

HUMAN MISSION OF EDUCATION

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Abstract. The article examines the complex role and great responsibility of the education today in development of the moral strength and human values of the children and youth. At the beginning of the article the author reconsiders the pedagogical ideas of Maria Montessori and her concept of education for peace as an instrument for reconstruction of the society and for improvement of the human living. Then the analysis of the moral values in the contemporary society is made and several issues and dilemmas are discussed referring the value disorientation of the youth and the importance of the models of adult's moral behavior in their search for personal identity. On the basis of this analysis, the human dimension of the education is elaborated enhancing the need for its understanding as support of development, which is based on several crucial elements: love, freedom and spirit of community.

Keywords: Education for Peace, Moral Education, Moral Values.

1. Introduction

"Averting war is the work of politicians; establishing peace is the work of education." Maria Montessori

In the thirties of the last century the renowned Italian educator and reformer, Maria Montessori stressed the importance of the education for peace. Faced with the dangers of the Second World War that was obviously threatening once again to engulf Europe, and feeling the need and responsibility as educator and already well-known expert in the field of education to contribute to avoid it, she proposed reconstruction of the human society by means of the new education, which should represent non-violent revolution. It is education that creates peace and enables development of human values, especially the moral ones. Montessori emphasized the idea of going back to the child and his potentials, because she believed that

knowing them and understanding their development was the key for creation of the peace and well-being in the world. On the Sixth International Montessori Congress that was held in Copenhagen in 1937 she had given her keynote speech in which she declared: *"The adult must understand the meaning of the moral defense of humanity, not the armed defense of the nations. He must realize that the child will be creator of the new world peace. In a suitable environment the child reveals unsuspected social characteristics. The qualities he shows will be the salvation of the world, showing us the entire road to peace. And the new child has been born! He will tell us what is needed!"*[8]

Striving to enhance the vital importance of the education for peace and the need of protection of children's creative potentials, Montessori was giving lectures in many European capitals launching few proposals:

- Establishment of university studies for peace (*corsi per la pace*). She was convinced that the peace should become a science: *"If man is to overcome war and his own conflicts and complexes, education must be given a scientific basis..."* [8]. The same way there is an "art of making war", there should be a scientific discipline regarding the new education of the man that will contribute to the improvement of his life.
- Foundation of a social party (Partito Sociale del Bambino) to defend the rights of children through official representatives in the parliaments of all nations: *"Where all pieces of legislation*

are discussed and where all material and intellectual interests of the humans are nurtured, there also must be someone who will defend the interests of the great majority of the human kind: children” [3].

- Initiation of an international movement for helping children named *White Cross* (La Croce Bianca). “*Children’s’ salvation must be a target to anyone who works in the name of humanity*”, is the call she addresses to the international community of doctors, educators and psychologists after the First World War.

Education for peace became Montessori’s main interest and occupation during the last twenty years of her life and, as a result of that, she was nominated for the Nobel prize for peace. However, since the 1937, when she initiated the Social party of the child up to present day, her words haven’t become reality and her ideas for the “small ones” have remained utopian proposals that could not prevent or stop the dreadfulness of the war and other evils made by the “big ones”. Nevertheless, her basic idea that the education is a miraculous tool for freeing from the violence and approaching towards peace is still significant today and deserves to be reconsidered, as well as the education of the young generations and our role as educators and teachers.

2. The moral values and contemporary society

The question about the target values toward which we need to strive today, reminds open. The Republic of Macedonia, as well as other countries that experienced the disintegration of the socialistic state system, in the last two decades has been facing with the changes of the value system. They are associated with turbulent social changes that, again,

led to economic, political, cultural and moral crisis. Brotherhood and unity, solidarity, state ownership, equality, self governance, the communistic ideal, for a long period of time were the basic values of our living and of family and school education. Nowadays, not only that they are not valid but are often not considered as values.

