

SAGGI – ESSAYS

THE PEDAGOGY OF *AIKIDŌ* BETWEEN THEORETICAL
AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

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This article tries to identify the paradigmatic lines for a possible integration between the cultural mindset of a pedagogical vision that is typically western and the philosophy that is at the base of the aikidoistic discipline, of Japanese origin, and because of this focused on an approach to the construction of knowledge that is at the same time theoretical and practical, which can therefore combine formal knowledge with practical knowledge. In Japanese culture, like generally in the far-eastern ones, there has never been a real detachment between the arm and the mind, between theoretical and practical, as instead occurred in our history, and this detachment continues to mark our educational systems, in which theoretical and practical by now for centuries struggle to integrate.

L'articolo tenta di individuare le linee paradigmatiche per una possibile integrazione tra il pensiero culturale di una visione pedagogica tipicamente occidentale e la filosofia che sta alla base della disciplina aikidoistica, di derivazione giapponese e per questo imperniata intorno a un approccio al contempo teorico e pratico nella costruzione del sapere, capace quindi di coniugare il sapere formale con il sapere pratico. Nella cultura giapponese, come in genere in quelle estremo-orientali, non si è mai verificato un reale scollamento tra il braccio e la mente, tra il teorico e il pratico, come invece la nostra storia ha vissuto e che continua a segnare i nostri sistemi formativi, in cui il teorico e il pratico ormai da secoli faticano a integrarsi.

1. Between pedagogy and aikidō: a possible interaction

In an attempt to delve into some significant subject matters for whom intends to start a formative path to self-educate and educate with *aikidō* (a modernised form of the ancient traditional *budō*), first of all we wish to explore the possibility of integrating two cultural and pedagogical understandings characterized by considerable substantial differences: the western and the far-eastern one. It is a reflection that can't be overlooked if one intends to train practitioners and instructors of a discipline like *aikidō*, which has its roots in the japanese mindset, in which traditionally the theoretical merges with the practical and knowledge never stops to a merely formal level, because it is intrinsically connected to the concrete dimension of experience, given the particular historical-philosophical background existing in that culture.

Outlining a meeting path between the present western pedagogical knowledge and a discipline of ancient japanese tradition like *aikidō* necessarily induces us to face various “obstacles”, both theoretical and practical, but also to consider important causes for reflection, wishing for a mutual disciplinary enrichment. This discussion appears to be necessary especially when one wants to try to plan an aikidoistic education not left to chance nor to improvisation, but that may be pedagogically functional for a suitable educational praxis, able to overcome the possible centuries-old split (typical of our culture) between formal and practical knowledge, between theory and educational praxis.

Educating with *aikidō* entails firstly *an adequate pedagogical training of who teaches*: this means a theoretical-practical strengthening of the necessary interdisciplinary knowledge to deal with any basic pedagogical-educational argument - made complex, especially, by the encyclopedic and circular vision of knowledge that, during the past decades, transformed pedagogy into the more articulate and emancipated “educational sciences”. The knowledge of the educator-teacher is preferably a widened knowledge, such that it can touch upon the most varied fields: the cornerstone of his theoretical education – as Aldo Visalberghi (1978) recommends –

must concern a wide range of knowledge that should take the steps from at least four basic cognitive aspects, which move from the psychological field to the sociological one, from the didactic one to the methodological to, obviously, the knowledge of the subject to teach, that entails the achievement of a specific level of competence, linked to a prolonged theoretical-practical exercise of theoretical and practical knowledge.

The pivotal point of educational sciences, anyway, must be and remain *education* – or, better, a renovated *culture of education*, as Jerome Bruner (1998) interprets it –, on which who teaches must train also concretely through direct fieldwork with internships and workshops. It is not by chance that the socio-psychopedagogical competence of who intends to teach, in Italy, has been brought already for several years at the academic level, and that this training connects with the times and spaces of primary and secondary school through the required experiences, indeed, of internships (contact with school tutors) and workshops (didactic simulations): the theoretical-practical knowledge of the apprentice teacher must forge future teacher's mind to allow him/her to fulfil a didactic that can face the many problems which arise when who teaches struggles with the complex dynamics of the learning-teaching, in addition to the delicate communicative dynamics with the individuals in training and with the theoretical and practical aspects to be combined synergically every time. It is a field in which prudence and, especially, competences, are never too many.

