

Speech of the Rector of the University of Bologna

Global Citizenship Education

Aula Absidale di Santa Lucia, Bologna

8 May 2017

Dear Students, dear Minister, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you all for being here in Bologna today. It is a true honour for us to host these two days dedicated to global citizenship from the point of view of education and to celebrate two very important anniversary that are strictly related to Global Citizenship Education: the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Erasmus program (as you know University of Bologna is strongly committed on that and is in the top 3 European Universities for students mobility and the anniversary of “Sherman Declaration”, signed on May 9, 1950.

As you all know, the two traditional pillars of the university are teaching and research, two concepts that are very much intertwined. Research provides education with a platform from which to develop, while teaching tests the very results of research and allows these to be transmitted. For centuries, every university has used these two concepts as models, from the very origin of the modern university, which has its roots in Germany thanks to the pedagogic theories of the Swiss thinker, Johann Pestalozzi. Pestalozzi was the first to identify the inseparable connection among ethics, environment and education.

The time has come to return to the value of education as a foundational experience and to recognise global citizenship as a platform from which to develop the university of the future, a third pillar to add to research and teaching. The idea of a global dimension to knowledge that stretches beyond borders was probably forged in the culture of the 1700s, from which the modern university arose. This same idea was reaffirmed in the Magna Charta Universitatum, signed here in Bologna in 1988

by 408 European universities. Today that number has risen to 803, and includes universities far beyond the borders of Europe. That same document is currently undergoing revision in order to adapt to the current global context in terms of the basic principles of research and teaching. The Magna Charta principles were echoed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with the launch of the Global Education First Initiative in 2012, which underlined the importance of education in schools for a country's development and the need to ensure that education becomes a basis from which to strengthen our awareness of global citizenship.

We are here today not only to reiterate the importance of our schools and universities in maintaining and developing knowledge, but also because we want to stress that development can never be divorced from education, indeed, that there can be no development without education. "Education" here is meant in its widest sense. Education is not merely the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. Education shapes values, codes of conduct, and constitutes the ability to awaken in the protagonists of our future society a sense of responsibility towards the world they will inherit and must look after.

We are well aware of the difficulties this task entails, starting from the fact that the world as we know it does not appear ready to take on such a broad and complex task. We all know that as we successfully tear down walls that separate and cause tension between countries, somewhere else we witness terrible events that threaten these accomplishments. Widespread war, religious conflict, migration, the consequences of warped ideologies, difficulties in cross-cultural relationships: all these issues are just one part of the challenges that the spread of true global citizenship faces and will face in the next decades.

Schools and universities, on the other hand, are the ideal terrain in which to sow the seeds for a global culture that rejects all forms of prejudice and separation. Starting from schools, and in particular from secondary schools, every student should be guided towards a sense of awareness that can be consolidated later at University.

This awareness can be achieved through the educational and thus also professional choices that students make when they arrive at university. At the heart of the word “university” is the concept of a universal culture, whose domain spreads across the entire world. Michael Oakeshott, professor of philosophy at the London School of Economics in the last century, put forward the view that a university is “a body of scholars”. In other words, over and beyond an individual’s area of expertise, research, as a whole, is based on the principle of cooperation. Though I may be thousands of miles far from a colleague who studies exactly what I study, we continue to have a close relationship, one that is built upon our shared knowledge. The same can be said for entire populations of students who move around the world precisely because their studies are a way of connecting with the wider world.

The School and the University are, therefore, truly the place to share and develop the idea of global citizenship. For this to happen, we need to work on two levels. First, we need to understand the differences between cultures and their unique characteristics. Second, we need to bring these differences together in order to produce, out of these differences, a complex notion of global citizenship.

One of my first duties as Rector of the University of Bologna was to nominate specific delegates for international relations, choosing professors with specialised knowledge in different areas of the world. In this way, the Vice Rector for Internationalisation can be in constant contact with cultural “ambassadors” who work on different countries and above all do this with a full knowledge of other cultures. This is essential for us. Only by doing this can we find the right way to approach countries with a teaching ethos different from our own and offer a truly intercultural learning environment to incoming students from different backgrounds. In this sense, our use of English as a global language needs to be constantly modified and adapted by specific knowledge regarding the countries with which we have relations in terms of exchanges and teaching.

Another important element which I believe to be central to our concerns here today is the need to complement traditional core subjects with transversal competences. These competences cover soft skills but also social skills and the ethical values at the core of research, particularly the need to base research on truth. Truth within our subjects is a basic ethical principle; it is an indispensable mantra that must be instilled in all those who are involved in schools. But this principle must be accompanied by a wider concern with educating our students to respect human rights and diversity as well as to create engagement and active citizenship.

We cannot aspire to global citizenship without this essential element. It is this that leads directly to giving value to cultural diversity, a diversity which is at the heart of study and research. In addition, the development of a sustainable lifestyle and in general the culture of sustainability are the bedrock for the transmission of knowledge. Sustainability is fundamental to the entire planet, and it is the health of our planet which we must look to when we think of the basis of our science. We will focus on sustainability here in Bologna next month with the G7 Environment initiatives.

The points that I have just listed, although we could certainly add others, are crucial in shaping specific teaching itineraries that must be woven together with our traditional teaching, or better still emerge directly from them.

I believe it is necessary to begin to see students as more than just individuals being taught specific packages of information in order to become the professionals of tomorrow. On the contrary, schools and universities are places where individuals are educated, and this individual subsequently may become a capable professional. For this very reason, we must educate students towards becoming mature and conscious citizens, well aware of the complex society that surrounds them. Only by doing this will we create the intelligent, forward-thinking professionals that we need for global citizenship.

In light of this, I believe setting up a university policy for refugees, as we have started to do here in Bologna, is an important act that demonstrates how a student in search of a new home, who has not yet been granted political citizenship, can find the necessary stepping stone in the university. The Alma Mater Studiorum is setting an example by being a place of welcome and open-mindedness, one that respects differences, one that treasures and safeguards cultural plurality.

All these issues together with others that will be discussed today and tomorrow are now part of the new Strategic Plan of University of Bologna, that recognises Social and Public engagement as the third pillar for any future policy, and has been set up by emphasising how any activity or action we are promoting can contribute to the SDGs of UN agenda.

The English philosopher that I mentioned earlier rightly suggested that a university is not a race where each student fights for the best position, nor is it an arena for combat. Dialogue, conversation and sharing experiences are the essence of a university. A conversation is something which reflects the traits and characteristics of who we are as individuals; its value consists in the way in which those involved open their minds and understand the viewpoints of others.

Hence a university is the ideal stage for what the great epistemologist Gregory Bateson called “ecology of the mind”, in other words viewing culture from every angle and not differentiating between what seems useful or advantageous today and what seems irrelevant and outdated as a result of the passing of time. Ecology of the mind is the best concept we can draw on to define the place in which a true idea of global citizenship based on education can flourish, the best way to make the university the place where global democracy is truly defended.

Thank you and enjoy the conference and the city of Bologna.