

# The voice of hungry minds: the relevance of Danilo Dolci for the Cultural Psychology of Education

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## Abstract

Danilo Dolci (1924-1997) was an Italian intellectual, social activist, sociologist, popular educator, and poet, who spent his life in the rural areas of Sicily, trying to develop a progressive view of education as part of the population's development and liberation from both poverty and organized crime. The core of Dolci's pedagogy was the idea of the citizen as a learner and the learner as a citizen. His ideal of education, also referring to Freire and Gandhi, was the "citizen of the world", able to overcome a colonialist and oppressive attitude to say that one's own heritage is better than any other in the world. Instead, to Dolci, what I am originates in my cultural roots and makes me able to recognize that I am equal to the other people in the world. To develop his pedagogical ideal, Dolci relies on aesthetics and praxis, recognizing the value of the human being as part of the nature. I finally discuss how Dolci's views on education can provide new useful perspectives to the development of the cultural psychology of education.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics; Educational Mainstreaming; Psychology, Educational.

The years between 1950 and 1975 have been a time rich of ideas, actions, reflections, and utopias regarding the role of education as an instrument of liberation, emancipation, social development, and reduction of social inequalities (Faure et al., 1972; Tateo, 2018a; 2018b). At that time, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization initiative promoted a discussion about the idea of "life-long learning", in the sense of striving for the continuous improvement of human beings toward an ideal of emancipation (Faure et al., 1972). This was much earlier than the neoliberal stress on "skills" that considers life-long learning as a process of constant adaptation to new demands of the job market in order to prolong the work life. In that historical context, a particular figure emerged, who is currently overlooked: the sociologist, activist, poet, and educator Danilo Dolci (1924-1997). He was a contemporary of Paulo Freire (1921-1997), and indeed, they met several times. In particular, Freire participated in two conferences organized by Dolci in 1969 and in 1976 in Sicily. In this contribution, I outline the strictly interwoven life, actions, and thinking of Dolci in the field of education and social life, in order to identify some relevant points of discussion for the development of the cultural psychology of education (Bruner, 1996; Marsico, 2018).

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## Who was Danilo Dolci

It is impossible to separate Dolci's theoretical elaboration from his life and action. Therefore, it is necessary to begin with his biography in order to touch the main points of his educational perspective. Danilo Dolci was born in the northeast Italian village of Sesana, which is currently in Slovenian territory. His father was an Italian/German employee of the Italian state railway and his mother was Slovenian. The job of his father led the family to live in different parts of Italy, and during the World War II they spent some years in Trappeto, an extremely poor and small fishing village to the west of Palermo. After the war, the family returned to the North of Italy, and Dolci graduated in architecture in Milan (Baldassaro, 2015; Vitiello & Polidoro, 1980). There are several versions of Dolci's biography, ranging from hagiography to detraction, as can be expected for a man of great impact (Vitiello & Polidoro, 1980). However, all the versions agree upon the fact that in his early adulthood, Danilo Dolci was dissatisfied and restless with the perspective of becoming a middle-class architect in the Italy of the post-war economic boom. He thusly engaged in a quest for "unifying life and consciousness" (Ragone, 2001, p. 15, my translation)<sup>2</sup>, moving to work in some then recently established experiences of Christian grassroots communities. Yet, he was striving for something more. So, in January 1952, he moved again to the village of Trappeto in Sicily, where he had spent some time with his family, during which he was able to observe the conditions of people's extreme poverty. He arrived in Sicily without any plans, camping on the shore and being helped by a family of fishermen. Soon, he bought a small lot and established a house that he called "Hamlet of God" (*Borgo di Dio*). Despite the almost mystical and deeply spiritual perspective of Dolci, our interest lies on the fact that he immediately realized how the way to improve the conditions of the people in that poor part of Sicily was not any missionary intent, but to build a solid social fabric and to attend to very concrete issues.