2. *The educational “practice” of aikidō*

Besides these set of problems, about whose evident complexity contemporary pedagogies have been debating by now since school, made compulsory, carries out a primary socio-educational role, it needs to be noted that in the particular case of a possible pedagogy of *aikidō* new and unavoidable issues arise, deriving from the peculiarities of an *art which is characterised by its own philoso-*

phic and cultural code, whose implicit educational and pedagogical concepts must be not only brought to the surface and analyzed in their peculiarities, but also interpreted starting from the pedagogical-educational dictate of our cultural apparatus and wisely integrated into our sociocultural behaviour.

From the theoretical assumption connected to the particular philosophy of *aikidō* relevant paradigmatic constructs can be deduced, useful to face the many educational dilemmas about which western pedagogists often wonder and which are often ascribable to the multiple paradoxes of the postmodern and postindustrial, mass-mediatic and hypertechnological man - as the contemporary man is often described (cf., for example, Rifkin, 2001; Taylor, 1994; Tsuda, 1993). Even if he is made "powerful" by the new scientific and technological knowledge, excited by frantic *mythologizations of technology* (Galimberti, 2009), he seems actually more and more fragile, alone and frightened by the unstoppable process of globalization/planetarization of information, which overflows from its natural communicative channels to invade every public and private space, and to make the global citizen a victim of his own power.

Immersed in an expanding cyberspace (Maldonado, 1997), the lonely navigator becomes the unarmed spectator of an unstoppable virtualization process, of which many worried researchers denounce the possible harmful consequences, with easy repercussions on the entire educational society and on the future of the planet itself (Calvani, 2008). This self-destructive process is often interpreted as the natural evolution of a centuries-old idealistic push of the western mindset, according to which body and soul, spirit and matter are realities that can't be integrated because they are incompatible and antithetical (Tsuda, 1993).

Such idea, considerably strengthened by the illuministic cartesian motto "I think, therefore I am", leads us to identify the human existence in a forced rationalist motion, all at the expense of the body's "reasons", the emotions, the impulses and the kinesthetic forces that foster the bodily intelligence (Damasio, 2001; Gardner, 1997), which are present anyway and which should be

recovered and rethought on the part of a certain education, especially in pedagogical terms (Gamelli, 2001).

In any case, we need to observe that a notable pedagogical movement exists, which tends to orient itself in this direction since the times of J.-J. Rosseau, perfectly in line with Dewey and with the related pedagogical-activist movement, although we can't deny that western cultural fashions and traditions nowadays allow the privilege of such pragmatic and functional integrations between theory and practice, formal learning and apprenticeship, only to a few isolated scholastic-educational experimental experiences. In general, in every educational environment we witness the paradoxes emerging from this irreconcilable *historical and philosophical (therefore cultural) scission between body and mind*.

The educational culture implied in *aikidō*, if practiced as an out-of-school activity or, better, if included into school contexts or, even better, if integrated into certain pedagogical paradigms, can become an extremely interesting cognitive and educational perspective to “open the minds” (Gardner, 1991) and to make flexible the bodies of many western students, who by now are not used to learn through the bodily experience and non-verbal communication, and often not very sensitive towards a discipline whose aspects of value certainly lead to compensate for or to heal the excesses and the imbalance of a widened social distress.

We can't surely consider as easily feasible an effective and immediate meeting between the formalized pedagogical thought, typical of our cultural tradition, and the constructs of *aikidō*, especially because a theoretical-practical interaction between these disciplines has never been faced before with the adequate scientific spirit, being it a potential interdisciplinary field or, even better, a trans-disciplinary one that is until now unexplored and very fluid. The search for this meeting can appear as a *field of research with considerable potentialities*, projected to enrich both disciplines (Travaglini, 2008; 2011; 2016).

