

## Education to Peace

On July 30, 1932, Albert Einstein wrote a letter to Sigmund Freud in which he enquired to the renowned father of psychoanalysis about the reasons for war. His letter and the answer Freud gave him stayed famous:

“Why War?” Such was Albert Einstein question to Sigmund Freud. How can we sway humans from the course of thinking that war is inescapable?

“There are certain psychological obstacles, he wrote to Freud, whose existence a layman in the mental sciences may dimly surmise, but whose interrelations and vagaries he is incompetent to fathom; you, I am convinced, will be able to suggest educative methods, lying more or less outside the scope of politics, which will eliminate these obstacles »

And he finishes his request to Freud by asking this final question:

“Is it possible to control man's mental evolution so as to make him proof against the psychosis of hate and destructiveness? »

In September 1932, Freud replied to Albert Einstein. Right away, he suggests to Einstein to substitute the notion of Might, that he evokes in his letter, by another one that he qualifies as more telling

and tougher: Violence. For Freud, violence and right opposes each other radically. Conflict of interest between humans are first and foremost solved through violence and so it is in the entire animal kingdom, of which mankind is part of.

Conflict of interest in which one must add for men, conflicts of opinion. He then goes on to offer a quick retelling of the story of mankind : first a human horde, limited, where muscular strength alone decided of the fate of people and things. Then there was a shift from muscular strength to tools: triumph was for the one with the best weapons, or the most skilled at it. Then came the superiority of the intellect, which overcame muscular strength, and tools. Yet, there is always domination of the strongest through violence, whether it is raw violence, or violence enhanced through intellect.

Through evolution and history, there was then a passage from violence to right: the power of one could be compensated through the coalition of many weaknesses. The power of allies represents now right, against the violence of a single one. Right is the strength of a collectivity, but, according to Freud, we're still talking about violence.

For a real transfer from to violence to right, a psychical condition is needed according to Freud, the alliance of many must be stable and enduring. The cohesion of the group must be permanently

maintained.

The community must organize itself, invent rules, and enact them. This calls for the installation of a sentiment of a community of interests, of bonds of love between the members of this human group, of social bonds, and that is where their strength lies : the force of the bond.

Freud will then come to the other question that Einstein asked: why do men let themselves get inflamed to the point of madness and sacrifice by war? It is no longer through the social link, the inter-human dynamics, but through each individual psychic dynamic that Freud will answer this time.

According to him, there exists an internal dynamic that breeds two types of strength: one that aim to preserve and unite, and one that seek to destroy and kill. We can also formulate it as the more common and well known opposition of Love and Hate.

All manifestations of life come from this Love/Hate couple. Hate that brings you to destroy and kill is inside each living being and drives what lives towards its disintegration whereas what wants to preserve life manifests the desire to live.

According to Freud, everything that brings ties of sentiment between men acts against war. These ties are of two kinds: first, the bonds of love that men can create between each other, then the

links that Freud calls of identification. “All that brings out the significant resemblances between men calls into play this feeling of community, identification, whereon is founded, in large measure, the whole edifice of human society. »

In humans, through Culture, civilization is perpetuated since time immemorial, and that's what founds all of mankind and each of us. Freud concludes “Meanwhile we may rest on the assurance that whatever makes for cultural development is working also against war. »

Between 1932 and 1937, Maria Montessori give a series of conference about the links that according to her exists between education and peace. It is, precisely in 1932 in Geneva, that she addressed the International Office of Education, and declared:

“An education that represses and rejects the promptings of the moral self, that erects obstacles and barriers in the way of the development of intelligence, that condemns huge sectors of the population to ignorance is a crime. Since all our riches come from man's labour, it is absurd not to regard man himself as the most fundamental of our riches . We must seek out, we must cultivate, we must enhance the value of man's energies, his intelligence, his creative spirit (...)What man produces must be directed toward an end that we might call civilization, or, in other words, the creation of a Super-nature as the handiwork of humanity! »

She goes on:

“The crux of the question of peace and war thus no longer lies in the need to give men the material weapons to defend the geographical frontiers separating nation from nation, for the real first line of defence against war is man himself, and where man is socially disorganized and devalued, the universal enemy will enter the breach. »

Where there is no bond, or no longer any, man is devalued ; where there is no social bonds social disorder rules and the forces of disintegration are at work.

How do we build these bonds of love, these social links that will allow the child to be and to take part in the task of civilization, in a way that's creative for himself and constructive for others?

Maria Montessori teaches us that the greatness of the human being's personality starts at birth. Education understood as aid to life must be considered as a help to the revelation of the internal psychic powers of each child.

