



## **SAPERE AUDE! - The testimony of Eironeia, School of Philosophy, after seven years of life in the age of the "Economy of Knowledge" [OCSE, UE] and "Education for All" [ONU/UNESCO]**

**Eduardo Caianiello**

[educaianiello@eironeia.eu](mailto:educaianiello@eironeia.eu)

Eironeia - Scuola di Filosofia (Italy)

### **Abstract**

*EIRONEIA'S MISSION: REPLACING THE "SCHOLE" AT THE CENTER OF THE EDUCATIONAL ACTION* - At the heart of the "key competencies" promoted by OCSE [DeSeCo] and UE [Lisbone 2000] there are "the practice of reflection" and "the emotional intelligence" directed toward "mental techniques" used during the school learning process. This is the ultimate sense of our action: to reopen the student's minds to the Socratic/Cartesian dimension of dialogue and meditation (school=skole=idleness!), which have always been the only pedagogic-therapeutic sources of (1) the opening up of really new horizons of research, and (2) the deep and lasting release of learning energies in people who are stuck and in trouble.

*THE HISTORICAL SITUATION: THE FIERCE INTER-NATIONAL CONFLICT* - "The dissolution of the monasteries and the development of flight travels may be considered as examples of discontinuous changes with revolutionary implications. Today something similar may be happening in education" [OCSE 2002]. Since long time the traditional systems of education, i.e. the schools created by the nations during the 19th century, are in a deep crisis, all over the planet. Thus the much more recent international realities are mapping out routes quite in contrast with what is practised in each member state [cf. OCSE: PISA, ONU-UNESCO: EFA...]. All this gives place to voids of deep and traumatic discontinuity in the present horizon; voids that the operators must seriously take in consideration at a political and strategic level. In fact, reforming the field of education can be evaluated both very positively (= revolutionary!) and very negatively (= revolutionary!) by the historical actors to whom the non-formal educator addresses. Our example: teaching to think about a mathematical operation means promoting the slowness in performing it... and this value is intensely opposed in all national schools of OCSE.

*THE ASSUMPTION OF MORAL RESPONSIBILITY* - «/n The Castle Franz Kafka, in describing the vain efforts of the protagonist to attain his goals, tells us all the hopelessness that a person can feel facing a deaf and blind bureaucratic machine [...]. Resistances to take into consideration the findings in the reflection on the educational policies and practices are very strong, and they can discourage the best wills . [...] And yet, such difficulties must not lead us to give up. As Lao-tse puts it: "the path is the goal"» [OCSE 2007]. This situation of historical rift often reaches heights of paroxysm that show the intrinsic limits of a purely "strategic" mentality. The Kafkaesque climate that every day those who work in this field breathe must be tackled by an essentially political and ethical propulsion. Thus the future of Education depends on the willingness of the individual to fully incarnate its absolute and irremissible values. Eironeia has been recognized (and awarded) as "social enterprise" because it testifies this kind of commitment: the only one that can bring Lao Tse's "path" back on the tangible routes of the present history, which finally are again those of Knowledge, but only for those who dare to cover them.

### **1. Eironeia's mission: the heart of Philosophy at the heart of a new world**

Today's societies place challenging demands on individuals, who are confronted with complexity in many parts of their lives. What do these demands imply for competencies that individuals need to



acquire? The OECD's answer to this question is: Philosophy; these "society's demands" imply nothing more and nothing less than Philosophy.

At the very heart of the "key competencies" promoted by OECD [7] and UE [2] there is in fact: "emotional intelligence" [=philia] and "the practice of reflection" [=sophia] directed toward all "mental (=mathematical) techniques" used during the school learning process:

1. REFLECTIVENESS – the heart of key competencies. An underlying part of this framework is reflective thought and action. Thinking reflectively demands relatively complex mental processes and requires the subject of a thought process to become its object. For example, having applied themselves to mastering a particular mental technique, reflectiveness allows individuals to then think about this technique, assimilate it, relate it to other aspects of their experiences, and to change or adapt it. [7]

In other words, the most important "key skill" that the OECD's program speaks about is the philosophical meditation on an already acquired mathematical/symbolic/mental know how. The ultimate goal of this planetary program is then a quite revolutionary one: (A) let the philosophical meditation about the sense of our science and life come before practical action...

2. Individuals who are reflective also follow up such thought processes with practice or action. [Ibid.]

(B)... so to make the yoga-practice of detachment – atarassia, vairagya... – the ultimate core of a really practical and active life:

3. Thus, reflectiveness is not just about how individuals think, but also about how they construct experience more generally, including their thoughts, feelings and social relations. [Ibid.]

This is the ultimate sense of Eironeia's creation: to reopen the student's minds to the Socratic/Cartesian dimension of dialogue and meditation (school=skole=idleness!), which have always been the only pedagogic-therapeutic sources of (1) the opening up of really new horizons of research in "hard" sciences, and (2) the deep and lasting release of learning energies in people who are stuck and in trouble.

