

EDUCATE IN THE USE OF WORDS TO CULTIVATE HUMANITY AND BUILD CULTURE MANIFESTO FOR DEMOCRATIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The Movimento di cooperazione educativa (MCE) with this Manifesto is addressed to the world of schools - teachers, students, inspectors, parents - to the world of culture and research, to those who have the responsibility to prepare favourable conditions for cultural growth in the territories and in the school - administrators, politicians, professionals ...-, to all citizens.

In particular, we address ourselves to those who look with concern at the violent and discriminatory use of language and the hasty proposals that invite a simplistic solution to the problem of widespread linguistic poverty through transmissive teaching.

1. EDUCATING TO SPEAK

Educating to the word to cultivate humanity and build civil coexistence

We believe that educating people to speak out in our multicultural societies means taking care of the future: having a vision of a future society, more united and fairer, which we want to build. We turn our gaze towards a horizon of peace, a path of awareness of the different plural histories enriched by the voices and languages that populate the planet.

Since we believe in language as an instrument of cultural construction and in the possibility of resisting the use of language teaching as an instrument of division, we propose an education in the word which is the necessary premise to support the ideals of civil coexistence, attitudes of respect, solidarity and hospitality towards everyone. We believe that the word, which allows us to share experience, to see and show the invisible that accompanies experience, thoughts and emotions, suffering and joy, has a central place in our lives and should occupy a central place in school.

We believe that education to the word should be promoted today, in the face of the complexity of the present, without denying the conflicts that characterize it by taking them in hand, but without giving up the cultivation of humanity and the capacity to share meaning. Democracy presupposes the conscious use of the word, in a spirit of egalitarian dialogue.

Educating to speak in order to cultivate critical thinking

Since there is an inseparable link between language and thought - the word supports thought, thought can only rely on the word to exist and be communicable - we believe that the conscious and widespread conquest of words and languages, of all languages by all, is an instrument of emancipation and a defence against the manipulative and falsifying uses of communication.

Since language helps to communicate social reality but also to construct it, we believe that education in speech, by not using words linked to superficial generalizations, undue and ethnocentric categorizations, is crucial to combat the simplification with which complexity is often reduced.

We believe that speech education means learning to name subjects, situations, events with reference to linguistic and conceptual categories constructed on the basis of experience and reflection, highlighting the criteria underlying linguistic choices and deep-rooted attitudes: fear, empathy or rejection, mental and relational proximity or distance.

We believe that educating people to speak can help to clarify the superficial and tendentious uses of language, the 'normal' expressions that are spreading: considering 'criminals' whole categories of people whatever their job, claiming that there is someone who has more privilege than others in the enjoyment of fundamental rights, even the right to survival, to think that there is a right to rejection of those who seek salvation at sea, ...

It is a question of denouncing the misleading use of words, of debanalizing the obvious by changing point of view: it is no coincidence that fundamental reflections on 'alienation' have been proposed by narratology, and therefore by studies on language.

For this reason, we believe that a school that educates thought must be a school that takes care of speech, of its conscious and responsible use and of the need to continually investigate meanings. It is a matter of building attitudes free of stereotypes and prejudices and of a willingness to confront different possible readings of reality, to broaden perception. In this sense, education for critical thinking, through the spoken word, becomes a practice of democracy.

Putting language teaching at the centre of the school

We propose that language education should be placed at the centre of the school at a time when social and educational contexts are characterised by the presence of different cultures, languages and modes of communication: to educate to the spoken word is to educate to the art of living together.

On the basis of De Saussure's research, we consider language as a complex system composed of verbal and non-verbal languages. The didactic practice of the MCE, based on this reflection, deals with this multiform aspect of

language, the interrelations and interlacing between different communicative / expressive languages, music, art, image, theatre ... We believe that choosing this perspective favours the inclusion of all, enriches and strengthens the educational proposal, to give more opportunities to everyone.

Given that language is transversal to all areas, we propose that speech education should be the tâche of all teachers, of all disciplines, within the framework of a pedagogy of cooperation and research.

We propose that all the necessary time be devoted to this learning: the time for dialogue, for reading as a pleasure and as a construction of knowledge, the time to discuss the meaning of words and to understand, to elaborate stories and reflections, to enjoy the beauty of artistic expressions made of words, to scientifically explore the complex and fascinating territory of linguistic codes, without giving in to the impulse to simplify and reduce learning to the mechanical formation and the knowledge of a single linguistic model considered immutable.