Since the age of three, children have laid down the essential foundations of their personalities, and this result hasn't been achieved by time simply passing but because the environment managed to take into account the psychical dimension of his development.

« The first two years of life open new horizons before us, for here we may see the laws of psychic construction hitherto unknown. It is the child himself who presents us with these revelations. He brings to our knowledge a kind of psychic life totally different from that of adults. Here is the new path! ». <sup>1</sup> 1939 Wrote Maria Montessori in her book “The Absorbent Mind” in 1939.

Let's plough deeper this first path: the first need of the child is to be loved. Love at birth is first a welcoming. This welcoming at this moment of life is an acceptance. To accept the child that comes and who his not quite the one we expected. This child of reality is not the one we imagined. So yes, we have to accept him so we can welcome him and love him. To welcome him is also later to create, to recreate an envelope around the child. This wrapping made of gestures that will hold, that will keep the baby's body, reinforced by looks and the language that will nourish the child's psyche, will little by little create this bond of love and attachment, necessary for life and its development.

The child's development happens at “the intersection of the inside and the outside”, at the meeting of his personal part and which of his entourage. There are internal factors that belong to the child himself, and external factors that are dependent on the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> MONTESSORI Maria, L'esprit absorbant, DDB, 1977

It's through our body that we reveal ourselves and are born to the world, it's through our body and the group that we build our attachment to the others and are born to psychic life. The body and the group act together through the feelings (the body) that the baby can experience, feelings of hunger, of thirst; feelings that the mother (the group), through a particular attention, a psychic centering on her child and on his feelings, can then express.

“When the body of the child speaks, the head of the mother thinks” write Bernard Golse in his book, “from Body to thought”. “Ah, he is hungry” the mother will say when her child starts crying. Or possibly “Ah, he is hot” will say the one who just fed him and can feel the baby's agitation.

This capacity that each mother possess to experience the unease of her baby and to transform these feelings into an adapted answer will relieve the child. This is precisely what made D. Winnicott, English paediatrician and psychoanalyst, say : “that the mother must have the capacity to place herself so she can be what the baby is ready to find.”<sup>2</sup>

The mother must place herself, which means to adopt a psychic position where she identify with her baby's feelings, so she can be what the baby is ready to find : if the baby cries because he is hungry, the mother must first, be able to interpret the cries as a

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<sup>2</sup> WINNICOTT Donald W :L'enfant, la psyché et le corps, Payot 1999,P.61

call for feeding and then, be able to be the one that will relieve this bodily feeling of hunger : she must be the breast that feeds the child.

This is what will, step by step, build the basic trust in the environment that constitute the foundation of the child's mental health.

The child's perception is that he can count on the environment, of which he doesn't exactly know what its made of, but he knows he can count on it, because he receives answers that alleviates his internal tensions.

The child is loved and experience the world as lovable, little by little, he will become loving, because he is loved, in a lovable world! The child experiences a “fulfilling” relationship, that will feed, build his internal world. The bonds of love, of identification, and the social links are in construction.

The next step that the child will live through in his development is equally important: it's the building of the trust in oneself and of self-esteem. This is a long path that will take the child to the end of his second year, or even possibly his third year. That is the time of construction of the spiritual embryo that Montessori talks about.

In the child of three, walking, holding, and language are built. He explores, he names, he learns to know, to assess, to distinguish,

and thinking emerges because the child carries within himself the bond of love that links him to others.

What does it mean to carry this bond of love?

Let's remember!

What does that mean--'tame'?"

"It is an act too often neglected," said the fox. It means to establish ties."(...)

But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others.

Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me.

The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the color of gold.

Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat . . ."

So the little prince tamed the fox. And when the hour of his departure drew near-- (...)

"It is your own fault," said the little prince. "I never wished you any sort of harm; but you wanted me to tame you . . ."

"Yes, that is so," said the fox.

"But now you are going to cry!" said the little prince.

"Yes, that is so," said the fox.

"Then it has done you no good at all!"

"It has done me good," said the fox, "because of the color of the wheat fields."

From the Little Prince.

To internalize the bond, is to carry, inside you, the memory of the good experience that happened in the loving presence of the other, and to keep it alive within oneself in one form or another.

Maria Montessori discovered in 1907, with the San Lorenzo children in the first Casa dei Bambini what she named "The secret of childhood or the true nature of the child." This discovery that she will do, on the polarization of the child's attention, and his capacity to focus on an object, is part of a long exploration that started in 1894 when she was still an assistant in the Psychiatry Clinic of Rome. She will refine her observations and her research at the Orthophrenic School where she works with deficient children.

