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**The evaluation process in the parental education practices.
From the analysis of the outcomes to the evaluation of the contexts**

**Il processo valutativo nelle pratiche di istruzione parentale. Dall'analisi dei
risultati alla valutazione dei contesti**

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Abstract:

The theme of evaluation allows us to explore a reality continuously growing abroad, which is also quite widespread in Italy: the parental education. Unconventional educational experiences and traditional school paths find a common element in the evaluation of the outcomes. From our perspective, the research on the evaluation process allows us to reflect on meaningful educational paths other than those of the school education contexts, for an analysis that includes experiences of

¹ The authors shared the structure of contribution however. The parts are to be attributed to: A. Rosati, par.1; G. Pieroni, par. 2; A. Mennella, par. 3-5; R. Raza, par.4.

personal growth and new opportunities for human and cultural development, at a national and international level.

Keywords: parental education; educational experiences; training processes; evaluation.

Abstract:

Il tema della valutazione ci permette di esplorare una realtà in continua crescita all'Estero e abbastanza diffusa anche in Italia: l'istruzione parentale. Esperienze educative alternative e percorsi di istruzione scolastica tradizionale si confrontano con un elemento comune: la valutazione degli esiti. Nella nostra prospettiva, la ricerca sul processo di valutazione consente di riflettere su percorsi educativi significativi e alternativi rispetto ai contesti di istruzione scolastica, per un'analisi che comprende esperienze di crescita personale e nuove opportunità di sviluppo umano e culturale, a livello nazionale e internazionale.

Parole chiave: istruzione parentale; esperienze educative; processi formativi; valutazione.

1. Introduction

Parental education experiences allow us to reflect on the sense of the community that inspires them and justifies their presence in different territories. The strength of the community, in fact, becomes a central element in these educational paths which place the fullness of the human being at the foundation of every activity and allows intervention even in situations in which the weakness of the formal institutional system is felt (Benz, 2016) or in coincidence with some emergencies, such as Covid-19 when «most of the millions of families suddenly faced with their children not attending institutional schools, whether government-run or private, did not choose this educational environment» (Ray, 2021, p.58).

It is no coincidence that in this contribution we intend to raise awareness of the situation in Pakistan and, consequently, of the desire to overcome some critical issues of the public school system in a context as difficult and varied as the one mentioned, to underline, finally, the importance that parental education can assume in the overall sociocultural context.

The attention directed to Pakistan is born from the progettual experience carried out by the coauthors² in the education field centered on dimension of pro-sociality and proactivity, characteristics typical of an educational community oriented towards promoting intercultural dialogue, global citizenship of peace and inclusion (Hanwey 1975; Merrifield, 2001; Sleeter, 1991). The participation to this activity made it possible to build a bridge between international reality geographically distant united by an authentic interest towards infancy and childhood. This collaboration allowed us to understand complex realities, such as rural and urban centers in Pakistan (Toba Tek Singh, Faisalabad, Gojra, Lahore), in which economy, poverty and the tradition that tends to exclude many boys and girls from formal education processes are also compounded by important cultural elements such as religious elements, which is another reason for division. For these reasons parental education in Pakistan in particular in rural community, represents a resource worthy of

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attention.

So, in the parental education process, a special attention is paid to the students' empowerment, to their educational and cultural needs. From this perspective, learning represents a process of activating responses to individual needs, a modality which, however, requires a careful evaluation. Evaluation, therefore, constitutes in this case not only a lens for observing the goals and skills achieved by students, but a process aimed at monitoring the effectiveness and validity of educational systems, according to objectives international comparisons and of self-evaluation.

In the case of parental education, evaluation also becomes an important moment for a constructive discussion between teachers, tutors and families. The interaction between educators and families characterizes both the planning of and the support to family education, it underlines the role of parents who negotiate the educational activities and contents with the teachers (Carlson, 2020; Davies, 2015), including e.g. some outdoor components like excursions and trips.