We propose that the right to slowness be respected as a condition for the mind to fulfil its linguistic function of interpreting (and transforming) the world. The time of thinking, as well as the time of walking, the time of growth and the time of breathing are times that have always marked the life of the human being, they cannot be accelerated at our pleasure. Understanding words and finding the right and effective words are operations that require patience and humility to try - to compare - to try again, supported by the desire to combine beauty and efficiency.

We propose that children and adults welcomed on the difficult path of word education be guaranteed the right to use and learn the language in a path of search free from the fear of judgment, punishment, negative evaluation.

On the basis of the long experience and research of teachers, educators and linguists, we reject the assertion that the objective of inclusion and the maximum possible development of each person's abilities and the objective of the quality of the educational and didactic proposal are irreconcilable.

We believe that the path towards these great objectives can be undertaken in schools and places that deal with language teaching, taking care of the small daily steps: that is to say, building, with the educational proposals of each day, cooperative school contexts and using appropriate work tools.

2. WHICH SCHOOL TO EDUCATE HAS THE WORD

A school of listening and dialogue

A class in which cooperation and democracy live cannot be a class in which the rule of silence applies, in which the reasons for its differences and those of others are ignored, in which different ways of thinking are not compared. We therefore consider it fundamental to recognize and guarantee everyone the right to speak and, conversely, the right - the duty - to listen. Dialogue and comparison enable mutual knowledge that generates trust and are the basis for the construction of knowledge.

We consider oral communication to be a fundamental aspect of language teaching: not only an indispensable prerequisite for acquiring written language skills, but also a fundamental skill in itself, to be taken into account in all school systems. Telling, arguing, presenting one's thoughts, discussing, speaking in public, speaking in assembly, sharing experiences and emotions are essential in the cooperative school because they are fundamental in social life.

In each path of knowledge, discussion supports the articulation of thought, stimulates mental processes, allows us to question reality by discovering different aspects and building networks of meanings that structure knowledge, configuring the need to ask questions as well as to seek answers.

We also believe that training in dialogue and rigorous argumentation are essential for the ability to evaluate and choose, prerequisites for democratic participation.

A school of storytelling

Storytelling is a relational activity, the community is made up of stories it shares. They are stories that give space to a plurality of voices, ideas, ways of being and living that characterize all of us as human beings. Storytelling allows us to compose the fragmentary nature of experiences into a readable unity without losing their richness.

Being able to narrate in all possible forms makes the subjects responsible, makes them protagonists and at the same time brings them closer to others. Listening to stories creates relationships and opens up other worlds and experiences.

The story brings with it the experience of listening that gets used to being in relation and thinking in

silence.

Each story can have citizenship at school: the stories of literature, myths, as well as the stories that everyone can offer to listen to or read. The story that contains daily life is fundamental, it helps to get to know each other and reinforces the identity of the group, revealing how each one is different and unique and at the same time similar to all the others, sharing their common humanity.

A school where language is used to communicate

Speech and writing are powerful means of bringing people together.

We believe in a school where speech and writing are used to communicate, where speech has space and where scripture is encouraged and accepted. The long journey towards the ability to use words more and more effectively cannot fail to foresee error, an inevitable step in any learning journey, not to underline, sanction, criminalize, so as not to detract from the pursuit of the pleasure of communicating with words. Freinet's pedagogy and MCE practice offer us life techniques that also have a symbolic meaning: free text, correspondence, the school newspaper, collective writing, collective focus, the class life book. Beyond the thousand different ways in which they can be realized and updated, they show a way forward: giving space to words used for expression and communication, in real situations, in life situations. They also invite us not to forget that words, born because they are negotiated by groups of humans to exchange ideas, cannot be used as a means of communication. can only be learned through exchange and comparison.

A school that welcomes the different languages and language skills present

We believe that at a time when social and school contexts are characterized by the presence of different cultures and languages, different methods of communication, different skills, educating to speak means educating to respect all the languages and different skills present in the classroom.

Everyone who arrives at school, at any age, is linguistically competent in the mother tongue - the language that shapes us, that connotes our psychological life, our memories, our associations, our mental patterns. Respect and protection for all linguistic varieties, whether they are different idioms or different uses of the same idiom, means that no language becomes a ghetto, a cage that separates, an obstacle to equality.

