

Special Education & Cognitive Rehabilitation according to the Educational Enlightenment

Giovanni Pampanini¹

¹National Mental Health Service of Catania, Italy,
and a researcher in Neuroeducation, Interculturalism, and Political Philosophy
at the Studio Interdisciplinare Scienze Sociali e Umane, SISSU, in Catania, Italy

Abstract

This article offers an insight about Pampanini's approach to Cognitive Rehabilitation that forms a part of his Educational Enlightenment, an original and coherent framework of pedagogical theories that he is elaborating since the '70s. According to this approach, not only special pedagogical tools and contents are important, but also neurosciences and educational archetypes. This point makes Pampanini's approach different from a generic approach to psychopathologies through a Language Therapy or Psychomotor Therapy, because it very much emphasizes the importance of the cognitive act (cognition). The guiding question in this approach is: What is the specific impediment that prevents this specific individual with this specific mental trouble to learn this specific item?

In the article some particular insights about the cognitive analysis of a pedagogical item along with mental retardation, Asperger and group-work pedagogical treatments are offered in a way to facilitate the assimilation and the use of the Educational Enlightenment and the related Cognitive Rehabilitation approach by an in-training teacher and/or educator.

Keywords: Special Education, Cognitive Rehabilitation according, Educational Enlightenment

History of Special Education in Italy from the '70s to nowadays

In the second half of the '70s a social and educative process led to reform in the educational system in Italy thanks to which disabled pupils were entitled to enter the normal school system, while the so called 'special schools' were abolished. This process paralleled a similar process that in psychiatry led to the abolition of the asylums in the same years (Pampanini, 2009). From a political point of view, the democratic ideals insufflated inspiration to both these processes, while in scientific and cultural terms the developments of a Vygotskian approach combined with the two Psychoanalysis trends inspired to Wilfred Bion and James Hillman cooperated in the inclusive reforms described here.

The '60s for Italy, as well as for Europe as a whole, were the years of the economic boom, but the situation in the rest of the world was very complicated at that time. Africa was in a terrible change after the first declarations of independence. In Asia, the two hot zones of Korea and Viet Nam were the most evident signs of the Cold War. In Latin America, the Castro Revolution in Cuba had risked to bring to a new World War because of the contrast, expressed over the Caribbean Island, between the two super-powers leaders John

¹Corresponding author. Tel: -

E-mail address: pampanini@sissu.it.

F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev. Despite this bitter international atmosphere, social workers in Western democracies demanded a deepening of the meaning “democracy” in the ‘60s and ‘70s. “Democracy” was intended not only

as a matter of balance between the two main political parties of the right and the left competing for the State power, but it had to include also a more nuanced and psychological dimension. Being a democratic person – many educators, teachers and psychologists argued – means more than simply sharing the voting freedom at elections. In fact, a democratic person should be able not to exclude other people when discussing about issues of common interest even if the interlocutors think differently. Differences in thinking, then, in religion, culture, customs, and even feeling, had to be thought of as different ways to be human. “Democracy” should definitively incorporate a basic respect for the many possible differences existing among people. In one with that, even the notion of “right” extended its own scope to include broader civil, cultural, and religious meanings.

From a psychological point of view, Vygotsky’s Cultural Psychology seemed to be the most conducive highway to re-addressing the social and institutional inclusion/exclusion divide. Up to the end of the ‘60s, Jean Piaget’s approach dominated the Psychology norms. According to this approach, some identified psychological stadia determined in their precise order the steps towards a normal development. At that time children were scrutinized in schools and psychological cabinet following the psychological norms published by the Swiss scientist in his many books that received a worldwide consensus. Nevertheless, during the ‘60s doubts circulated among psychologists and teachers who worked with “at limits” children. In fact, poor people coming from peripheral social strata or from rural areas or even from abroad and attending city schools were often found to be under the psychological norms therefore sent to special schools for children with mental retardation. In that epoch of intense urbanization, such a scheme became very popular in Italy as well as in Europe. Criticisms to Piaget’s psychology expressed the concern that it could serve to cover social injustice through a “scientific” approach. On the other hand, Lev Vygotsky’s approach to Cultural Psychology seemed to help more in adjusting the now perceived excluding and undemocratic, educational institutions. A *versus* was then established between Piaget and Vygotsky: the former was seen as the author of a too much individualistic approach, with norms not sensitized to social and cultural nuances, while the latter became the “highway” to overcome the finally perceived *cultural needs* in Psychology. For sure, the latter was much more democracy-oriented and inclusive than the former.

Going in depth in the implied psychological arguments, one could say that while for Piaget language was nothing else than the expression of thought, to Vygotsky language comes first, then, thought, as a sort of “internal language”, follows. To Piaget, society is quite “outside” the individual mind; to Vygotsky, on the opposite, society plays a strong role in forging the individual mental life. Briefly: to Piaget culture, including society, religion and history, is outside the borders of mind; exactly the opposite is the case for Vygotsky: for him, the individual is nothing but a part of society, culture, and history.