On the one hand, for the teachers involved in parental education courses, evaluation constitutes the first phase in the planning of the criteria, the methods and the tools of the educational system; on the other hand, for the families it represents an opportunity to question their choices through active participation in the life of the school, conceived as a small community. The participatory model, in fact, enlarges this opportunity to a greater extent than the official school, since parents are directly involved in the decisions, activities and functional processes of parental education: this quality gives prominence and reinforces the relationships between students, teachers and families. The latter are invited to propose and share learning objectives, timetables and spaces, methods and programs to make the school an authentic community, capable of activating personalized learning paths and promoting a spirit of belonging and identity to the educational project. The school then becomes a center of social and community experience, a place where practices translate into opportunities for learning and human growth for everyone: teachers, educators, students and parents (Davies, 2015; Sergiovanni, 2000).

In the context of a pedagogical reflection on the role of evaluation in alternative educational systems compared to evaluation in formal schools, here abovementioned elements take on a decisive role, as what characterizes parental education is precisely the synergy and the close collaboration with the students' families.

From this angle, it appears that evaluation opens the path to the analysis of each educational centre, of their curricular choices which derive from the sharing of a demanding responsibility between supervisors, teachers and tutors, families and the educational centre itself. The evaluation also allows, in fact, to carry out an analysis of the educational structure, in order to improve its internal organization and consequently increase the effectiveness of its actions (Stufflebeam, 1971; Tyler, Gagne & Scriven, 1969).

Evaluation often represents the initial phase of the educational activities, so much so that in many parental educational centres the planning is done in the October-January and January-May periods, preceded by a careful observation phase of the group of students who have different ages, needs and learning paces.

The skills the educational action aims at are indicated in a meaningful connection to well-being and relationships with others, with respect of the group dynamics, as suggested by the *National Indications* for the curriculum of the pre-primary and first cycle of education schools (MIUR, 2012, 2018) to which the parental education paths refer.

Students' well-being, curiosity, motivation, joy and desire to learn are the central aims of evaluation in parental education programs: these focus actually more on the process rather than on the learning outcomes. Furthermore, the mutual observation and the effective collaboration between educators in carrying out daily activities with the group of students constitutes the stronger point of the educational experiences which are analyzed in this article. It offers at first a reflection on the role of evaluation in parental education experiences; secondly it highlights the salient characteristics and the impact of parental education in Pakistan; finally it shares some principles of reference we deem useful to harmonize the traditional institutional educational offer with parental educational experiences.

2. Evaluation (and assessment) in parental education

Evaluation in the scholastic and educational processes as well as surveys about students' aptitudes have always been the subject of study in the school world. Over time, evaluation (and assessment) have mostly represented the conclusive phase of the whole scholastic activities, even if numerous criticisms have been made over the years, such as: 1. evaluation is relative, subjective, often arbitrary as large divergences have been found between teachers who had to grade the same student's work or the same work group; 2. the teacher should avoid stereotypy and the so called 'halo' effect. By stereotypy we mean a more or less declared inalterability that is established in the judgment formulated towards the student. The 'halo' effect is that a student's answers are often overestimated; 3. traditional assessment claims to consider too many elements together, such as the grade in the essay, the vocabulary, the syntax, the originality of the expression, the imagination, the logic and coherence of the content (Cesa Bianchi, Bregani, 1980).

Today, in addition to the formative assessment which remains important throughout the entire school year, teachers are called upon to prepare students for the Invalsi tests (tests of the National System for the Evaluation of Education) which constitute a necessary requirement for the subsequent state exam. These tests are administered in primary schools - second and fourth years, and in lower secondary schools - third final year - and in upper secondary schools - second and fifth final years. Their aim is to evaluate the students' level of preparation in subjects like Italian, Mathematics and English (Orizzonte Scuola, 2019). The tests are used to make comparisons at a European and international level; for example, in English they measure students' listening and reading skills and the overall level of knowledge acquired. The teachers' task on this regard is to guarantee an effective learning process, through a clear and engaging teaching so as to make students reflect about the contents being studied. Therefore on the one hand, public schools comply with an evaluation connected to European and International criteria (see Invalsi); on the other, the demand for parental schools or homeschooling is increasingly growing: *here* evaluation takes on another meaning, because it doesn't refer to "standardized measurement criteria", rather it pays attention to the integrality of the student path throughout the entire school year: the relationship with the group, the management of one's emotions, contact with animals and the natural environment, respect towards peers, educators and parental figures are, in fact, essential elements in the evaluation process. However, as the regulations require, at the end of each year students must take an eligibility exam (in June) to verify whether the skills in the main school subjects have been achieved.

