From Pampaedia to Lifelong Learning. Is “the scholastic form” lost in translation?

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This paper is an outline of my on-going doctoral research, that examines the European Union (EU) education policies and Lifelong Learning (LLL), drawing on Foucault’s reflection on knowledge-power and subjectivity (Foucault 1971, 2007, 2008; Popkewitz 1998; Peters, Besley 2008; Rose 1999) and on Governmentality Studies (Dean 1991; Fejes 2008; Fimyar 2008; Masschelein 2006; Masschelein, Simons 2007; Nicoll & Fejes 2008; Peters 2001, Peters, Besley, Olssen, Maurer, Weber 2009; Simons 2002). In this space, the object and the methodology will be displayed, giving a synopsis of the entire research. In addition, a theoretical perspective is advanced: to assume Barthes’ concept of myth (Barthes, 1984) for an archaeological analysis of LLL, investigating the rhetorical powers of the educational discourse (Standish, 1991). In doing so, the paper will focus of the relation between the 17th Century idea of Pampaedia, developed by Comenius, and the way education policies discourses translate it in LLL. The paper concludes offering some considerations about how the subjectivity of school has been reconfigured by LLL discursive formations.

LLL is the common “overarching goal” of several international organizations (UNESCO, WB, OECD, UE) and it has been shaping the worldwide educational agenda since the mid-90s (Field 200; Laval 2002). Furthermore, it has become the global organizing principle not just of adult education but of all forms of education: life-long and life-wide, in their formal, informal and non-formal settings. In the last decades, a plethora of studies have been critically engaged with education policies and LLL, but this is not the case for the Italian context, where philosophical studies on this topic are scarce, and those which draw on Foucault’s concepts of governmentality are nearly absent. Therefore, the aim of the research is to make a step in order to overcome this deficiency and to expand the theoretical exploration of LLL, problematizing it as being historically related to a problem of governing within the changing contours of the present (i.e., the neoliberal shift towards a knowledge economy and a post-welfare society). Doing so asks to re-read EU education policies, engaging the critical ethos suggested by Foucault and received by various scholars (Ball 1995;
Simons, Olssen, Peters 2009), working for an ontology of the present, showing “that things are not as self-evident as we believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult” (Foucault, 1988).

In this attempt, the research develops a twofold analysis. First, it offers some elements for a genealogy of LLL (Field 2000; Olssen 2008; Centeno 2011); secondly, it sketches out an archaeological examination of LLL, looking for its raison d’etre, discussing the underlying paradigm, drawing attention to its contradictions and demystifying any form of rhetoric. Displayed in a broader scenario, LLL appears to be something more than a concept, an idea or an educational programme. In Foucauldian terms, it seems to be a governmental educational apparatus (Foucault, 1994), a “heterogeneous combination of “discourses”, institutions, architectural edifices, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific pronouncements and philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions” (Foucault 1994). Thus, it has to be analysed looking at three polarities: the bodies of knowledge which legitimize its development; the power relations created by its technologies; and the processes of subjectification it implies (Agamben 2009), inquiring the way it influences human beings thought, behaviours, and desires.

Moving from this premise, the EU education policies can be addressed as a component of the apparatus discursive formation. As Ball (1993) expresses it, policy can be conceived as discourse through which certain possibilities for thought are constructed and other are excluded. In order to understand the way of thinking that are fashioned or taken out by the LLL discursive formation, it is important to analyse the rule of its formation. To engage with this inquiry a short detour is needed.

As the title of the paper suggests, the investigation proposes to recall the idea of Pampaedia, an idea which some scholars take as a possible forerunner of the modern idea of LLL for All (Albericci 2002, p. 30). Pampaedia is the word Comenius (1592-1670) chose to define his Universal Education proposal: “all people should be educated fully to ful humanity. […] Not any one individual, nor a few nor ever many, but all men together and singly, young and old, rich and poor, of high and of lowly birth, men and women – in a word, all whose fate it is to be born human being” (Comenius, 1986). According to the Moravian philosopher and pedagogue, considered the father of modern education, the goal of education is to enable human beings to realise their innate potential, “to prove themselves far superior to the animal kingdom through their three special endowments, namely reason, speech, and free and varied operation”. The main work is “the study of wisdom, which elevates us and makes us steadfast and noble-minded – the study to which we have given the name of morality and of piety, and by which means we are exalted above all creatures”. Indeed, “in schools we must look for the Salt of wisdom [Latin Sal], that is Sapere
knowing], Agere [acting], and Loqui [speaking]” (Comenius, 1986). In Comenius’ perspective, all people are born with the capacity to become human and education is the indispensable process by which each person makes his or her humanity flourish.