Pedagogy could take notable research cues from the guidelines of *aikidō* and, in general, from the study of traditional *budō* (way that leads to the end of war through disarming, which de-

rives from the most ancient *bujutsu*, consisting of a set of fighting systems transmitted since the Japanese feudal age), turning the axis of its interests towards values concerning ethics, socio-relational aspects of education, body-mind integrity, confrontation and cognitive and emotional overcoming of conflicts, synergy between theory and practice, aesthetic research, inter-cultural integration. *Aikidō*, on the other side, can take many inspiring elements from the ideas, often not well-known, of the “contemporary pedagogies” (Cambi, 2005), very attentive to an active education based on the union between theoretical and practical knowledge, aimed especially at building a school of research and experimentation, able to open the minds of the teacher and of the learner towards cognitive areas to which often the traditional school could not and still can't orient.

3. The praxical-theoretical cohesion in aikidō

The practice of *aikidō*, which has its roots in the thousand-year old Japanese tradition, originates in a different cultural context, which proposes (also) other ways of thinking and of acting, often very different from ours. To the traditional formation of the educator, for whom educational sciences are the main orientation sign, we then need to add cognitive elements that allow a good comprehension of the historical-philosophical background subtended to the spirit and practice of *aikidō*. The future instructor, like every practitioner, needs to understand how true is the thought of Morihei Ueshiba, founder of *aikidō*, when he claimed that “True wisdom derives from intellectual education, physical education, ethical education and the education of the *ki*” (Ueshiba, 2004, p. 65). This latter concept is difficult to translate in the lexicon of European languages and it can be represented as an impersonal energy that all individuals own since birth, but that is often badly channeled.

His idea, apparently utopistic but actually concretely feasible, if contextualised - was and continues

to be the one of *putting together a complexity of values* that one of our certain way of thinking tends instead to split and break or annihilate, making often become unnatural and distressed our way of doing, both mental and physical, both formal-theoretical and practical - and, among other things, to betray the famous latin proposition *mens sana in corpore sano*, with which it is very probable that the ancient Romans, as well as the Japanese, identified themselves. Such a thought reminds in many aspects the philosophical one of Edgar Morin (2000) who, in the *concept of complexity*, recovers the lost unity, the broken harmony, because in the “complex”, according to etymology, the parts and the whole start to merge again in a sort of original entirety, where the single and the multiple can interact again, harmonizing themselves.

It is then desirable that the aikidoist would be able to embrace different basic pedagogical competences, as well as to master, in the capacity of an expert of the discipline, both the practical and the theoretical aspects of *aikidō*, one essential for the other: he should “know how to do” *aikidō*, apart from (theoretically) knowing about *aikidō*. This is the reason why an educational path with *aikidō* should be carefully articulate along a dual, but synergistic, axis: one strictly theoretical-pedagogical, the other practical-aikidoistic; the first reflective, the second active; but without any hierarchy among these two levels, so that one is always closely connected to the other and their circulation produces a mutual regeneration and a progressive development of conscience and of knowledge. In this way the process of building a knowledge of the knowledge can be developed, as Morin would have said (2007).

The planners and organizers of such educational path have the task of giving the right push to the initiative, aimed at sensitising and at increasing the range of competences which, if they can seem to be simple and intuitively governable, we actually know that they require a long and articulate path of planning, research, experimentation and organisation, and in which the theoretical-formal and the practical fuse together in a path of synergistic and committed praxical-theoretical construction.

4. *The pedagogical potentials of aikidō between theoretical knowledge and know how*

From this integrative-interdisciplinary work, truly empirical-experimental, one can observe a summation of introductory cues, of notes both theoretical and practical, aimed at examining some problems that easily emerge when one tries to make two so different (apparently) disciplines meet. The themes, debated using a truly pedagogical lexicon and far from too technical or text-bookish purposes, aim at focusing especially: on the possible inter-cultural turning point between the eastern and the western dimension, and on the correlated anthropological problems, on the dilemmas concerning bodily intelligence, so denigrated in our culture, contrary to what happens instead in far-eastern cultures (whose the aikidoistic vision belong); on the dialectic relationship between formal learning and apprenticeship; on the intrinsically pedagogical elements that can be noticed with a careful interpretation and a deep experimentation of the aikidoistic language, which can be interpreted as a successful modernisation of the ancient spirit of the samurai.