An important responsibility of the school is also to accept the difference of those who initially have a less adequate linguistic competence. We know how a lack of language proficiency can significantly affect the whole educational process, creating profound disadvantages. We also know how language proficiency is related, for all, to physical conditions, family and social background.

The result must be a commitment, on the one hand, to make choices, in the methodological and didactic field, that help everyone to improve communication skills, and, on the other hand, to reject both a summative evaluation based on the presumed measurement of standard results by external controls.

We believe, however, in the possibility of promoting the development of language skills for all in a context of cooperative work.

We believe that the promotion of linguistic expression and exchange can help everyone to succeed on the path of speech education and alleviate the marginalization that generates suffering among those who do not have sufficient tools to begin with. We also believe in the increased opportunities that occur in a school where there is a plurality of verbal and non-verbal languages and where a "contamination" between different languages and codes is felt. The ability to understand and communicate is favoured, in a group, by the presence of different languages, the awareness of the structures of one's own language emerges more easily from the comparison which highlights the similarities and differences between the different languages and allows one to discover the potential and the constraints of personal language.

We believe in a school that can legitimize diversity and differences by allowing everyone to express themselves, to communicate, to improve their competence and awareness by experimenting as active citizens capable of producing culture and beauty.

A school that considers each language as a living body and a possible object of research.

We consider language not as a static object, a model to be known, but as a complex and changing reality in which and with which we live, and which shapes us. It is the common home that human beings build and continually

adapt to their needs. We offer language teaching that is not only centred on learning the code and a model that is considered immutable, but open to research.

We believe that the complexity of language cannot be effectively addressed by linear teaching (from isolated elements - signs, words, sentences, ... - in an additive way, from the easiest to the most difficult). We believe that it should be explored in order to better understand its multiple aspects - orality, pragmatics of communication, semantics, linguistic structures of sentences and texts, logical links established by certain words, etc. - and to better understand the complexity of the language. - by focusing on comprehension as a construction of meaning. We consider inadequate a teaching that emphasizes grammar as a teaching of rules and definitions detached from the texts, supported by mechanical exercises that are not very functional. Just as knowing the anatomy of the legs does not make us faster in the race.

Instead, we consider it fundamental to work on texts and meanings, to stimulate discussion on the meanings attributed to words and expressions.

A school that carefully accompanies the first learning of the written language

The encounter with the written language, one of the fundamental encounters of life, is an important moment in which children enter into a new communicative world, very different from that of orality. They encounter a powerful new medium whose potential they can appreciate: writing allows them to leave a lasting signal and to communicate across spatial and temporal distances, reading can open up distant, incredible, exciting worlds through the discovery of a new, wonderful power of words.

Since the spontaneous activity of research and exploration of the code begins, for everyone and in different ways for each one, long before school and continues for a long time, we believe that a natural method is the most correct approach: a 'method-non-method' that does not provide a 'teaching' for successive stages that are equal for all, but an accompaniment in a context rich in stimuli that respects and favours individual paths and, at the same time, allows to weave them and make them interact in the group.

A school that makes people meet books and discover the beauty of words.

Our speech education would be seriously lacking if it did not try to provide opportunities and develop strategies to bring children closer to books, knowledge and the beauty they contain.

At school, books of knowledge must find a space that opens up worlds, offers many different points of view on reality, arouses a new desire to know, enlighten and make our own personal experience of the world more meaningful.

In school, books must find a place for the pleasure of reading, to take advantage of the richness offered, in all cultures, by works of fiction and poetry, powerful evocations of images, experiences, emotions and thoughts. To put real and attractive books in the hands of children, to animate this fundamental encounter, is the first and fundamental task of the school.

THIS MANIFESTO

We hope that this Manifesto will help many teachers, already operating or intending to operate according to these criteria, to recognize themselves as part of a large group on the road to a better and more inclusive democratic school and a less unjust society.

. We know how important the presence or absence of cultural offerings, public spaces designed for sociality, libraries, support for the activities of schools and all places where languages are taught is.

Finally, we cannot fail to recognise how important it is for teachers to have a working context in which the teacher does not feel isolated in his or her role, overwhelmed by the need to constantly face new problems and bureaucratic tasks.

We believe that in this case, when faced with demands or provisions that do not respect the rights of the child - the right to expression, to be consulted, not to be discriminated against, to participate - it is legitimate to respond with actions of civil disobedience.

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