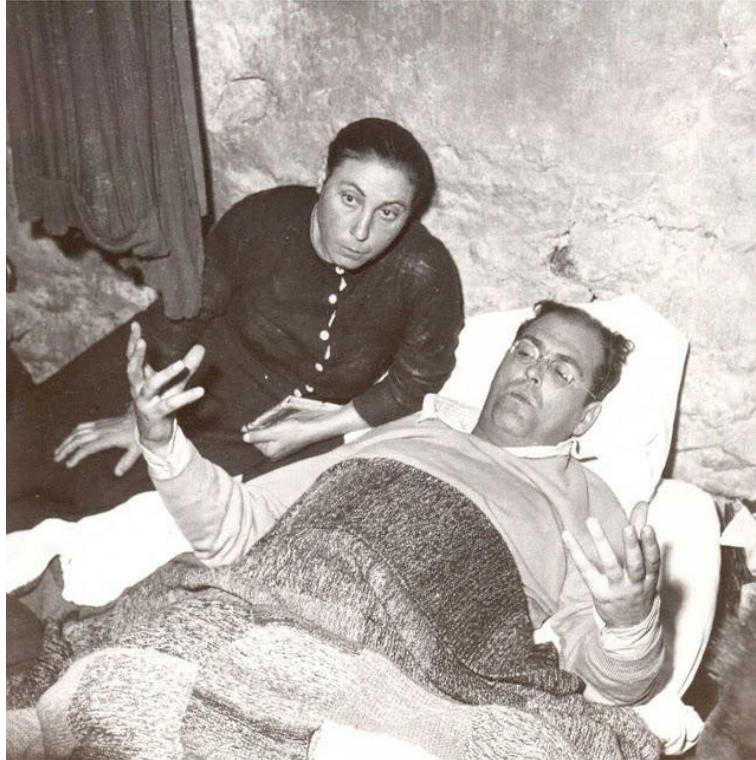
One must figure out the social conditions of Sicily after the Second World War as the most deprived and unjust. In the village of Trappeto, almost all men were unemployed, except for the few summer months of fishing. The land was dry and owned by feudal lords who kept their *latifundia*<sup>3</sup> largely uncultivated. Houses were without beds, sanitation, and water. The children were not in school and did not have clothes to wear, mostly roaming in the streets and fields. That area of South Italy was considered more or less the same way as the middle-class contemporary society thinks about the poorest suburban slums or isolated villages of some African countries. The first consequence of such extreme deprivation is that both the inhabitants themselves and the rest of the society could not imagine redemption or alternatives. Wretchedness became a naturalized condition, which is directly attributed to the people, rather than to the deliberated cultivation of social injustice. In Sicily, the unjust actions were those of the Mafia in cooperation with the old ruling class of landowners, lawyers, and doctors, who provided the political personnel. The Mafia exploited people by controlling the few water sources and subtracting the main food sources by means of illegal fishing.

Dolci narrates a turning point to his action in 1952, when he saw a child dying of starvation in his mother's arms. He immediately started an eight-day fasting in the very same room where the child had died, sending letters to local authorities and calling journalists to denounce the untenable life conditions of the people (Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup> In the original text: "*unificare coscienza e vita*" (Ragone, 2001, p. 15).

<sup>3</sup> A *latifundium* is a very extensive parcel of privately-owned land, often the legacy of noble families and made lucrative through the exploitation of local workers without rights. When profit was not possible, landowners preferred to leave the lands abandoned, forbidding farmers to do subsistence agriculture. In Sicily, *latifundia* dominated the island from medieval times. They were formally abolished by a land reform in 1950-1962, but some of its forms still survived.



**Figure 1** – Dolci in a hunger strike for eight days, in the home of Mimmo and Giustina, whose child died of hunger, unknown author.  
Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=47533088>

The first action had a huge impact in Italy, and Dolci obtained public funding for the creation of a local school and sanitation. Thanks to the initiative, Dolci started a network of collaboration with intellectuals, scholars, and invited volunteers to Trappeto. He established a systematic method of community-building, analysis, and intervention that he called *grassroots self-analysis*, which meant that the communities should discuss and identify their own needs and the means to solve them, promoting both self-consciousness and empowerment.