It should be remembered, in fact, that parental education in Italy is regulated by Law 62 of 10 March 2000: "Regulations on compulsory schooling, on the right to education and on the

authorization of non-state schools" (Official Gazette, 2000). Legislative Decree 25 April 2005, n.76, Art.1, paragraph 4, states that «parents, or whoever takes their place, who intend to provide privately or directly for the education of their children, for the purposes of exercising their right/duty, must demonstrate that they have the technical or economic capacity and communicate this year by year to the competent authority, which provides for the appropriate controls" (Indire, 2015). It is therefore the families who communicate to the relevant school of their municipality that they wish to independently provide for their children's education and it is up to the school directors to verify their technical and economic possibilities. The communication to the school director must be sent by 30 January of each year and this communication must be attached to each student's teaching-educational project (Art.3, paragraph 1, Ministerial Decree 8 February 2021).

3. Why Pakistan? Sharing The Path Within the Globale Education Community

As anticipated in the introduction to this article, it is necessary to present in more depth the pro-social reasons that led us to choose Pakistan as country/community on which to focus our attention.

One of the most important peculiarities in the fact that on the basis of the references and values of both Christian and Muslim faith; Pakistani families are in fact able to implement scholastic, educational, training and orientation actions and projects that summarize and harmonize organizational aspects and pedagogical components at non-formal, informal, formal/instituzionalized levels. Beyond the diverse religious identities and affiliation, it is precisely one of the traditionally most significant aspects of a common historical-anthropological dimension that, ancestral and natural way, invites us to consider and evaluate together what is happening in the Pakistani community; this broader cultural common horizon lies in the fundamental role that the Indo-European linguistic and cultural matrix has played and still plays in defining the sense of identity of both communities: the Italian-European and the Pakistani one.

Pakistan is characterized by having the second youngest population globally, a relationship with China that is much more solid than the ambiguous and controversial one with the United States, a geographical position (straddling the north-south and east-west directions of 'Eurasia) which makes it strategically indispensable for the development of continental and intercontinental connection projects (Perra, 2021).

«In Pakistan most children only attended primary level education and do not go beyond: the Primary School Net Enrolment Rate is 71%, which is higher than other educational levels such as 18% at middle education level and 11% at Higher of Higher Secondary Level» (Government of Pakistan, 2017 cit. in Batool & Webber, 2019, p. 123). The factors affecting school attendance are «when father is the head of the household, when mother heads the household, and when some other of the household has this status. Moreover, the influence of the head on school enrolment may also reflect itself through explanatory variables such as household income and parent's education» (Mahmood, Saquib & Qasim, 2017, p. 261).

4. Considerations on Parental Education in Pakistan

According to recent data (Ahmed, Rönkä & Perälä-Littunen, 2022) in Pakistan 22.5 million children aged between five and sixteen do not attend school. Since 2014-2015, the literacy rate has actually remained unchanged at about 60%; the literacy rate in urban areas is 73 %, while in rural areas it is 52 %. Here in Pakistan, parental education tends to be founded on and guided by some

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cultural references. We are very aware of the importance that the maternal uterus plays in the growth of a child; in the recent period, especially between 2020 and 2022, we have been able to observe that many parents have acted as good educators, have effectively taught and motivated their children, with the aim of helping them make the right choices when they will reach adulthood and they will thus be able to take on a specific social role. On the other hand, in Pakistan, most of our population is not well educated; approximately 70% of parents do not pay adequate attention and care to their children's education and learning path.