## 2.The origin of Eironeia's action

Now which is the origin of Eironeia's action?

**From the worst suburbs...** - In 2000 I was a teacher in a Parisian high school, The students are very sick children that cannot go to school, primarily for psychological reasons. My destination was the Parisian banlieue, and I was really shocked by the amount of pain and mental/social paralysis that I had to battle with. My kungfu/yoga activities helped me to retain my stability, but not the schooling stability of my pupils. I then understood that the pedagogical tools which teachers normally have at their disposal are far from sufficient. A pupil's mental pain is an irreducible school pain: a psychiatrist will never be able to autonomously manage the latter, and ordinary teachers even less so.

**... to the luxury center of a western town** – In 2003 I became a specialized tutor in the rich center of Paris, where the mental blocks of my pupils were rigorously equal to those in the infamous suburbs. The fear of texts, school, teachers, the BAC (!!!)... the same terror can be found everywhere: no parents, no socioeconomical conditions, no personal history can explain such an universal, unitary and clearly distilled phenomenon. Boys and girls, rich and poor, children and adults. Finally the human mind can produce an authentic paralysis when it is a question of school. Now "school": is a question of what? There is no doubt that: the pupil paralyses his mind in front of a) the text b) the introspective movement that any act of interpretation necessarily entails. Thankfully I am a good teacher, so I'm in condition to grasp this experimental evidence: when I speak to explain my lesson, the pupil is quiet and attentive...but when it is time for him/her to access the text and/or his/her own thoughts to interpret either the text or to explain his comprehension of my words, his/her entire being falls down in a kind of hypnoid condition from which he can typically produce a destructive hunger against... me, that is to say, the teacher. And what is a teacher? A teacher is the human being that allows = obliges you to go forth towards your own personal, mental, emotional...and ultimately, human evolution.



### 3. The core of my theory

My theory on the human mind was then finally created: 1) the greatest form of energy that the human body/mind can produce follows the dynamic (vectorial) direction of its natural=mental human evolution; 2) the most essential task to realize in this evolutionary vector is an interpretation task. This theory is now expressed in my essays and books and in my PhD Thesis.

- (1) About children - I demonstrate that the “syncretic” [10] weakness of a preschool child's numerical reasoning ([11] [6] [4]) is, here and now, the actual root of the highest scientific peaks that the great genius of mathematic reach in their adult age.

In other words, I show that the strange and [for us, ordinary adults] quite enigmatic preschool phase of our cognitive development is in reality the real root of the “bewildering and exotic” fruits [4] of the highest mathematical creations. A teacher must then speak to pupils not only about the positive evidence of the world, but also about the “negative evidence” (such as  $20=1$ ) of what no adult will ever be able to explain but about what he can certainly speak of: with calmness, while smiling, and with attention... to the contemplative silence of a child (= to the actual and real root of men), that never expects the complete certainty of Truth from adults, but that understands very well if someone is truly speaking to him.

- (2) In what concerns adult people, if the childish perception of the world does not disappear from the human mind but reappears later in adulthood, in which kind of mental activity can we use it, when we can already read and perfectly understand mathematics? The OECD here above answers this question: “reflectiveness allows individuals to think about their technique, assimilate it”... and we have seen that this is the most important «key skill» that the OECD's DeSeCo program speaks about: the meditation on an already acquired symbolic/mental skill.

### 4. Philosophical meditation on science as a practice of making sense

Now (all along my writings) I say: “doing” and “reading” are events, as is “operating”... because for human beings every “evidence” is an event: every “operation” necessarily is performed in an individual time, as every symbol necessarily “occurs” = happens in an individual mental life. Then, when a man is obliged to reflect on the operations he is performing, his mind finally re-establishes contact with the innerly historical and event-driven nature of his internal world: and this is making sense.

Actually, we know that all great mathematicians and scientists have had this kind of interior very troubling experience of symbolic and experimental evidences. Finally... all men that really and sincerely face the negative and “paradoxical” evidence of  $\{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7...\} \equiv \{1, 3, 5, 7...\}$  – the whole of numbers is the same number as a single part of them – are intensely shocked by such a totally unexpected apparition. Then, if a man decide to take his time to reflect on the meaning of these troubling manifestations, during this time his mind will acquire more and more the «athletic vigour» that George Boole speaks about :

5 «To supersede the employment of common reason, or to subject it to the rigour of technical forms, would be the last desire of one who knows the value of that intellectual toil and warfare which imparts on the mind an athletic vigour, and teaches it to contend with difficulties and to rely upon itself in emergencies » [1]

So, the magical teaching of children by George Boole's wife - Mary Everest [3] - gives us a pre-existing vision and tradition of this kind of scientific education to science, and I have applied my renewed, enhanced and transdisciplinary method in Eironeia, with great success in my battle against school phobia and cognitive/emotional blocks in learning.