On the other hand, the question that imposes is if the newly formed value structure in the social life should really be considered as progress and perspective. Are the new values truly incorporated in the daily activities and behavior of adults and youth? Is the accepted pluralism always conveying tolerance for the ones with different opinions? Does democracy mean equality for all? Does the scientific-technical and technological advancement mean also peoples welfare, advancement in the sense of continuous engagement for personal improvement, striving toward noble goals and giving personal contribution for being more human? Unfortunately, today there are numerous indicators, not only locally but as well globally, of increased violence, division and intolerance among people on different grounds, of confining in personal egoism, nation and religion, as well as of increased material and spiritual poverty and exclusion. Therefore, the controversial thesis of Rousseau (developed in the essay that won the competition at Dijon Academy in 1750) that progress of science and culture development leads to regression of morality, imposes with relevance in the contemporary world. Civilization spoils the moral, as emphasized by the great French educator of the 18 century, because the art is in the function of luxurious life, the science of law is in the function of injustice, history is in the function of tyranny and wars [9]. In such conditions of division, moral decline and alienation, that are not much different from Rousseau’s time, education appears as powerful instrument of change of

society through building of moral values and behavior of children, youth and adults.

The contemporary society, generally speaking, is a society of challenges, change, insecurity, uncertainty and unpredictability, open possibilities and alternative models of interpretation and acting, a world of super complexity, as called by some authors.[2] This world requires persons that are initiative, energetic, self-confident, persistent, capable and ready to deal with the challenges and to generate new changes. Nonetheless, the today's world witnesses Spenser's interpretation of Darwin's theory of survival of the strongest in social context: survives and succeeds the one that manages to overcome the competitors, regardless of the means used, because the goal (success, money, power) justifies all means. Therefore, this era creates successful and rich people, but also ones that are aggressive, ruthless, prepared for manipulation and dishonesty, and that have personal benefit as a driving force in interpersonal relationships.

The children and youth are witnesses of these social events. In the circumstances of social turmoil, undefined educational ideals and values as well as disorientation, young generation in search of personal identity, meaning and values of life, develop personal value code and pattern of behavior, primarily, by undertaking or refusal of models of moral behavior of adults. Basically, the imposing question is: what do they find important in life, what are they striving for? The diagnostics of the values and ideals of nowadays students and their behavior doesn't leave too much space for hope in brighter future, but is rather increasing the awareness and need for wider social action. Since the eighties, psychologists that were studying the behavior of the American youth are warning that the basic measurement for youth is money; and furthermore: they want it *all* and they want it *now*. [7] It looks like this condition is not characteristic only for American pupils and

students from twenty years ago, but it's widening in space and time. The principle of utility that at one time of human development gave way to the spiritual criteria of value behavior of man, is having its comeback, wearing the apparel of material welfare and power. These determinants certainly mean distancing from Man and from his strife for peace. Therefore, educators have a holy duty and a big responsibility to change this value orientation and to help a child and a youngster in their walk toward humanity and peace. In fact, the delicacy and complexity of the educational mission of parents and teachers is in humanization of ruthless pragmatism of contemporary living with spiritual universal values that, at the end, make Man human in a real sense of the meaning.

3. What kind of education is needed?

The education is primarily an ethical question, because it provides the development of human values and constructs the culture of peace. Therefore, the key task of educators, namely, parents and teachers, is to guide and lead the process of continuous approaching towards humanity within oneself as well as within the ones they educate. That is conducted through continuous questioning of values, attitudes and behavior; fulfilling in that way the humanization of the world we live in.

In the last decades the main attention in the area of education is focused toward improvement of the school system: raising of educational standards, increasing of achievements of students, improvement of quality of work of the teachers and schools. As a necessary consequence, these reforms emphasize the priority of market mechanism, competitiveness, and effectiveness of the results. In such conditions, humanistic dimension of education seems to be put aside, and the sense of morality and social

responsibility are neglected or ignored. Emphasizing of free market approach and promotion of competitive society means moving away from the basic goal of education that comes from the etymology of the word education (ex-ducere=pulling out), that in fact means, assisting of the development. “*Our hope for peace in the future, pointed out Montessori, will not be found in the formal knowledge that the adult can convey to the child but in the normal development of the men*”. Therefore, it is necessary to go back to the origins of education and to search the key for overcoming the contemporary social and moral deviations.