The grassroots work had identified two main issues that represented the symbols of the social injustice found in the area: unemployment and draught. Addressing collectively these two issues was at the same time an act of empowerment for the local community and a direct clash with the local powers, politicians, and Mafia, who controlled the resources. The second remarkable initiative that is representative of Dolci's trajectory took place in 1956. In January-February, Dolci organized a mass fasting with 1,000 local people, fishermen and farmers, on the beach of Trappeto against the illegal fishing and to ask for the building of a dam in the Jato Valley in order to fight the draught. After a few days, he organized what he called a *reverse-strike*: he gathered a number of unemployed volunteers to repair a main road of access to the village that was completely abandoned by the authorities. These initiatives were organized and advertised openly, calling for the intervention of the public authorities that in the first place appeared as the police force to stop those actions.

Dolci's non-violent method, similar to Gandhi's strategy, was indeed to provoke the reaction of the authorities with blatant acts of civic resistance before the eyes of the press. Dolci and other four were arrested (Figure 2) and sentenced to prison in a public trial that had an even larger echo in Italy, leading the government to commit to the building of the dam and the roads. Dolci was in some way anticipating the

collective movements for water as a public good and for granting free access to it as fundamental human right, linking water with the possibility of development and emancipation (Mazzoni & Cicognani, 2013).



**Figure 2** – Arrest of Danilo Dolci in February 1956, unknown author.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20464846>

In 1957, Dolci won the Lenin Peace Prize and with the money he moved to Partinico, a poor suburb of Palermo, where he established a center for long-range social change and full employment. He animated grassroots groups in the area, leading to the creation of farmers' cooperatives that produced wine and took the responsibility for the management of water resources which were obtained thanks to the construction of the new dam in the Jato Valley. During the following 25 years, Dolci developed a two-tailed work. On the one hand, he produced a number of sociological and political analyses on the conditions of the population, based on innovative methods that I will discuss in the next section. He discussed problems such as unemployment, mafia and politics, the relationship between urban and rural territories, urban planning, and education. On the other hand, he started an intense activity of international networking, travelling, and organizing congresses and training seminars in Partinico. He received a number of intellectuals and young people who came to learn about Dolci's experience and to volunteer in his center. The work also led to the creation of a number of groups of "Friends of Danilo Dolci" all over the world that provided fundraising and volunteers (Amato, 1978).

The last part of Dolci's life and activity focused on education. At that time, it was a common understanding that education was the key to social justice and to the emancipation of oppressed people (Faure et al., 1972; Freire, 2000; Tateo, 2018a). The vision, also shared by Dolci, was related to the construction of a new kind of humanity, based on dialogue and understanding: a new generation of professionals and politicians,

whose education should be based on innovative forms of pedagogy from an early age. Every pedagogy is based on a system of values that defines the forms of acceptable and non-acceptable development, the legitimate learning goals, and the ways to assess it (Tateo, 2018a, 2018b). In the case of Dolci:

Education becomes revolutionary when it is not an “investment for the training of suitable workforce, and in sufficient number, to correspond to the needs of industrial society”, but a process of raising awareness and of construction of the citizens of a new society, who adapt only to what they consider fair (Dolci, 1968, p. 127, my translation)<sup>4</sup>.

Until his death, Dolci worked in the construction of a community educational center in Trappeto, designed through the participative efforts of the local community, which should apply his pedagogical principles to very young children (Dolci, 1976). Dolci wrote extensively against the transmissive model of schooling. Echoing Freire’s banking model of education (Freire, 2000), he criticized the school as a tool for the reproduction of unfair social structures and violent actions upon the person’s development. He writes:

The dominion of the prince has moved through the secular institutions into the schools, refining strategies and tactics, and also hierarchizing the objectives. The teaching of the guides, more experienced in rules than in valuing, emphasizes the role of the leader-preceptor-stimulator-programmer-manager, the techniques of forced feeding and the final product: “the educated individual”, “the subordinate” docile toward submission and adapted (Dolci, 1985, p. 115, my translation)<sup>5</sup>.

Dolci, as many of his contemporaries, deconstructed the ideology of education, the transmissive model and the inner contradiction of the meritocratic model in a market society (Tateo, 2018b) in favour of a dialogical model of teaching/learning (Coppola, Mollo, & Pacelli, 2019; Gomes, Dazzani, & Marsico, 2018). He also stressed the tight connections between schooling and the exercise of power:

It is sufficient to consider the terminology that generally illustrates the looming on the subordinate: to instruct (to build on, or inside), to teach, to guide, to stimulate (i.e. to spur), to form (“to impart the right form to the pupil”), to recommend, to correct, to inculcate, to admonish, to shape, to mould, to model, to direct, to urge, to protect, to spur (that is, to ram); doctorate and indoctrinate: it’s done but hardly said (Dolci, 1985, p. 176, my translation)<sup>6</sup>.