In Pakistan, girls are kept in a more protective environment by parents; boys are given more opportunities to socialize and be autonomous. Keeping in mind the great deal of cultural diversity, it is important to study parental education practices in the cultural context in which an individual lives. While my insights and experiences are by no means wholly representative of a country that includes several ethnic, linguistic, and cultural traditions, I will highlight some of the commonalities that are observable in Pakistani parenting styles. Parenting styles are said to have profound impact on child's development. However, these are largely influenced by culture and its vision of the world. The present considerations aim at develop a valid and reliable scale for measuring perceived parenting styles for Pakistani culture. Parents play a vital role in the emotional, psychological, social growth as well in the intellectual development of their children. Children not only inherit genetic characteristics from their parents, but they also learn the culturally codified system of personal values and habits of interaction with other people. In Pakistan, the family is the fulcrum of social life; the sense of family honor serves as a fundamental reference for many ethnic groups. Parents, their children, and their children's families often live together in the same home. In more traditional families, men serve as heads of their homes. I Will provide here some cultural references. What are the main characteristics of Pakistani culture? Pakistani culture has the following characteristics: a) Islamic values and traditions; b) national language and regional languages; c) mixed cultures; d) a rich literature; e) social organization dominated by men. According to Islam, parents must be models of virtue for their children. Parents are responsible for nurturing, teaching, and educating their children to the best of their ability. However, conflicts that require discipline often need to be addressed. Islam is the main religion in Pakistan. 95-98% of the country's population is Islamic; other practiced religions are Christianity, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism. Christians represent a minority; parents therefore have the responsibility to guide and educate their children with kindness and mercy. Children need limits, to be confronted with responsibilities; every child is equally important to parents. Several options are considered and different choices are made by parents to give their children what they think they deserve most. About *Parental Styles*. One of the most important aspects is which parenting style is the most appropriate for the child? Many parents are still unfamiliar with this term. They treat their children the same way they were once treated when they were children. Many simply remember how their mom and dad raised them and, consequently, make decisions based on their previous experiences. It also happens that they often also turn to trusted relatives and friends for advice and support. We can group parenting styles into three main categories: authoritarian, permissive and democratic. Parents can resort to one, or to the other or lean towards one of the three. *Authoritarian parents* always try to control their children. They set rules and expect them to follow them. They usually don't like their children asking questions about why they are being told to do something. Authoritarian parents, in general, are not very warm and affectionate towards their children. Although they love their children very much, they become very critical of their children's defects. Children of

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these parents have difficulty thinking for themselves because they are always told what to do. *Permissive parents* are described as those who set few rules or limits for their children. They are very loving and caring towards their children despite their shortcomings or achievements. However, permissive parents sometimes become overwhelmed by the negative behavior of their children. The *democratic parenting style* is one in which parents actively and with conviction involve their children in conversations, decisions and even in the negotiation-setting of family rules. They help their children to reflect and predict what the developments of their actions will be, they advise them and help them to prevent and avoid negative consequences. My point of view as a Pakistani Christian. Living in Faisalabad certainly offers a good observation and study platform: it is in fact the third largest and most populous city in Pakistan, in the Punjab Province, with almost seven million inhabitants. I have the opportunity to observe here that many parents strive with good will to practice a democratic educational style but the success of their parental action also depends largely on the educational and traditional background in which they themselves grew up. I therefore believe that the Government of Pakistan can do a lot to better support families, improve the quality of its education policies, guaranteeing greater, if not free, accessibility to studies up to the level of secondary education for the Pakistani citizens. As a Pakistani Christian, I think we should refer to the teachings of Jesus as a model of parenting; we also need to learn to dialogue, to encourage and motivate our Muslim Brothers to unite together in the search for friendship, unity and peace. We Christians want to make more of an effort to collaborate with Representatives of other religions. In fact, we know that the principles and teachings of Jesus help us in this sense: for example, when Jesus says: "Love one another as I have loved you". That commandment applies to everyone and is suitable for every role; every father, every mother must love their children received in the same way in which they have received the care and the love of Jesus. When we become parents we take on a role unlike any other. Even if one has been a babysitter, an older sister or brother, or a fabulous, funny aunt or uncle, it's not the same as being a parent. For us Christians, of course, the Bible is also a book on pedagogy; it contains many lessons on parenting. In fact, we can ask ourselves: "What does God expect from us parents?" Before having children, or when we thought we would have them, did we dedicate enough time to reading, knowing and meditating on the biblical text with the lens of what it has to say to all parents? Or perhaps we became parents before we became Christians, and so we wonder how faith in Jesus Christ should impact our role as parents. I believe the Bible has a lot to say about the roles and responsibilities of parents. Verses applicable to parenting are not always obvious; just because a verse doesn't explicitly refer to "mothers" or "fathers" doesn't mean they can't gain valuable lessons from it. As parents we are called to play multiple roles: guide, leader, teachers, advisors, mentors, examples to consider. When scripture speaks to teachers, leaders or anyone, there are applications for our parenting role, too.