Thanks to the discovery of Edouard Seguin on the importance of

the sensory development in the building of intelligence, and thanks to her own experience with the children of the Orthophrenic School, she will redirect, once more, her research and will study the normal children of San Lorenzo. The secret of childhood, for Maria Montessori, lies in the child's capacity, thanks to the manipulation of an object that he chose freely, to concentrate.

What constitutes for her, the possibility to build oneself on the psychological, physical and spiritual plane and condition a harmonious development: when the body, through movement, and the mind through intelligence work together, then the Being build itself in unity.

We can observe the unification of the two sides of the personality which are body and mind. Which then results, is the building of an awareness that the child has, of being in a relationship with the world, in a “here and now” of action and reflection that goes with it, which gives him a feeling of being, and a feeling of being in a relationship with others: “the consequence of concentration is the awakening of a social sense.”<sup>3</sup>»

Maria Montessori will also understand through her observations what she will formulate in 1937, in one of her conferences “Life of Man starts with an unconscious struggle between adult and child and, generation after generation, Man stays a poorly developed

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<sup>3</sup> MONTESSORI M, L'esprit absorbant, opus cit, MONTESSORI M., l'éducation et la paix, Ed DDB, Paris 1996,

being, a person far from the ideal of a normal man, gifted with a balanced personality on the affective and intellectual plane.”

From birth, the little Man, this “forgotten citizen” must struggle against an environment that cannot understand him in his essential dimension of a Human Being, meaning in his psychical dimension, which have specific needs to which adults must answer.

This misunderstanding of adults towards children and the impossibility for them to become human in a harmonious way in an environment that would welcome them positively, will lead the children towards resistance behaviours or inhibitions that Maria Montessori will name: psychic deviations.

She always described the child as the “disturber of the adult who is tired by his work.”<sup>4</sup>»

For Maria Montessori, we see in the child « A soul, imprisoned in darkness, striving to come to the light, to come to birth, to grow [...] who will animate inert flesh, calling it with the cry of its will, showing itself to light of consciousness, with the effort of a being coming to the world. ».<sup>5</sup>

What she called the “hidden nature” of the child that can only reveal itself in specific conditions, when the environment allows

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<sup>4</sup> MONTESSORI M., in L'enfant , Ed DDB, 1936, 1972 , p.8

<sup>5</sup> MONTESSORI M., in L'enfant opus cite p.25

it. The environment must be built in such a way that it favours the child's activity, and this activity becomes the source of his attention and its polarization. That's where the entire secret is, whatever the age of the child

What must be done at first is to create a society of young children and the “casa dei bambini” was this first place built, where the child was able to have an activity with a defined and intelligent goal, a useful help. A place where the child can observe around him the ordered movement of other children who work, and then, the beneficial action of this activity revealed itself. It is necessary that the vital flame that is used for the construction of the child through activity doesn't stay passive.

“The goal of education is to further civilisation's progress, and to improve Man through the child”

Education as an aid to life is the vision that we have of the child's development, accordingly, and furthermore, it indicates us what could be education.

We do realize that education thought as aid to life, represented then a new way of education who ultimately only brings back ancient ideas about education “To draw outside: Educare”, to favour highlighting what stays hidden inside, and, from the human soul, allow the development of the child's potentialities.

But unfortunately, the goals of education have, for a long time, strayed far away, from this vision to reduce themselves to the learning of knowledge disconnected from its context.

During the first six years, the child will acquire both its identity and the capacity, the power, one could say, to act upon the world in an autonomous way.

“Help me help myself”, that's what, in 1920, when Maria Montessori was visiting a school, a young child asked of her. “Help me help myself”, which she will rephrase in “the child in the family” as “help me do it by myself”.

Yes, the environment that reveals the child is prepared in such a way that it allows the child, between birth and six, to do by himself. This requires a great preparation from the adult that accompany the child, as it is not about leaving the child by himself, but to have this particular attention that will support his emerging action, that will accompany his first successes, his first words, his first movements.

It is indeed, about having this attention that will gradually distance itself, not disappear but change nature, an attention that will leave more space to the independent activity of the child to deploy itself freely in the environment specially prepared for him.

Useful help is hard to accomplish as we always swing between too

much or not enough, between omnipresence and absence.

Useful help is the one that will prepare an ordered environment, favours movement and offer sensorial and social activities so that the child can freely orient itself and build himself feeling safe and confident. Useful help offers an environment where the adult is not omnipresent through speech and direct action upon the child, but where the adult can observe, be patient, be quiet, and make silence inside himself so as to not interfere with the spontaneous activity of the child.