Each child represents a wealth of potentials, energies and powers, from which a great part resides undiscovered, undeveloped and unused in life. Therefore, this potential has a great creating force and needs to be a starting point in educational process. In order to extract the potentials from each person, it is necessary to approach them with respect and knowledge about the developmental characteristics and to create stimulating environment that gives directions to the activities for complete development of the person. This environment consists of several key elements that represent the basics for each education:

Love. Translated into the language of pedagogy, love means care and acceptance of the pupil, warmth, joy and commitment, respect and understanding, carefulness in attitude toward him, sensibility for his needs, trust in his potentials and abilities. If the educator treats the child accordingly, the risk of appearance of “wars” between parents and children, teachers and students is reduced to minimum. This also means prevention for numerous manifestations of deviant behavior of youngsters (runaway, lying, stealing, violent behavior). Indeed, love toward child and mankind in general is the key necessary element that makes education a mission of a higher goal. Therefore, education is more than a

science, it represents art, the hardest, but the biggest, the most noble and the most important of all human arts, that assumes not just knowledge, but a gift, and a virtue as well, the one that penetrates the mind as light, through the filter of heart so it is to be transformed in the “character of strength, beauty and freedom” [1] for the one that teaches and for the one that learns.

Freedom and independence. Closely connected with love is the idea of freedom in education, incorporated in the pedagogical concepts of Rousseau (the theory of natural and free development), Froebel, Dewey and Montessori (“*Help me to do it myself*”). Freedom is a condition for manifesting individuality and for initiating physical, but also different intellectual activity: initiative, independence in observation, critical thinking, prediction of consequences, and creativeness in adjusting to them. The freedom and independence are basis for building the relationship of mutual respect and understanding between adult and a child, that result in shaping the individual that is self-confident, fulfilled and capable of making moral decisions without fear and dependence on the opinion of others. Thus, in the process of education it is indispensable a free development of a child and creating of such conditions that “will enable the individual to give his contribution in the group interest, as well as to participate in such activities in which social leadership will be focused on his personal mental behavior, and not to the authoritarian mandate of his actions” [4]. The role of education is to give directions to child activities and to provide normal conditions for the development of his personality, and the teacher instead of imposing, needs to “wait and observe” (“*osserva aspettando*”) (Montessori), based on this, to “interprets and directs” (Dewey) and in such way “to free the life-process for its own most adequate fulfillment” [4].

Community spirit. Education in a democratic society must equip children

and youth to live in a community in which making decisions will not be an individual act, but taking into consideration the needs and interests of others: "Education should create an interest in all persons in furthering the general good, so that they will find their own happiness realized in what they can do to improve the conditions of others"[6]. Despite competitive mechanisms of market economy, in the educational process, primarily, there is a need to nurture humanity and mutual assistance; contrary to competing spirit, cooperation and communication; contrary to exclusion and self-sufficiency, tolerance and solidarity. From the early childhood it is necessary for children to become aware of the consequences of their actions not just in the development of their character and life but also in the lives and characters of others. Only in that way education will be in the function of achieving the great life goal: joint work for common good.

4. Conclusion

The education is a process, a continuous journey, continuous vouching for change and improving of the world and one's self. Contemporary education is confronted with numerous challenges that are pointing out to its human dimension: multiculturalism, inclusion, protection and preserving of environment. In the attempt to respond to these challenges, educators

are fulfilling their fundamental mission: to create people. That means that primarily they need to represent a model for moral behaviour that witnesses the importance of the acts and their consequences and the personal contribution to creation of better community. Shaping in that way their own life trajectory, they leave legacy for the future generations: we all have the obligation to strife toward humanity.

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