As in the case of Freire (2000), the educational system produces its inherent dialectic of oppression and liberation. The educational work can be either a way of naturalizing social inequalities, teaching that the society is as it is, or a way to emancipate human beings by offering them the context for the development of their personal inclinations and potential (Tateo, 2018b).

This synthetic overview on Dolci’s life was necessary to introduce his theoretical approach, to the extent that his thinking was never detached from the intervention in the real context, they were rather mutually feeding, with the support of the third pillar of his work: poetry.

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<sup>4</sup> In the original text: “L’educazione diventa rivoluzionaria quando non è ‘investimento per la formazione di personale adatto, e in numero sufficiente, a corrispondere ai bisogni della civiltà industriale’, ma processo di sensibilizzazione e costruzione di cittadini di una nuova società, che si adattano solo a quanto ritengono accettabile” (Dolci, 1968, p. 127).

<sup>5</sup> In the original text: “Il dominio del principe si è trasferito attraverso le secolari istituzioni nelle scuole affinando strategie e tattiche, gerarchizzando anche gli obiettivi. Insegnare delle guide, più esperte in normative che a valorizzare, rimarca il ruolo del leader-precettore-stimolatore-programmatore-gestore, le tecniche dell’imboccare e il prodotto finale: “l’individuo educato”, “il subordinato” docile a sottomettersi adattato” (Dolci, 1985, p. 115).

<sup>6</sup> In the original text: “Basta considerare la terminologia che generalmente illustra l’incombere sul subordinato: istruire (costruire sopra, o dentro), insegnare, guidare, stimolare (cioè pungolare), formare (“imprimere la giusta forma all’allievo”) raccomandare, correggere, inculcare, ammonire, modellare, plasmare, foggiare, dirigere, sollecitare, tutelare, spronare (cioè speronare); addottorare e addottrinare: si fa ma quasi non si dice” (Dolci, 1985, p. 176).

## The main tenets of Dolci's philosophy and methodology

The interest in Dolci's work started with the acknowledgment of the methodological innovations that he introduced in his political and sociological work, first in Sicily and later in the urban industrial periphery of Milan. His fundamental distinction is between the ideas of power as the exertion of a force, opposing to the concept of domination, which is exerted through violence. The concept of power is not necessarily negative, to the extent that it indicates a necessary condition for the accomplishment of any work or the establishment of system organization. When power is intended as a way to create inequality and oppression, it becomes domination, which can be kept only through symbolic or material violence. The dichotomies power-domination and force-violence are built through different modalities of relationship, that Dolci called transmission and communication, respectively. Dolci and Freire shared the view of humans as incomplete beings. For this reason, people would be naturally open to learning and striving for overcoming their present condition (Freire, 1996). Dolci explained that there are two different pathways that can be taken: the authoritarian way domination-violence-transmission, and the democratic way power-force-communication. The first way led to the social inequalities that he fought in Sicily, while the second can lead to the full actualization of individual and collective potential for good. In this respect, starting from the everyday experience, Dolci tried to elaborate specific practices of communication that could lead to the exercise of a collective and democratic power, respectful of each person's voice and needs. He first applied this concept to the civic action and, later, to education. The relevant point is that Dolci was able to theorize a methodology integrating social investigation, affirmative action, and education, that could be of great interest for cultural psychology of education.