For his democratic plan of teaching everything to everyone and his idea of the need for international organization of public education, Comenius has been regarded as one of the UNESCO’s precursor, persuading J. Piaget, Director of the International Bureau of Education in 1957, to describe him as “one of those authors who do not need to be corrected or, in reality, contradicted in order to bring them up to date, but merely to be translated and elaborated”. This judgment facilitated to endear him to UNESCO, which awards the Comenius Medal for educational research and innovation and supports the “Education for All” movement (UNESCO 1990, 2000), now redefined as “Equitable, Quality Education Lifelong Learning for All” (UNESCO post2015 Education Agenda); as well as to the European Union, whose Comenius Lifelong Learning programme encouraged educational exchanges between European schools.

Apparently to continue Comenius’ ideas, the LLL dominant discourse seems to be aimed at promoting the culture of mankind, in favour of freedom and peace. However, trying to follow Piaget’s suggestion, it is important to question if LLL is “merely” translating the idea of Universal Education or in its elaboration is doing something more: how are these two ways of thinking about the educational systems related? Do they assume the same concept of education? What happens to school in translating the Renaissance idea of Pampaedia into the neoliberal terms of LLL? How is the LLL apparatus changing the role of schooling? What is the particular way formal education is intended to be governed in the time of the so-called “learning society” (Simons, Masschelein 2007)? Answer to these questions requires investigating the subtle and contingent mechanisms of power and knowledge production, considering their effects on both people’s subjectivities (Sennett 1998; Dufour 2003; Laval 2007) and the “scholastic form” (Masschelein, Simons 2013, 2015, Clément et al. 2012 ). The following are just few of the possible considerations.

Translating culture into information, knowledge into skills and competences, studying into learning, freedom into freedom of choice (and consume), government into governance, know yourself into capitalize yourself, autonomy into autonomous adaptation, education into a quasi-market, responsibility into accountability...the Renaissance, and later Enlightenment, utopia of a reasoning educated humanity has been domesticated, absorbed and emptied of its proper ethos, by the speech of LLL. Advancing in the archaeological examination of LLL, this paper suggests
looking at the relation between LLL and *Pampaedia* as the creation of Barthesian myth, which becomes a discursive governmental technique.

As Barthes conceptualized it in *Myth Today* (1984), “myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us”. Acting on a double level of signification, it develops “an imperative, buttonholing character: stemming from an historical concept, directly springing from contingency, it is I whom it has come to seek. It is turned towards me, I am subjected to its intentional force, it summons me to receive its expansive ambiguity”. LLL might refer to Comenius’ *Pampaedia*, but in the same time it works on it, it diminishes the original meaning of *Universal Education*, concatenating it with other signs, which are expressive of a certain life-style (i.e., to be a lifelong learner) and set of values (i.e., to adapt to the economic and social needs).

By the use of several rhetoric techniques (i.e., inoculation, the privation of history, identification, tautology, neither-norism, quantification of quality, statements of facts) a myth has the force to “immobilize the world”, it suggest and mimic a “universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions. Thus, every day and everywhere, man is stopped by myths”. Paraphrasing Barthes, LLL can be conceived as a “stolen and restored” speech, whose intention is “somehow frozen, purified, eternalized, made absent”: in passing from being a politicized proposal to be a natural necessity, creating a “pseudophysis” and making itself looking “neutral and innocent”. In doing so, LLL “acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions. […] It is in the fullest sense a prohibition for man against inventing himself. Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image [i.e., the lifelong learner], eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time” (Barthes 1984).

Obtaining consensus and legitimation by referring to Comenius’ utopia, LLL is yet distorting its original meaning, creating an appealing narrative which naturalizes the actual contingent socio-economic situation, insinuating in the subject an enterprise and learning morality, prohibiting the invention of different ethos. Reformed by the LLL strategy, the “scholastic” form of the educational institutions risks to degenerate in a “pseudo-scholastic” form, translating *Universal Education* into a Universal Pseudo-Education. Adopting the UE, UNESCO and OECD LLL policies, what school are required to do is to train pupils to be collaborative and peaceful consumer, to be
competitive and flexible work-life learner (Scott, in Field and Leicester 2000). Within the myth frame of values, LLL becomes the instrument for a better and permanent adaptation, transforming the entire life in a sum of learning opportunities that have to be exploited. Adaptation is exalted as a virtue, forgetting that human beings’ virtue is not adaptation (which is an animal one), but the capacity to transform the world towards better ends and to pose question, as the following: “should we adapt? When should we do it and when should we not?“.

Concluding, being reconfigured as life-long and life-wide, education seems to be dispersed in the environment. This means the impossibility to consider education as something that essentially needs to be in a separate space and requires a proper temporality, as a school experience needs according to Masschelein and Simons (2015). In this way the LLL apparatus seems to be taming and deschooling school: forgetting school is about “time and space offered to find a destiny” (Masschelein, Simons 2015) and to practise the critical “art of not being governed in this way” (Foucault 1997).

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