Fil rouge of this attempted itinerary is the observation of the considerable expressive and creative potentialities of this possible fulfilment: *aikidō*, if wisely oriented, can be considered an extremely functional way to stimulate a healthy development of the individual and of his/her real cognitive and emotional, mental and bodily-kinaesthetic resources.

Effectively, the work on a construction of a possible pedagogy of *aikidō* revolves around different fundamental matters, which all move in the same direction and which can be summarized in Morihei Ueshiba's (2004) warning of opening your own spirit, of taking on your own responsibilities, of gaining experience "harshly" (with accuracy and discipline) and of developing at best the most authentic and deep potentialities. All this thanks to an education that allows it, that fosters an adequate environment for the natural unwinding of the processes of training and growth: this warning doesn't seem very different from the one of illuminated educators or pedagogists who, although they are

rarely listened to, they try to make their authoritative voice reach school classrooms with valuable suggestions.

One for all: the Polish educator Janusz Korczak who, in his genuine wish to “become child again” and to see the child's right to be respected fully recognised, is convinced that a true educator is such if he/she “doesn't crush but frees, doesn't drag but raises, doesn't oppress but trains, doesn't impose but teaches, doesn't demand but asks” (Korczak, 1996, p. 114); and if he/she knows (and it is an experienced, concrete knowledge, not only a formal one) that “the child understands what is its duty” (Korczak, 1996, p. 114), as well as that the role of the teacher is not to transform “any child into something different than who he/she is” (Korczak, 1996, p. 114), given that “a birch will remain a birch, an oak an oak, and burdock burdock” (Korczak, 1996, p. 223). “I can awaken what snoozes in the soul, but I can't create anything” (Korczak, 1996, p. 223).

The desired way is in any case a way that reawakens, that makes bodies and minds flexible: it is an educational path that can show us the universe outside and inside of us like “an enormous open book, full of miraculous things” (Ueshiba, 2004, p. 35). “It is there that true knowledge must be researched” (Ueshiba, 2004, p. 35). According to a certain contemporary pedagogy (linked to the idea of an active and creative school), learning can be an actually formative process only if it occurs through the direct experience of the cognitive object on the part of the pupil, following the well-known deweyan motto *learning while doing*. The most pertinent historical-pedagogical form to the real application of this motto that our scholastic tradition remembers is surely attributable to the pedagogical concept of *apprenticeship*: it is commonly considered the educational context in which the young individual receives the necessary practical (and theoretical) training to learn in a concrete, factual way an activity in which he/she can then become an expert. Rather than a place of formal acquisition of *knowledge*, it is the environment in which one pragmatically builds the *know how*.

It could be interesting to compare *three different forms of apprenticeship*: the *artisanal* one of medieval and renaissance age, the *far-*

eastern one of ancient thousand-year old tradition and the one, feasible and actual in our school contexts, of the *didactic workshop*. In the specific experience of *aikidō* we take into account the space-time reality existing in the *dōjō*, a physical and spiritual place, typically Japanese, where we practice the way and where the traditional training of arts is carried out, especially of martial arts – reason why it is known and also partly spread in the contemporary western culture. Our wish is to draw useful pedagogical information from the described historical and far-eastern forms of apprenticeship, in order to optimise the forms of teaching in our training contexts pertinent to the practice of *aikidō*.