### *The self-analysis of needs*

Danilo Dolci was one of the first intellectuals in Italy to introduce the approach that one would today call community psychology; he named it "grassroots self-analysis". The method consisted of establishing a discussion, as participatory as possible, involving the local people, so that basic needs of common interest emerged. The second step was to identify a concrete solution for each of the acknowledged collective needs (e.g. the lack of clean water or sanitation). Then, the people were to organize in grassroots movements in order to pressure the public opinion and the authorities to adopt the necessary solution for each problem. The methods of action were to be strictly non-violent (e.g. positive strike, hunger strike, sit-in, petitions, etc.), in order to avoid any instrumental allegation of being subversive and providing the authorities with a pretext for repression (Ragone, 2011). The non-violent strategy demands specific abilities:

- (1) achieving the development of consciousness and self-analysis on the part of the concerned populations;
- (2) promoting the participation of the weak, alienated, and rejected;
- (3) interrelating new, open, and democratic groups which value everyone;
- (4) developing in everyone the profound values which can sustain the nonviolent model;
- (5) causing the population to undertake precise acts to denounce the existing violent structures;
- (6) inventing continuously the most effective forms of nonviolent pressures;
- (7) creating new groups;
- (8) promoting organic and democratic planning for each zone and region;
- (9) effecting the essential dialectics between consciousness and personal assumption of responsibility; and
- (10) contributing to the formation of necessary centers for world consolidation (Amato, 1978, p. 227).

Such an approach is crucial because it combines the three aspects of: investigation, to produce knowledge about the actual conditions; *education*, to the extent that the self-analysis and the investigation develop new knowledge and competences in the group; and intervention, because the process leads to concrete affirmative and transformative actions (Savarese et al., 2019). Such an approach is neither naïf nor arbitrary, because it is based on a strong methodological framework.

## *Voicing the participants*

The methodology of inquiry in Dolci's work is based on two main instruments: the "life-story interviews" and the "reciprocal maieutic". Dolci introduced for the first time in Italian social research the idea of the direct voicing of the members of the community by collecting their stories in a first-person perspective. He applied this method as complementary to the traditional sociological methods for the first time in Sicily, trying to understand the conditions that led poor peasants to become outlaws (Dolci, 1960). The first-person perspective, the almost naked recollection of life narratives trying not to alter the original text, was something revolutionary at that time, because it implied in the legitimation of the voice of people, like the Sicilian farmers and fishermen, who were considered somehow savages and eventually subhuman. This methodological choice implied several epistemological considerations, concerning for instance the objectivity of the data obtained through first person report, the issue of dialect as a legitimate form of cultural expression and power relationship between educated researcher and illiterate informants.

The second fundamental tool developed by Danilo Dolci is the so-called reciprocal maieutic. Starting from the philosophical exercise of maieutic, introduced by Parmenides of Elea and developed by Socrates, he introduced the fundamental dimension of what one would call today collaborative knowledge-building. The Maieutic is indeed based on dialogue between two persons, while Dolci invented the maieutic group, a democratic method of work in which people sitting in a circle took turns of speech to express, without urge or pressure, their position. Each one must be silent waiting for his or her turn to speak. This allowed people to genuinely listen to the others and reflect upon their opinion, also taking the time to revise their initial position before expressing it. The maieutic means to develop everybody's potential to discover and to create. According to Dolci, maieutic encounters trigger a dialectic and dynamics of motion that should lead to the construction of a new every day Utopia (Dolci & Rodari, 1979).

The maieutic group is based on a specific psychological theory, with premises similar to the cultural-historical perspective: the Self develops through social interactions in the form of communication. In a certain sense, the Self is a node in a network of personal communications, which emerges only through communicative acts (Ragone, 2011). Here lies the criticism to the transmissive mode of communication. If the Self develops through communicative acts, any act of transmission whose nature is unidirectional and directive exerts a sort of violence on the Self, because it inhibits the possibility of a true dialogue and thus of a maieutic process of knowledge-building. On this ground, Dolci was largely hostile to television broadcasting. In his view, this was the prototype of transmissive communication, which could never serve the development of human beings. One might wonder what could have been his position about social media. I think that he would possibly have been extremely critical, too. Actually, the most part of the so-called social media are only apparently dialogical. First, they replace personal interaction, which, according to Dolci, is the basis of communication. Second, while the so-called communication many-to-many mimics the group communication, it actually puts in place a sort of "rain in the pond" effect. Each person produces messages addressed to a multitude that, like a raindrop falling in a pond, produces a number of circles. When the number of messages multiplies to infinite, the chaotic sum of monodirectional transmissive communications one-to-many produces the same effect of rain creating an infinite number of circles on the water surface. They have a short duration, reach a certain limited audience, and their effects contrast each other, creating a chaotic order. Dialogue is not possible under these conditions because it requires time and structure. What eventually happens is a cumulative effect of monologues that ends up inhibiting the creation of new knowledge. The only use of social media that Dolci would have probably appreciated is the fact that they can be used to organize collective meetings in a quite extensive and effective way. In other words, they can be good to organize quickly non-violent collective actions.