5. Conclusion: Principles For Evaluation And Evolution To A New Integrated Educating Community

As we proceed towards the conclusion of this exposition, we believe we must state and offer to the readers' attention some *references and principles* on the basis of which - with a purpose of evaluating, harmonizing and valuing - the substantial, varied and precious *corpus* of Parental Education/HomeSchooling experiences can and should legitimately be considered as an integral part of the educational process, as a trend that enriches the activities of the Italian, European and global

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educational community. Education and learning are a condition and a natural manifestation of being and the capable State educates itself through the experience gained and offered by successive generations.

Principle of Quality: Over time, this principle has become one of the fundamental cultural references of our Community, a prerequisite for work, professional and social action, an indicator that something has been carried out with adherence to shared expectations, to standards negotiated and consensually recognized as functional to the effectiveness of the mission of an organization, a business, a company, a school. The etymological reference to the Indo-European culture indicates the root of the proto-Indo-European *k^wo-, related to another root *k^wis and present in numerous pronouns, adjectives and interrogative adverbs such as, for example *Qui? Quis?* (Gandon, 2018, p.166.). One of the most interesting aspects of the word *Qualitas* and its root lies in its 'interrogative' nature: the questions it directly asks or to which it indirectly refers are: *Who? What? In what way?* The nature of each Question is such that it opens up and enhances a path of hypotheses, researches, in-depth analysis, and therefore knowledge in a general and specific sense. Hence the noun *Qualitas* gradually, diachronically defines and consolidates the character of a value attached to an object, a product, a service, an intellectual work conceived and achieved in the best possible way according to recognized criteria.

Principle of Experience: From the Latin deponent verb *experior, experiri*, connected to the Greek verbs *peirao* 'I attempt, I try', *peirō*. Experience is a central pillar of our culture and Community. We emphasize that every attempt, every meaningful journey, enriches knowledge, the collective knowledge heritage.

Principle of Success: The Human Being, and therefore the Human Being Educator, is a manifestation of Nature, of the Divine Intelligence; every good educator works effectively because he is moved, animated, inspired by a well-founded intention and good will. It is precisely this good, firm, patient and consistent will that stands as a guarantee of the *Qualitas*, of the success of the educational experience precisely because it is an act directly linked to the Source Of Life.

Principle of Knowing How To Do and Learning From Mistakes: The *Qualitas* of every experience is determined and forged, we would say symmetrically, both in the 'a priori' of its higher matrix – the Platonic Realm of Perfect Ideas – and in the 'a posteriori' of a constant, spontaneous, natural trying and trying again. It is precisely the desire of Man to continually improve himself that drives him to reflect critically but always positively on the practices put in place in order to advance them, to perfect them so that they can become more attractive and that they respond to the purposes for which the Educating Community has proposed and implemented them.

Principle of Feedback: It is therefore easy to recognize that the varied paths of Parental Education/Home Schooling, in Italy, in Europe and in the World, not only relate, as we have seen in the previous paragraphs, to the same National, Continental and Planetary Educational History, but, inevitably, provide a critical, proactive response to the entire 'Educational System' allowing all the actors involved to reconsider, redefine, propose theories, settings, models, integrative and complementary educational offers for the total benefit of the 'learners', their families and the entire Human Community.

Principle of Capacity, Principle of Responsibility: The Principle of 'Capacity' is based on Responsibility and consists in knowing how to consider, give a constructive meaning to all what is intentionally experienced and manifested in a given context and, in particular, in a pedagogical

context. Capacity (Latin 'Capio') 'To take, to understand' is the quality of being able to take in order to contain; to contain, host, consider, value, conceive the organicity, the cohesion of the various aspects, components and manifestations of a 'System', a 'Community, an Educating Community. And indeed, Plato himself had observed how the 'Power' is the ability to " influence another, or to be influenced by another" (Sophist, 247e). Locke resumed the Platonic distinction between *passive and active power*; "the power thus conceived", Locke wrote, " is twofold, that is, capable of making or undergoing a change (Locke, 1999).