In the ‘60s and ‘70s the psychological tests were suspected not to be so neutral and culture-free as they pretended and declared to be. The social workers accused them to be apparently neutral tools and to use in truth their neutrality for better serving to excluding people, above all, poor people or minority people, from the mainstream society on the very basis of their cultural belonging. Culture became an important argument in both democracy and psychology.

Many Italian teachers, educationalists, and psychologists intensely worked and published during the '50s, the '60s, and the '70s in order to vitalize the debate around these themes and stimulate the appropriate, inclusive reforms in school system. Just to mention a few of them: Don Lorenzo Milani, Mario Lodi, Bruno Ciari, Danilo Dolci, Lamberto Borghi, Aldo Visalberghi, Raffaele Laporta, Andrea Canevaro, Roberto Zavalloni, Piero Bertolini, Giovanni Maria Bertin, Ettore Gelpi, Clotilde Pontecorvo, and Franco Frabboni. Thanks to this change, the focus for the social workers committed with just education became at that time to be sure that their work was not implicitly serving exclusive and undemocratic ends. From those years onward, education in Italy went in one with an inclusive approach to social and democratic matters.

The Educational Enlightenment

In 2003, I collected my many notes on Education since the '70s and three years later, I published a book by the title Educational Enlightenment in Italian (Illuminismo pedagogico. Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editoriale Catanese di Magistero, CUECM. Prefazione di Aldo Visalberghi e Post-fazione di Le Thành Khoi). The Educational Enlightenment is a formula to capture four theories that I developed with more volumes in the following decade 2006-2016. The following scheme gives a general outline of this complex:

1. The Theory of Educational Archetypes.
2. The Theory of Educational Action.
3. The Political Theory of Educational Institution.
4. The Regional Theory of Comparative Education.

The four theories do not constitute a sum of different lines of thought and one should take them altogether for having a proper understanding of the Educational Enlightenment as such. Since my approach to Special Education and Cognitive Rehabilitation draws from it, it is appropriate to give now a general outline of it.

1. The Theory of Educational Archetypes

Along the centuries until, at least, Modern Age, every civilization has been developing distinct traditions of Education linked to some leading figures who finished assuming the position of archetypes. On using Le Thanh Khoi's "General Theory of Education" and the related notion of civilization as "unit of analysis", it is easy to identify particular men who played that role within their own civilization, like Lao-Tse, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Mohamed, etc.

Starting from the examples of those great, leading educators, the historical inquiry into the various traditions of Education should retrace back how those archetypes continued to inspire the successive educators. The educational archetypes, contribute to shape the how-s of Education in general, not only in their own tradition, but also, after the beginning of the era of more intense international communication, even in the traditions of the others.

According to the Theory of Educational Archetypes, Education today is an ensemble of institutions, activities and actors whose "shape" can be properly understood if one tries to look at the continuous archetypal appeal that drains from the roots of the different civilizations. Not only this: in order to moving towards a real "dialogue among civilizations" in Education, the Theory of Educational Archetypes proposes that every teacher, educator and educationalist should attend both his/her tradition of Education and that of the others in order to furnish her/his educational publics with an enlightened interpretation of the educational archetypes.

2. The Theory of Educational Action

The Theory of Educational Action aims to furnish teacher and educationalist with a complex of grids useful to catch the complexity of her/his own educational activity while monitoring the correct implementation of it. Starting from general grids related to large categories and taxonomic objectives, the series of grids goes on till to touch the micro-dimensions of a vast range of educational activities' kinds.

Particularly sensitive to the new acquisitions of the Neurosciences, the Theory of Educational Action emphasizes the importance of Language and Culture in Education, specifically Rhetoric as the "art of persuading and convincing". On doing a correct and fruitful use of the different Rhetorical figures, the educationalist is in a position to focus on the various ways in which s/he does her/his discourse before her/his educational publics according to the Rhetorical tradition of Education to which s/he and her/his educational publics belong.

The Theory of Educational Action is conceived of in according to the general vision of Education as proposed in the Educational Enlightenment, that is helping individual to find responsibly and "after due consideration" her/his own position within the inter-human chain that binds all human beings on this earth.

3. The Political Theory of Educational Institution

General Schemes of the Political Theory of Educational Institution, PTEI. Three basic assumptions are at the basis of the PTEI:

1. the post-Second World War ideology of modern schooling "forgot" to insert culture as a main value for practicing education; on the contrary, the more culture-free, the more modern.
2. The educational institution should normatively guarantee to all publics the right to know-and-understand the major problems of current world, in a way that each of us should enjoy the possibility to choose her/his own place in the inter-human chain "after due consideration".
3. Education politics should be conceived of not only in terms of "educational policies", but also in terms of caring about the personal awareness of the political consequences of one's own personal action.