Another very relevant methodological tool used by Dolci was poetry. He wrote several books of poems that constituted an integral part of his way to understand the reality and to include the existential

and emotional dimensions into the elaboration of his theorizing and acting (Ragone, 2011). Dolci extensively used a method that only recently is being accepted by psychology in its legitimate epistemic value (Rhodes et al., 2018). Poetry was both a way to communicate the findings of his inquiries and to explore the reality.

### *The pedagogical principles*

From the end of the 1960s onwards, Danilo Dolci tried to apply his methodology to the process of education. He felt the pressing necessity to act on the educational system when he realized that no affirmative action of collective empowerment can be realized without forming a class of educated community leaders. So, he started discussing with the community the project of building a new model of school or educational center, as he called it, in the small hamlet of Mirto (Dolci, 1973, 1976). The center began as a kindergarten, taking kids under six years old, with the plan of opening a whole-cycle school. This was his controversial endeavor until his death. The pedagogy of Dolci is based on the fundamental role of the group in cultivating the natural curiosity of the individual (Coppola, Mollo, & Pacelli, 2015). Learning and development begin with individual discovery, improved through the process of group discussion. Every morning the classroom was started with a discussion of the plan of the day through the maieutic group. No activity was undertaken until the classroom reached an agreement. This was intended to develop at the same time the personal interests and the commitment of pupils and the maieutic social attitude. As the school was located in the countryside, the participants' individual interests and curiosity often emerged from the possibility of observing the environment, in the sense of both nature and cultural heritage:

The dialectical relationship between discovery and original, creative rediscovery, and the acquisition of the cultural heritage developing outside; those methods for use with individual subjects – both individual and group methods – which are best calculated to promote heightened awareness and organic development; the development of a realization that it is not possible to create only analyses or to create only syntheses and create them too soon; coordination in planning, so as to be able to produce things together in the short or long term, and in cooperation with the groups involved in the development of the region (Dolci, 1973, p. 138).

The group learning process described by Dolci follows the progression:

Observation, concentration; maieutic elaboration of the initial statement of the problem and of the hypothesis; establishment of a plan of experiments (individual and group) to test the hypothesis; thinking through of the problem (individually and in groups); tentative formulation or verification of the theory; verification of suggested hypothesis; adjustment of the theory (Dolci, 1973, p. 139).

The pedagogy of Dolci is relevant to the extent that he provides an (old) new meaning to some of the key terms of current educational approaches. He actually defended the idea of a person who is in constant development (life-long learning). The same competences that a person should develop as a student are those that he or she will use as a citizen of the local community and as a citizen of the world (life skills) (Tateo, 2018a). What is learned must be carefully assessed through self-analysis and must be useful for acting in the world in order to build a more just society (visible learning), and learning takes place in the dynamic between the person and the group through the reciprocal maieutic (dialogical learning). Dolci did not refer directly to Vygotsky, but he actually conceived an idea of personal development which is very similar to the original understanding of the Zone of Proximal Development: not just the emergence of problem solving skills through social interaction, rather the life-long process of construction of a moving personal horizon towards full citizenship and humanity (Tateo, 2019). Dolci adamantly talked about the utopian dimension which is inherent to any educational process. His discourse is really needed nowadays, when education seems to be aimed precisely to kill any utopia, any developmental conditions yet-to-be-achieved, in favor of

an instrumental view of education as reaching levels and modes of performance that have been previously established by some job market dynamics.

## Dolci and the cultural psychology of education

Danilo Dolci was not a psychologist of education. He was rather an eclectic activist and intellectual, who tried to approach the problem of social injustice from the perspective of the grassroots action.