5. The historical separation between the arm and the mind in the construction of knowledge

The double training present in the *dōjō*, aiming at a unitarian complementarity, practical-artisanal on one side and theoretical-intellectual on the other, reminds to some extent the way in which military schools and academies worked from the first half of the Eighteenth Century to the first half of the Nineteenth Century when, in addition to the natural martial training, they provided a high education of technical-scientific character and they took care of the learning of the arts, both liberal and mechanical, as well as of the ideological-behavioural education of the individual (Santoni Rugiu, 1995). Let's quickly examine the semantic difference between liberal and mechanical arts, which can't be considered only symbolic but rather and especially substantial because it directly serves as an example of a *thousand-year old dyad between the actions of the arm and the ones of the mind*. As the historian of pedagogy Antonio Santoni Rugiu highlighted in his lucid historical-philological study of the difficult relations between formal school and artisanal learning (this last one is always in the background in the history of western culture), it clearly emerges that “free” men could practice “liberal” arts, worthy of the free man; otherwise one was destined to practice the mechanical ones, that is artisanal professions.

Liberal arts concerned linguistic and theoretical studies (talking, listening to a music, watching a dance, meditate etc.): the man belonging to free classes worked independently through speeches or written works and sometimes directed other people's work. This allows to identify significant elements related to the ancient concept of school, in Greece called *scholè*, "free time" (or "what one can do in his free time"), and in Rome *ludus*, "game", that is "non-work" the juxtaposition between intellect and *otium* is easy to understand. On the contrary, in *tabernae* (workshops) manual works, mechanical arts, were carried out, by the ones who belonged to the non free classes (*negotium* means non-leisure, addressing to who "can not take the liberty of lazing").

The dichotomy between mind and body was "clear and irreparable" (Santoni Rugiu, 1995, p. 7) and will give rise to the irreconcilable distinction between the two educational models, one recognizable in formal school, the other in artisanal formation. When an all-round education of the individual was considered essential, people tried to find a solution to this dichotomy. This scission finds an explicit foundation in the recalled historical-philosophical dichotomy between body and mind.

Military academies combined the oral and on-book (rather recent) teaching of formal disciplines with the method of learning while doing "for the formation of the behaviour, of the gentleman's savoir faire in society" (Santoni Rugiu, 1995, p. 186). These schools had become the only place where the high classes could have an *integral formation*: from its quality "would depend, other than from the family lineage and the personal worth proved, the career of every blue-blooded young man" (Santoni Rugiu, 1995, p. 174). To the "chivalric exercises", during which the use of every sort military instrument of the time was taught (sword, stick, saber, halberd, musket), were added "gallant exercises" (like italian- and french-style dances, a foreign language – usually French – pleasure, parry and militar horseback riding, one or more musical instruments, singing etc.). Because of this servicemen gained "a position of pedagogical avantgarde compared to

the other professional fields, to the liberal arts on one side and to the mechanical ones on the other” (Santoni Rugiu, 1995, p. 175).

We can't omit an analogue, and not less important, commitment to education on the part of the *Jesuit boarding schools* of the same period, whose military-like structure and authoritative didactic methods reminded in some way the ones of academies: in these boarding schools as well, an ideological-religious education was combined with a practical-artisanal training, even if the dedication towards military arts stood in the background compared to the overriding spiritual indoctrination (being the commitment to military teaching marginal and above all reserved to the upper classes).

What mainly makes the difference between these scholastic structures (military and Jesuit) and the medieval and renaissance ones devoted to liberal and mechanical arts is the greater importance given by these latter to the cognitive formation and training compared to the disciplinary one of ideological-behavioural type of the first ones: in artisans' workshops everyone was highly aware of how his work contributed to the entire productive process, while in military schools and in boarding schools was often required the forced repetition of mostly meaningless actions and behaviours, only aimed at instilling behavioural rules indoctrinating and subordinating, and at mechanising the behaviour in order to depersonalise it and making it as much as possible governable.

6. The special relationship between instructor and practitioner in aikidō

The practice of *aikidō*, if carried out seriously and continuously, requires a *particular relationship between instructor and practitioner*. It is a kind of relationship which, at least partly, if for no other reason than the geographical and historical origin of this art, is based on the ancient foundations of Japanese culture and on some of its educational traditional premises. These foundations appear in some way rather similar to the previously described ones of our ancient artistic-artisanal workshops of medieval and renaissance age, whose educational typical characteristics

effectively died out, being replaced through centuries by educational methods that lost every connection with them.

