



Module 10 “Supplementary”

Phase 1 – Activity 1

The technique of debate

The dimension of conflict is intrinsic to the human being. Each of us is in conflict with himself/herself: this inner dimension is only of modern man, but ascended in the ancient times, as evidenced by the literature of archaic Greece and the poems of European different cultural traditions. Thinking of the epic of Gilgamesh and the inner conflict that leads this mythical Sumerian king to embark on a journey that reveals the remedy to end the death that looms inexorably over every man.

The dimension of conflict is not only interior. Human history can be understood as the history of the way in which man has learned to manage conflicts, elaborating very different strategies that often cross and intersect with each other: ritual strategies, armed strategies, but also strategies based on debate.

The strategy of debate finds the basis in the Greek polis. A system of democratic government is not just a system where people vote. Only the vote is not an indication of democracy: it is so only if preceded, accompanied and followed by debate.

Debate is a form of conflict management useful in the civilization systems we consider to be the most advanced. Even in Europe, which was the cradle of conflict management through debate, there is less and less debate today.

We cannot here examine the causes of the deep crisis of this instrument of democratic conflict management. However, we can observe how, at the micro level, the 'debate' technique is increasingly indicated as a didactic tool in schools for developing both disciplinary and transversal skills.

In a social and political context where debate is less and less practiced, as well as in a world where interpersonal relations are entirely filtered through social networks, proposing to young people to debate, or rather to discuss together about a subject has become a difficult but necessary undertaking.

The video “Democracy as debate” focuses on the 'debate' technique and its application in a Secondary school, class IV (17 years old), of a technical industrial Institute. It is a class that stands out for its excellent scholastic performance and where the students live together in a reasonably civilized way. This does not mean that the class, more or less consciously, is not crossed by conflicts, which often remain implicit, underground, not fully expressed, or in any

case not expressed in a common context that allows us to take note of it at group level and then to resolve them.

In this specific case, the conflict emerges in gymnastic lessons, where the class is fragmented into a multiplicity of subgroups: on the one hand there is the gender contrast, on the other a division that responds to the preference for certain sports rather than others; there is the division that opposes those who are good in sport to those who are not. Then, in the background, there is the tendency to select playmates perceived as compatible with you. A compatibility that brings into play parameters that have to do with the physicality: the diversity of gender, the diversity of skin, the diversity of language, smell that distinguishes each of us.

At the beginning of the school year the professor of gymnastic, after some lessons, perceives tensions, which are latent, unexpressed conflicts, which however prevent in the class to be a group, to feel part of it, even in the specific diversity as individuals from the same community. Thereby the professor decides to bring out these conflicts for solving them by applying the debate technique, in order to find new solutions and strategies for sharing and belonging to a group. The professor declares to the class his decision to stop taking them to the gym. If they want to go back there - he declares - they must find a solution. The reaction from the class is of strong dissent, but then, little by little, students understand that the only way to find a solution is by discussing together: firstly they bring out the problem and recognize it; then they struggle in order to find a solution; finally they give a concrete form through the definition - debated and therefore shared - of a set of rules that aim to create a game capable of involving the whole class.

References

Simon Quinn, *Debating in the World Schools Style: A Guide*, New York, Idebate Press 2009

Jo Cariens, *Faith Schools and Society. Civilizing Debate*, London – New York, Bloomsbury, 2009