The cultural psychology of education is currently facing theoretical and methodological problems posed by a multicultural and increasingly complexifying world (Schlieuwe, Chaudhary, & Marsico, 2018; Tateo, 2020). Cultural psychology is able to deconstruct the current evidence-based, ethnocentric, and benevolent logic of many intercultural psychological interventions. Yet, it is still difficult to reconcile the idiographic and culturally sensitive perspective of cultural psychology, its high-level theoretical elaboration, and the psychological intervention in concrete contexts. Recently, Marsico (2017) attempted to identify some basic elements that should characterize the future developments of the cultural psychology of education. If one assumes that education is at the core of the dialectics between societal continuity and societal change, one realizes that education is the “the outer border of human development” (Marsico, 2017, p. 10). Development is a process that implies a constant movement, a mobile personal horizon, and a locomotion between different contexts. Thus, if one wants to observe development in its making, during the process of education, one should focus not on the consolidated structures, but on the liminal process of transition from one condition to another. Education is a culturally-situated instantiation of a universal process of development. In ecology, one recognizes the existence of unique local configurations of organisms and environment called ecosystems, which are phenomenologically unique although their laws can be generalized. In education, one should recognize the existence of “edu-systems”, unique local configurations of people and environment where learning relationships unfold. Any educational problem can only have a local solution, because any form of development cannot be generalized regardless of its environment. One cannot expect to cultivate olive trees once they are moved to the North Pole, even if claiming that the processes of phytogenesis is universal. Any generalization can be constructed only at the level of the theoretical model of the processes, and not at the level of the means-outcomes causal nexus (Tateo, 2020). The cultural psychology of education is reviving a fundamental principle of the educational movement in the historical period between the 1950s and the 1970s, the so-called “learning revolution” (Tateo, 2018a): the idea of the incomplete and unachieved nature of the human being that results in the constant striving and being “hungry” for learning. This implies “that (a) education serves future development; (b) it is a complex process through which individuals become human; (c) it works on the border between the actual and the possible” (Marsico, 2017, p. 12).

The first lesson that we can learn from Danilo Dolci’s pedagogy is that learning requires time and effort. This statement may seem trivial, but it is exactly the opposite of the current orientation in education. As learning has become an instrument and education a commodity, the idea of effectiveness has subtly infiltrated education up to the point of being naturalized. The performances of the learners and of the educational systems are assessed in terms of productivity, which is the most performing relationship between time and effort. In other words, time is a limited resource and educational practices need to be adapted to this axiom. Performance has replaced maturation. An industrial concept has replaced a biological one.

The second tenet is that learning and development require communication, rather than transmission. The form of communication proposed by Dolci, the maieutic, requires, again, time and epistemic justice: all the participants deserve conditions and legitimation to contribute. The sociological perspective of Dolci, largely shared in cultural psychology, is that society is a system of systems (Tateo, 2020). Action cannot initiate but from a specific local system made of concrete people, with concrete stories to tell, needs, and, eventually,

local solutions. Any intervention which does not voice this teleogenesis at the local level, is an act of colonial violence that forces the system to develop within a “window” of acceptability established by the dominant social forces (Tateo, 2019). This is true both in the case of the individual development and in the case of the community. On these premises, it is evident that the cultural psychology of education shall first of all focus on the first-person account, developing methodological tools that allow all voices to be heard as loudly and clearly as possible. These tools must necessarily be more sensitive than simple interviews and must be based on the integration between the communication, the praxis, and the affective experience. Many art-based methods, the grassroots self-analysis, the methods for the elicitation of ambivalence, the Trajectory Equifinality Model (Sato, Mori, & Valsiner, 2016) are all suitable solutions. Communication and understanding require time. Thus, any method must consider the historical unfolding of the researcher/participants relationship through several encounters. One-time interviews are not enough.

So far, I have provided only a few suggestions for a possibly fruitful re-reading of Dolci’s work within the cultural psychology of education. I think that many of the problems that emerged in the social-historical context in which Dolci operated are still relevant today. If we understand psychological intervention as a communicative act, as a form of reciprocal maieutic, we can overcome the current aggressive forms of intervention as “putting people back on track”. This becomes even more important when we deal with individuals and groups experiencing a condition of silencing, oppression, and discrimination. Will we be so brave as to take our stuff, move to a new place, and simply start talking to people in order to let them teach us their real problems, expectations, utopias and imagination, instead of forcing them into a falsely universalistic psychological practice?

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