We wonder if it is really possible to manage to establish in the present times the particular relationship between teacher and pupil typical of ancient Japan, being completely changed the historical and social conditions compared to the ones of Japanese Middle-age¹ and to those typical of our apprenticeship belonging by now to history, and that can then be considered anachronistic.

The thought of these ancient relational foundations between teacher and student recalls to when in Japan the relationship teacher-pupil in the learning of arts was immersed in the special environment of *apprenticeship*, focused on the direct example, on a total dedication and self-denial towards the learning (and the teacher), on a non-verbal teaching of the educator (often incomprehensible to a too rational view) and on a consequent intuitive learning on the part of the pupil.

It is a very similar relationship to the one that could be observed in our ancient artisans' workshop: the inductive, practical and sometimes strict training prevailed on the deductive, theoretical general learning, even if history witnesses that this educational method, which proved to be essential in certain periods, did not last long and remained limited to confined educational settings, especially confined to the less privileged classes.

In regards to this topic it can be interesting to know that the historical figure of the Japanese master, who still today can have an own significance, mostly formal, in certain contexts, can be referred to in various ways (*shihan*, *shisho*, *doshi* etc.), each of them implies the root *shi* which, in addition to the meaning of “fulcrum”, “guide”, someone links to the meaning of “hill” and extensively (considering the whole ideogram) to the image of a “plant that grows on the hill” (cfr. Lowry, 1999, p. 45).

1 The end of Japanese Middle-age traces back to 1868 with the end of the Tokugawa age (1603 – 1868) and the beginning of the Meiji (1868-1912) restauration.

This image becomes the metaphor of the commander who, to watch his troops, climbs up on a faraway place, strategic and safe, gaining in this way an optimal view of the battlefield: hidden by the trees he can then observe undisturbed and direct the battle with no dangers for himself. The teacher, as a strategist, observes and teaches from this privileged perspective, assuming qualities that make him humble, authentic and authoritative and remaining, at least in appearance, on the background (faraway on the hill), while being effectively at the center of every action (he decides the moves of his troops), an observer who is calm, attentive and strong at the same time.

On the other hand, the changed sociocultural times require a necessary reinterpretation and a renovated contextualisation of this relationship, because today the concrete possibility of such relationship, of which Gardner highlights some essential aporias when he writes about apprenticeship (Gardner, 1999a; 1999b), would be inconceivable: in fact, the social and historical-cultural conditions that could legitimate a full realization in the ways in which it was historically intended, don't exist anymore.

7. The pedagogical-educational potentialities of aikidō

Aikidō allows to actualise a formative experience integrated to the standard experiences contemplated by the institutionalized educational forms of our culture, for the particular theoretical-practical characteristics observable in the peculiar relational context that comes about during the development of the educational processes of this discipline and in the different cultural approach with which is thought and developed a typical educational and self-educational path through *aikidō*. Some theoretical-pedagogical elements can be considered fundamental, essential for the formation of practitioners and educators who intend to develop a qualitatively significant path of this practice.

First of all, we should give relevance to a particular cognitive element, as said before, often overlooked and mostly marginal in

traditional educational models, the intelligence of the body, a *forma mentis* largely reevaluated by the most recent pedagogical lines as a significant mental potentiality of the child to learn and creatively adapt to different environmental contexts with which he/she interacts and in the future, became an adult, will have to interact (Gardner, 1997; Gamelli, 2001). This cognitive area is little developed in the contingent cultural contexts: usually in western educational culture, during the traditional school lesson, the linguistic intelligence and the logical-mathematical one are the most privileged, to the detriment of the other cognitive resources.

During the different expressions of *aikido* the body acquires the features of a functional cognitive property, through which one can know and, especially, understand the meaning itself of this oriental discipline. We need to add that such resource must be considered in a different way than how it is considered in the more materialistic field of physical education (where, instead, an athletic-competitive vision of the physical and athletic strengthening of bodily abilities prevails). Secondly, in the practice of *aikido* it is important to have a sense of discipline which, especially at an early age, can't be separated from the game, experienced by the child with all its heart both on the physical and on the intellectual side.

