

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION  
ON  
QUALITY EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

1st May 2010  
from 11am to 1pm  
at the Permanent Centre for Education (PCE), Luzira  
Intervention of Hon. Mario Mauro

I am very grateful for your invitation to this prestigious event. It's an honor for me to be here together with important Ugandan personalities. I would like to thank for their presence the Ministry of Education and Sports, Hon Geraldine Namirembe Bitamazire and General Secretary of UNESCO in Uganda, Mr Augustine Omare Okurut. Thank you for your kind welcome and His Excellency Pietro Ballero, Italian Ambassador in Uganda. Moreover, I also thank Mr Danson Kahyana – Executive Director of Permanent Centre for Education- and Mr John Makoha – representative of AVSI in Uganda – for your kind welcome.

Throughout my entire career I have had a passion for education and paid special attention to it. It is a theme I have also promoted in my work at the European Parliament where I developed the E-learning program for distant education, and the Erasmus Mundus program for facilitating worldwide mobility of university students.

I am also grateful for the opportunity to express myself on a theme—that of Quality Education—which is increasingly important for future generations.

My Theory is very simple. Under many points of view the problem about the quality of education in developing countries is the same of developed countries.

Surely, it's a matter of resources, it's a matter of good organization of the educational system.

But first of all we must convince our young people to open their minds to the adventure of knowledge. We must convince our young people to open their minds to the adventure of knowledge. We must challenge our young people in order to let them know the truth.

Every Catholic institution is committed to the dialogue between faith and reason, so that it might bring to light how both harmonize in the path towards truth, which is, as we all know, a singular reality. This dimension of Christian thought, this dialogue, must be brought into the public arena in order to pursue the highest aims of culture.

But, "Quid est veritas?" (what is the truth?) St. Augustine asks. "Vir qui adest"(is the man in front of you), is the response. It means a man who is passionate about all of life, who finds learning an adventure, who is not overtaken by passivity.

This is the challenge that confronts our society. How can we be freed from this mysterious apathy, from this invincible passivity? How can we establish

a relationship with reality that enables us to rediscover the joy of being in the world, so that the anxiety and the fear we feel regarding our future doesn't paralyze our young people, our children?

We can choose not to look squarely at our own lives, but we must feel some trepidation in the front of our children's destiny. We can immediately see that these questions cannot be answered simply by providing more information, that is, through instruction. So what type of education can respond to this challenge and answer these questions?

In order to educate today, we must not put aside the subject, that is, the young person or adult who is placed in front of us. We also must not put aside the fact that this young person or adult has, deep down, the desire to learn. Even if they are not aware of this desire, it is still there. A teacher can begin to awaken that desire in the student by giving him/her proper consideration.

Every teacher knows one thing well: if a student wishes to learn, there can be many good teachers able to help them. The problem is that often it seems that there is no seeming desire to learn. So first of all the desire in the student must be awakened, and this inborn desire is, above all, a desire for totality—for an experience of a meaningful life that points beyond itself to the infinite.

The young person in whom a desire for totality is awakened will be interested in the subject material as a means of discovering that totality.

Nowadays, since even a teacher cannot take for granted the students' interest in studying, in the same way no institution, be it the Government or the Church, can take people's interest for granted.

The reason is clear: Today the human being is in a deep crisis. We see it in young people's passivity, the quasi-inability to get interested in anything, and also in the scepticism of so many adults. They do not find anything worthy of their complete human involvement. It seems as though nothing can interest them to the core, put them in motion, so that, according to one book on education, "Commitment to study becomes the lowest and boredom the highest."

The youth people are paying for the scepticism of adults who think like Malraux: "There is no ideal worth sacrificing for, because everyone is a liar and nobody knows what the truth is."

Without a compelling and believed in truth to propose, adults will not awaken the interest of young people because the young people will know that the adults don't believe what they are saying.

The Christian proposal is often reproduced in the same manner, reducing Christianity to a list of values to which the person must simply adhere. The outcome of this reduction of Christianity is evident to everyone: Christianity doesn't penetrate the daily life of most people.

We have tried to get by in education with giving information. But we are not giving the piece of information that matters most: the meaning of reality. The results are in front of us: invincible passivity, lack of true interest. What students really need, in fact, is to be introduced to the totality of reality and be shown its relevance to their lives. Without grasping its significance, reality cannot move us to the point of becoming interested.

From where do we start?

Education is nothing other than answering the question of meaning that arises from the encounter with reality. If we abandon this in the name of neutrality we basically abandon education. We relinquish that which is necessary to be fully human. It would be irrational to give a toy to a child and not tell him how it works. We have received the most beautiful gift that man can receive—life—and we are without the instructions on how life works. A teacher can only give this hypothesis of meaning in a reasonable way, by a master. And the master is the one who helps you to grow up. This tradition challenges skepticism so that the heart that we all have—with its desire for beauty, fullness, and happiness—can be truly human. It starts with an experience. When we see someone in front of us and in him we recognize that what our heart desires, this need for meaning of reality is there, embodied in that person.

A teacher, a true master arouses the interest of the learners so that they want to be like him, they want to participate with him, to live what is real like he does, to become interested in the subject like he/she is. It is possible to not be bored, even to study administrative law, chemistry or physics, and be really interested. It is possible, even in our current situation, to educate.

What we need is a witness, someone who is not skeptical and who lives what is real in front of our very eyes. Who wouldn't desire to live his work, relationships, projects, and free time not with boredom but with intensity?

Education offers to the person a hypothesis, a proposal of meaning, which can be validated by comparing it to the fundamental needs of his own person in such a way that he can see for himself the correspondence. If we, in the situation where we find ourselves, are not able to offer a hypothesis that can relate to life, it is a shame for everyone.

For this reason, the great challenge we have before us is whether we are able to offer something that is attractive enough to awaken the interest of the "I" of the person, that is, the reason and the freedom of the person. Only this can truly give something to man, to a man who, oftentimes fumbling, seeks an answer.

To offer this is not an imposition. It is simply the greatest service we can give to our young people. It is the same as what a father desires for his own children. Only in this way they can thank us for giving birth to them, because it would be unjust to bring them into this world without offering them a hypothesis of meaning, an hypothesis of truth.

As initially said: what is the truth? No one has this answer. But we can meet and recognize the truth and we are asked to serve it. The truth is a man who offers himself, who comes towards us, who has a judgment on reality. He is that man whose heart is aroused by the spirit and able to challenge the world beyond his evil. And going beyond his own evil there is the responsibility to build the good for everyone.

I'm sure that in your school, in your country, it's plenty of this kind of man.

Thank you!