Principle of Learning to Learn: Learning to Learn is as we know one of the *Key Competences* indicated by the European Union (Recommendation 2006/962/EC of 18 December 2006): "The ability to persevere in learning and to organize one's learning also through effective time and information management." Continuing to learn has become of paramount importance in so highly dynamic and evolving local and global contexts. If, therefore, every citizen is called to persevere, to nourish and to support her-his own personal, original, creative learning path, all the more so this concerns the Social Systems and Subsystems: the whole Community, in an intrinsically intelligent and flexible way, continues to improve ItsSelf, to grow and evolve thanks to every cultural and educational contribution shared by Its Members.

Principle Of Documentation, Sharing And Dissemination: The ability to give dignity, the ability to enhance a practice, a significant experience elaborated, developed and promoted within an Educating Community is fundamental; good practices are naturally highlighted and shared so that everyone is able to benefit from it in a process of documentation and horizontal dissemination. We recall here that the term *Document* is linked to the Latin verb *doceo*. The Indo-European root **de/ik*, from which the verb derives, outlines the act of *learning through indicating* and it is possible that it is also linked to the root of the verb *dicere*; it is interesting to remember how the Italian adjective *docile* (easy to instruct), learner, discipline, disciple, also refer to *doceo and disco*. According to this reconstruction, which we subscribe to, the etymology shows us clearly how 'docere' and 'discere' are united by the same original semantic nucleus and, translating this into the classroom, they coexist in a continuous interaction and mutual enrichment (the Greek verb *didaskein*).

Principle of Balance Between Continuity And Generativity: The experiences Of Parental Education/Homeschooling conducted In Italy, In Europe and globally must therefore be accepted, considered, evaluated in a thorough and accurate way, valued in an adequate way, as they generate and implement new community educational ways and solutions. It is quite clear that Governmental Bodies, we all need to consider and answer the following research questions: a) with what previous pedagogical experiences does Parental Education stand in continuity? b) are there visions and proposals that create or at least attempt to create a fruitful osmosis with ministerial programmatic documents (Italian National Indications, 2008, 2012); c) how do the different theories, models and practices of Parental Education broaden the Vision and Mission of the Educating Community? d) what demands, what needs, what family and social needs does Parental Education seek to respond to?

Principles Of Growth, Progress, Circularity, Evolution: It seems to us that one of the central points in the analysis and overall evaluation of the reality of Parental Education and Homeschooling, in Italy and not only, lies in the reflection that they constitute a social expression of freedom and creativity, a remarkable exercise of conscious and responsible citizenship: Italian citizenship, European citizenship, planetary citizenship. It seems obvious to us that, if anything, the majority of those who

propose Parental Education projects in Italy³, are fellow citizens who were educated, and raised *within the national school system*; it therefore seems more than legitimate that they, in full agreement with Families, exercise their right to conceive, design, implement and disseminate Pedagogical, Educational and Didactic projects that move courageously and develop in ways other than institutional ones; they thus provide a very interesting synthesis of formal, informal and non-formal learning.

The circle of analysis then closes in a fruitful way and, at the same time, it still opens to spirals of the New, of what has yet to be discovered: Thought In Fact Knows How To Describe Itself, Thought Knows How To Educate Itself; A Capable State Knows How To Improve Itself, Present Generations Learn By Learning From The Mistakes Of The Previous Ones. The experiences of Parental Education with their proceeding to create collaborative bridges between values of the past and values of the present, between the perception of unproductive limits and the exercise of the right to freedom of choice, between unresolved needs and flexible and effective educational solutions stand as spurs of growth, coherent dynamics of progress auxiliary to a Free and Conscious Social Evolution, leaning towards a fully positive Future.

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³ As we have understood from the meetings in presence and videoconferences we had here in the Upper Tiber Valley of Umbria and Tuscany and in Lombardy with Parents, Educators and Coordinators; courtesy of Dr. Simonetta Ferri Coordinator of The Project Mata Dharma APS/«Semi del cuore» (Sansepolcro, Arezzo) and Mr. Sergio Leali, President of LAIF – Association For Parental Education.

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