Let's remember once more what Maria Montessori wrote about the educator:

« To learn silence instead of speech, to observe instead of teaching; instead of draping oneself in prideful dignity pretending infallibility, clothe yourself in humility.»

Then the child can reveal himself as a tireless worker because we know that the enthusiasm within him, is pushing him to work.

And our final goal lies in serving the child as “by serving the child, we serve the spirit of Man, the spirit that must be free.”

So the educator of the child below six knows that he helps mankind in the essential period of his formation because the environment

that he offered the child allows him to build within him freedom and discipline, which will make him an independent being, creative and loving.

During World War II, Maria Montessori stayed in India, and she will work there for almost ten years from 1939 to 1948.

It's during this Indian stay that she will put together what we call “cosmic education”. She puts together what is useful help for children above six years of age and she gives us the keys to build the new environment that we must offer the children of that age.

Between six and twelve, the child will have access to a new level of consciousness, he needs to understand, to know how the world works. He has an ardent desire to learn : “the mind of the child is like a fertile field, ready to receive what will later blossom in the guise of Culture.”

What we must give the child of that age, is all of the universe to widen his image and his concept of the world, and of himself. We must feed his hungry intelligence, to help him apprehend the complexity of life and open the vast field of knowledge, to allow his exploration.

How was the universe formed? What are the laws that govern it? How are galaxies, other solar systems, ours, Earth, how was all this made possible? How did Life appeared? How did Man develop?

And me, here, today? Who am I?

The child starts to be able to articulate the essential and existential questions of his life: who am I? Where am I going and what Man's purpose on Earth?

Our main tool will be the child's imagination “Human consciousness comes into the world as a flaming ball of imagination” wrote Maria Montessori.

From six years old, we give the child access to his past, so he can better build a creative present: education as aid to life achieves its full meaning, to build a better world so that we can, as Edgar Morin says: “take on the prosaic part and live the poetic part of our life.”

Poetry finds its source in life itself, and everything that Man has dreamed, built, invented is the fruit of his imagination, that we've laid the foundations of during his first six years of life through sensorial activity.

During these years, we've sowed the seeds of an ecological education and maybe even an education to ecology, and during the next 6 years, these seeds will germinate and bear fruit as an awakening of a new consciousness.

This consciousness will express itself in the respect of life because it will know its origin, it will know the long path of evolution needed so that his own can happen.

This consciousness will also express itself in the respect for Earth, his Earth because he will know its hardships and travails across time and space, to finally make life possible on it and grows.

This consciousness will finally express itself through the respect of other living beings, other human beings who, like him, participate today in making everyday life a possibility for all, so that we can all find a way to express and realize ourselves.

Then teenagehood will come and follow childhood, bringing along new characteristics, and will have us consider environment under new aspects.

Maria Montessori didn't write much about teenagers, and the environment needed for them to build themselves harmoniously. Nonetheless, what she left us is enough to understand that once again, it's a delicate period in the life of the individual.

She talks about Erdkinder, the children of the Earth, as it is roots we need to give to these fragile beings, who are in a passage, between childhood and adulthood. They doubt, they hesitate, they are shaken by violent emotions they have a hard time to control or master. Seeking freedom, they still need boundaries that will make them feel secure. They need to feel free, and are moving away from their family, and to live their life. They need to be acknowledged, to learn by themselves, to have their own experiences, and the environment must answer these new needs.

Education as aid to life “is one that seeks to help the adult world, to know, love and serve the child better, and beyond that, to help all mankind to progress in its development.” We must consider the child, Maria Montessori wrote, as “the true builder of mankind, and recognize him as our father. The great secret of our origin lies secretly in him.”

I would like to quote Maria Montessori once again, when during a conference in Brussels in 1936, she says these words:

“Constructive education for peace must not be limited to the teaching in schools. It is a task that calls for the efforts of all mankind. It must aim to reform humanity so as to permit the inner development of human personality and to develop a more conscious vision of the mission of mankind and the present conditions of social life. These aims must be achieved not only because man is almost totally unaware of his own nature, but also because for the most part he does not understand the workings of the social mechanisms on which his interests and his immediate salvation depend (...) We must turn back and make the child our principal concern. The efforts of science must be concentrated on him, because he is the source of and the key to the riddles of humanity. (...) In order to develop, he needs much broader opportunities than he has been offered thus far. Might not this goal be reached by changing the entire structure of education? Society must fully recognize the social rights of the child and prepare for

him and the adolescent a world capable of ensuring their spiritual development. »

Thank you for your attention

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