Keeping in mind those three pillars, the PTEI goes on:

- 3.1 to assert the duty/right for all educators to attend the different Education traditions in order to favour an enlightened interpretation of them in the light of the "dialogue among civilizations" current paradigm; democracy is conceived of as an attended result of such a dialogue;
- 3.2 to keep the professional hard work as an educationalist (whatever be her/his specialization) as a public job of quality;
- 3.3 to seriously accompany the professional work as educationalist with a high-level intellectual commitment, which could ameliorate one's own comprehension of what a political-personal responsibility is and could be, thanks to Education.

4. Regional Theory of Comparative Education

Drawn from Le Thanh Khoi's "General Theory of Education", a global vision of eight civilizations is constructed that should help educators and educationalists to identify eight large educational archetypes each of which presents peculiar traits. Those civilizations coincide grosso modo with eight macro-regions – North America, Latin America, Africa, Mediterranean, West Asia, Central Asia, India and neighbours, and East Asia.

According to the Regional Theory of Comparative Education, those macro-regions and civilizations hold specific traditions related to Education that are recognizable not only in terms of historical excursus, but even today, that make it easy to identify both educational policies (for instance, for a proper implementation of the Right to Education) and pedagogical modes (with an attention to Rhetoric-s).

The Educational Enlightenment and Special Needs

The Cognitive Rehabilitation that is based on the *Education Enlightenment* distinguishes from a generic approach to psychopathologies through a Language Therapy and Psychomotor therapy insofar it privileges a sound approach to the cognitive act (or cognition), even if it does not assimilate to pure pedagogy as in the normal schooling. The Education Enlightenment Cognitive Rehabilitation also separates from a pure application of Neurology to Pedagogy as in the recent developments of the so-called Neuro-education, and for the same reason. In truth, the Educational Enlightenment Cognitive Rehabilitation holds a humanistic approach to the teaching-and-learning situation combined with a neuro-scientific one. In order to understand better my approach I proposed an analysis of the teaching-and-learning situation thanks to which the educator can achieve a more clinical attitude to her or his job becoming able to lead a self-checking and self-evaluation (Pampanini, 2005, pp. 68-77). Like two snails that are studying each other with an in between space (struction, according to Jaynes), the educator and the learner stay one in front the other trying to communicate about an item to be learnt.



If the educator is able to self-ask: What is the specific impediment that prevents this specific individual with this specific mental trouble to learn this specific item?, I argue that s/he is doing two things contemporarily: education and research (so avoiding educational routine). The Theory of Educational Action is precise insofar it invites the educator that works in the field of Special Education not to take for granted the consequences in the field of cognition of a psychopathology; on the opposite, it claims educators to focus their attention on the concrete impediment to cognition.

Teaching to severe Mental Retardation children

The Educational Enlightenment that inspires Special Education and Cognitive Rehabilitation requires that the educator self-ask: Is it that this cognitive item contains specific elements that are beyond the true capacities of this learner? Therefore, one supplementary question is: What is the cognitive substance of the item proposed for learning? To me, the educator should not refer to an abstract notion of ‘difficulty’,

or worse, ‘abstraction’, as in Piaget’s approach. On the contrary, s/he should question him/herself about the concrete impediment to learn. In particular, s/he should focus on the cognitive quintessence of the item proposed, compare the prerequisites of it with the already studied (and eventually registered in the accredited literature) cognitive difficulties of the given psychopathology under observation, and finally get profit from the community beneficial influences on cognition, as in Vygotsky’s approach. The limits to intelligence should be investigated in themselves always in a fresh way.

Teaching to children with a limited intelligence can be a special way to do research on intelligence in itself and its many facets. For instance, teaching to counting up to five to a severely limited child could challenge the intelligence of the teacher/educator/rehabilitator in a way to figure out personalized solutions, for instance, first posing five pens on the in between table, then, framing them on a paper (Pampanini, 2013).



Teaching to Asperger boys in group

I am now working with a group of six adolescents with light mental retardation including one with Asperger syndrome. I am using the following disciplines: journalism, psychology, geo-history, and economics. On a large geographical map on a table, I invite the students to situate “at home” the faces of the national leaders that I previously drew from newspapers, then, I invite my students to interpret the leaders’ faces – a truly difficult exercise for an Asperger boy – according to the news that regard their acts.