The normative and the recreational element, as the theoretical and the practical one, enter an obliged dialectic interaction, assuming a significant pedagogical character; in the contexts of learning of the aikidoistic discipline should therefore take shape a particular playful or "recreational" atmosphere (Visalberghi, 1988), in the adolescent or adult contexts, which facilitates, at the same time, the development of a natural sense of the rules and of the moral, which in many aspects finds a theoretical comfort in the semi-experimental observations of Jean Piaget (1993) on the gradual development of the moral judgment in the child: such development diversifies itself in the different evolutionary stages passed through by the child and adolescent's mind, and the adult can relate to the young only with the right awareness of how these natural pushes from the psycho-biological level need to be managed and "shaped" on the educational level.

The aikidoistic expression should therefore take place through a constant immersion in the *playful or recreational dimension*, involving an unavoidable pleasure for learning and an incessant push for the wish of understanding (solicitation of interest and self-motivation). Learning becomes in this way active (not mechanical or based on superficial factual knowledge), because the body-mind of the child becomes the active and synergistic builder of the performance that he is called to experience personally and in group through the autonomous and social construction of various cognitive-bodily representations (opening towards often little considered cognitive channels). Some educational experimentation should go in this direction, in order to build precise theoretical-practical models of education-training to *aikidō*, easing the appearance of a real interest in learning, learning through doing and merging theoretical knowledge and know how.

Not less important appears the adhesion to an educational model that takes into account the *right canalization of the bioenergetic forces* of the individual, especially when bodily expression is directly involved in the educational process: the generalised tendency of our culture to move energy in the upper part of the psychosomatic structure (in particular shoulders and head) can find in the practice of *aikidō* a compensating context that encourages the energetic movement towards the pelvic part (Tsuda, 1993), the lower part of the body (which is the place of the earth and of the game): school today more than ever fosters an insane and exaggerate tendency to cerebralisation, which consists in an exasperate movement of the child's cognitive interests towards the virtual and the abstract notions, at the expenses of the general psychosomatic well-being. The risk, widely spread, is the formation of bodily structures that are unbalanced on the energetic level (bad postures, physical inactivity, easy contractions of the upper part of the body, difficulty to endure psychophysical stress, relational tensions, etc.).

Of fundamental interest appears, as we saw, the special relationship pupil-teacher that tends to form in general in all the educational context and in particular in those pertaining to martial

arts: the climate of respect and authority, wisely created by the instructor through specific ecological expedients present in a context like the *dojo*, should encourage the aforementioned pushes to self-motivation, to self- and hetero-discipline, to the development of certain cognitive, emotional and relational skills otherwise doomed to remain largely unaccomplished. Moreover, the vision of the bodily representation through the direct vision of the right bodily movement (by observing what the expert suggests in an adequate way), stimulates first the intellectual structures of the pupil to build a logical sequence of movements aimed at a specific and concrete realization of a bodily experience and, then, the subsequent reproduction, more or less accurate, of what has been observed in terms of direct experience: such process will gain with time an always greater expressive-creative autonomy, leading the pupil towards a not negligible mastery of the representative agents of his/her bodily-kinaesthetic skills (greater trust in him/her self and in others, and greater self-esteem), drawing the theoretical level of knowledge ever closer to the practical-experiential one.

We can't overlook, in the end, the socio-relational motivation solicited by the practice of *aikidō*, whose ideal contexts lead to practice "together" and to coordinate, first of all physically (body to body but also mind to mind), "with" the space, times and bodies (and minds) of others, thanks to a constant exchange I-You (Us) and of a continuous training of the so called "interpersonal intelligence": sharing space-times with others should enhance the individual sense of responsibility towards the reality of the other and of the group, as well as a general respect for the own personal dimension and for those of others. We must finally remark the *inter-, trans-culturality* to which a practice like *aikidō* leads: the understanding and the respect for the other (potentially different on the cultural level) allow the progressive acquisition of a non-verbal language aimed at going beyond one's own narrow cultural limits and at opening one's mind to more broadened cognitive dimensions.

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