On the other hand, with adults that simply and purely love the time of scientific meditation, I have trained the mind of my pupils with these shocking evidences that Plato called “awakening truths” [20, 523c] that allow our mind to “go beyond the crystallized world of “either/or”

6 Going beyond the either-or: An illustration of reflectiveness – The ability to deal with differences and contradictions is found on many lists of key competencies within the economic and educational sector. Today's diverse and complex world demands that we do not necessarily rush to a single answer, to an either-or solution, but rather handle tensions...



## 5. Wage zu denken! From Franz Kafka and Lao-Tseu to Immanuel Kant.

Now, to realize its mission, Eironeia is not only a specialized educational center: it is a global pedagogical, cultural and scientific answer to the unitary educational problem that is the problem of our unified Europe of Knowledge and our globalized planet. In other words: Eironeia is the microcosm of an entire educational type of politics. Why?

Because my life has finally convinced me that without the simultaneous and synergic help of all the positive forces of our world, a teacher will never be strong enough to make a child (or adult) that is terrorized by school, go forth towards texts and towards his inner [interpretation of] the world, that is towards his future life.

In summary: the pedagogical, cultural and political reality of Eironeia is thought to be the convergence-perimeter of all human energies that, according to my vision, are necessary to give man the force to move towards symbols (= to his truly human roots and destination), and to give symbols the concrete= historical possibility to nourish human life.

Nonetheless, the path of informal education is a very difficult one. The system of formal education is an extremely closed system, and all forms of international appeal to a formal/informal collaboration are very, very hard to be heard by formal systems:

7 Strategies III. Faire en sorte que la société civile s'investisse activement dans la formulation, la mise en œuvre et le suivi de stratégies de développement de l'éducation - 45 Pour atteindre les six objectifs exposés ci-dessus, il faut une approche diversifiée qui dépasse de loin le cadre des systèmes formels d'éducation... [22]

In fact, I actively put forward Eironeia's «instances de dialogue systématique » [22] to political and educational institutions.. .but there is nothing better than the words of the OECD on the difficulties faced by a non-formal and « transdisciplinary » teacher/researcher when he proposes a new vision of education to the old intra-national school, even if it is the same vision that is proposed by the most important inter-national organization in the world:

8 Kafka - Franz Kafka, dans « Le Château », en décrivant les vains efforts du protagoniste pour atteindre ses objectifs nous dit tout le désespoir que peut ressentir l'individu face à une machine bureaucratique sourde et aveugle. [...] Si un scepticisme constructif de bon aloi ne peut certes jamais nuire, tout projet innovateur se trouve à un moment dans la position de « K » cherchant à atteindre le Château. De telles difficultés ne doivent cependant pas faire baisser les bras. Et comme le disait Lao-Tseu : « le chemin, c'est le but »... [OCDE 2007]

I can only confirm that the creation of a new educational reality that aims to fight against school phobia, truancy and school difficulties thus suggesting another - meditative and reflexive - method of education to the scientific community ... is quite a kaffian experience.

I want anyway to stress something very important... perhaps the most important thing to stress. Our globalized western world is here and now the place of violent institutional dialectics: intra-national education fights against the new inter-national drives, and in the case of that intra-inter-national reality called "Europe", Europe fights against itself. I have accepted this situation with an unconditioned kantian faith – Wage zu denken! Sapere Aude! – , which is my "Vernunftglauben", because if the Europe of nations fights against the Europe of its euro-cosmopolitan citizens, this institutional war is anyway a great victory of Peace, that is the beginning of a real new world.

## Reference

- [1] BOOLE G. (1854) An Investigation of the Laws of Thought, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (2000) Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000. Presidency Conclusions
- [3] EVEREST BOOLE M. (1904) The preparation of child for science, Oxford: Clarendon.
- [4] GELMAN R., GALLISTEL C. R. (1978) The child's understanding of number, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press.
- [5] KANT E. (1784) Was ist Aufklärung?



- [6] MEELER, J. & BREVER, T. G (1967) Cognitiv capacity of very young children. Science, 158  
[7] OECD (2000) DeSeCo. La Définition et la sélection des Compétence.; [8] (2002) Comprendre le cerveau. Vers une nouvelle science de l'apprentissage ; [9] (2005/2006) L'Education à l'OCDE ;  
[8] PIAGET J. [1926] Langage et pensée chez l'enfant, Neuchâtel-Paris : Delachaux & Niestlé : 1959 ;  
[11] [1941] La genèse du nombre chez l'enfant, Neuchâtel-Paris : Delachaux & Niestlé : 1967.  
[9] PLATO, Republic, Oxford Clarendon Press  
[10] UNESCO [22] [EFA] Education For All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments. Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000