Beside this, I give them basic information about the biggest countries of the world, calling them the “Big Players”, divided for continents. Then, using a basic information about economics, we make simple calculations to understand richness and poverty all over the world and situate us as Italian along with our migrant people on the global range of historical and economic potentialities. In-between and In-among are two new coined words that I am using with my students in order to make them distinguish between a matter of interest to two players only and a matter of interest to more players. In truth, life and world are full of examples of the two species, like Cold War between two Super-powers (In-between) and the sources of richness, like oil (In-among). Each meeting includes four sections:

- 20 minutes for newspaper reading and casting news in the appropriate box of the prepared didactic schedules;
- 20 minutes for casting the actors' faces on the world map;
- 20 minutes for discussion on economics: wage, GDP and per person GDP, Gini's Index, etc.;
- 20 minutes for discussion on Comparative History issues: colonialism, slavery, world wars, Cold War, globalization.

According to the intellectual potentialities of my students, I invite them to advance a forecasting based on what they have just learned, making them understand that they too can do something for the better. In fact, at the end of our four months long work, the students will expose their results into a public seminar in Catania and, via Skype, to the worldwide public that is willing to listen to (Cristaldi, 2016).

The idea for this is that the students, even if with some mental troubles, are always able to catch the broader significance of the introduced items for learning. 'Significance', in this context, means that the item introduced should keep a vital sense in *primis* for the educator. If this is given, then the learner is quite likely to take interest in it. In a sense it is true that the item holds a position between the world and me therefore it stays somewhere between my micro-dimension and the macro-dimension of the world outside me. For that reason, I in *primis* as an educator need to take care about it, and for the same reason I am convinced that my students also should do the same (Pampanini, 2007). In fact, as the neurosciences show, the significance of an issue is associated with a number of pre-conditions that the pedagogical experiment here described just holds:

- the relevance of the present and the immediate future for consciousness (Spinney, 2015).
- the use of faces, actions, and voices (Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia, 2006; Cozolino, 2008; Kandel, 2012; Siegel, 2014);
- the use of geographic maps with games (Pampanini, 2014, Appendix);
- the casting of learners in history, attributing to their role as actors (Boix-Mansilla, Jackson, 2011; Cristaldi, Pampanini, 2016).

Conclusions

As an intelligent, blind person can describe something that s/he never saw, a person with a limited intelligence could appreciate a recondite sense of a notion that a cultivated educator sees as flat and obvious. I believe that intelligence in itself is something that easily escapes from the limits of a too much scientific approach [7]. During the decades of my job, I observed that all children get more interest in the issue introduced to them if the educator makes them appreciate how much important that issue is for her or himself. In other words, the item introduced for learning should always maintain a significance, first, for the educator; the learner, then, will follow.

References

- Boix-Mansilla, V. & Jackson, A. (2011). **Educating for Global Competence: Preparing Our Youth to Engage the World**. New York and Washington: Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning and the Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Cozolino, L. (2008). **IL cervello sociale. Neuroscienze delle relazioni sociali**. Ital. Transl. Milano: Cortina.

- Cristaldi, M. (2016). **The Global Teacher**. In Pampanini, Giovanni, ed., Right to Education and Globalization. Catania: Amara.
- Cristaldi, M. & Pampanini, G. (2016). Research and activism about Girls' Education for Global Democracy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 0(0), pp. 1-12.
- Kandel, E. (2012). **L'età dell'inconscio. Arte, mente e cervello dalla Grande Vienna ai giorni nostri**. Ital. Transl. Milano: Cortina.
- Pampanini, G. (2005). **Education and Didactics. The One World Approach**. Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editoriale Catanese di Magistero, CUECM.
- _____. (2006 Italian version). **Illuminismo pedagogico**. Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editoriale Catanese di Magistero, CUECM. Prefazione di Aldo Visalberghi e Post-fazione di Le Thành Khoi (2008 Spanish version. *Iluminismo pedagógico*: Buenos Aires: Altamira).
- _____. (2007). **The Reasoning and Its Flaws**. Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editoriale Catanese di Magistero, CUECM.
- _____. (2009). **La follia del manicomio**. Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editoriale Catanese di Magistero, CUECM.
- _____. (2011). **Intercultural Intelligence**. Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editoriale Catanese di Magistero, CUECM.
- _____. (2013). **Democratizzare l'educazione**. Come l'intercultura e la neuropedagogia stanno democratizzando il nostro modo di fare educazione. Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editoriale Catanese di Magistero, CUECM.
- _____. (2014). La redécouverte de la culture dans l'intelligence. Considérations interculturelles et néuroscientifiques. In Cristaldi, M. sous la direction de (Ed). **L'approche interculturelle de la cognition et de la thérapie**. Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editoriale Catanese di Magistero, CUECM, pp. 15-28.
- Rizzolatti, Giacomo & Sinigaglia, C. (2006). **So quel che fai. Il cervello che agisce e i neuroni specchio**. Milano: Cortina.
- Siegel, Daniel J. (2014). **Mappe per la mente. Guida alla neurobiologia interpersonale**. Ital. Transl. Milano: Cortina.
- Spinney, Laura. (2015). **The specious present. Once upon a time**. quantum-mind.co.uk/specious-present/