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The dialogicity of human thought as a constitutive element of the helping relationship

La dialogicità del pensiero umano quale elemento costitutivo della relazione d'aiuto

di

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Abstract:

Caring and loving, in a dynamic of motivation and support aimed at the well-being of the person, are just some of the ingredients that in today's time characterize the helping relationship. The school world, as the main and variable context, becomes a dialogical gymnasium that opens to new and interesting challenges for pedagogy: from the evolution of human thought - also in the light of the social and cultural transformations of our time -, to the symmetrical/asymmetrical perspective of the educational relationship, to the construct of reciprocity in interpersonal relationships. Starting afresh from the dialogical efficacy of human reflection, to arrive at the construction of a helping relationship that places the person and his or her evolutions at the center of the debate, represents one of the greatest urgencies for the educational sciences.

This paper, through an empirical reflection on the dialogical characteristics of human thought, aims to analyze the deeper aspects of the helping educational relationship within the school context.

Keywords: Education, Relationship, Person, School, Dialogicality.

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Abstract:

L'avere a cuore e il prendersi cura, in una dinamica di motivazione e sostegno tesi al benessere della persona, sono solo alcuni degli ingredienti che nel tempo dell'oggi caratterizzano la relazione d'aiuto. Il mondo scuola, quale contesto principale e variabile, diviene palestra dialogante che apre a nuove e interessanti sfide per la pedagogia: dall'evoluzione del pensiero umano - anche alla luce delle trasformazioni sociali e culturali del nostro tempo -, alla prospettiva simmetrica/asimmetrica della relazione educativa, fino al costrutto della reciprocità nei rapporti interpersonali. Ripartire dall'efficacia dialogica della riflessione umana, per giungere alla costruzione di una relazione d'aiuto che ponga al centro del dibattito la persona e le sue evoluzioni, rappresenta una delle maggiori urgenze per le scienze dell'educazione.

Il presente contributo, attraverso una riflessione empirica sulle caratteristiche dialogiche del pensiero umano, mira ad analizzare gli aspetti più profondi della relazione educativa d'aiuto all'interno del contesto scolastico.

Parole chiave: Educazione, Relazione, Persona, Scuola, Dialogicità.

1. Pedagogical constructs of the helping relationship

The reality in which we live and confront ourselves is characterized, today more than in the past, by being a forge of confrontation between different cultures. This is the foundation for the elaboration of a new culture, which welcomes within itself the different instances and identities, and tries to make them a creative synthesis. An idea that cannot fail to interest the relationships that are intertwined within the modern; Just think, for example, of formal educational realities, families, but also the peer group. It is important to proceed with the construction of a clear and defined relationship of interinstitutional participation with the primary pedagogical-educational intent, not as an element to be resorted to in the event of difficulties or prejudicial events. The meaning of the educational relationship today becomes an essential construct for another idea of a relationship of help, of support to the other than oneself. But it is good to remember the starting point of such a reflection, namely "the connotation of the educational relationship as a relationship of help, within which it is not exceptional to encounter the weakest piece, that is, the recipient of educational work, with the difficulty of combining autonomy and the ability to depend on others, which are the two poles on which every relationship is structured, in close correlation with the asymmetry of the educational relationship" (Balzano, 2017, p. 24).

In 1981, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposed health for all as a target for the year 2000. To date, it is sad to say, the goal that was set for us over 40 years ago has not been achieved. It is difficult to think only in terms of objectives: perhaps it would be more correct to formulate a reflection that poses, on the one hand, the need to progressively extend a model of health, which for the sake of brevity we could call European, and on the other hand try to implement the resources necessary for its implementation. Moreover, the problem was disposed at the time because it did not look at all the elements that can contribute to the achievement of this objective. In helping relationships, in fact, it is necessary to nurture or recover a dimension of professionalism. It means avoiding amateurism, which is identified with approximate interventions, carried out with ease, without understanding

exactly in what context and with what identity one is dealing, and without giving evidence of an assumption of perspective: an amateurish action is carried out that lives on the space and the short body of a day of goodness, of a day of heroism. It is amateurish, at times, to support a charitable initiative, without making the commitment to understand the structural perspective in which that initiative itself is placed. Professionalism, in this sense, does not mean so much carrying out a profession, but looking at reality with the taste of commitment, of deep understanding, living help not as a duty that is fulfilled in one's free time, on holidays, but as a commitment that runs through an entire existence. Supporting a charitable initiative and discovering that it can be a lucrative occupation can mean turning a volunteer initiative into professionalism, and this can become a serious detriment (Sirignano, 2020).

The network of exchanges that can make the goal of health for all possible concerns the need for everyone to live the relationship of help as reciprocity, and not to feel their position as professionalism, but as a professionalism capable of offering help in times of need and which in turn may need the support of the other.

2. The Dialogicity of Human Thought

One of the issues, which seems easy but is actually very complicated, concerns the knowledge of the other, his thinking, his ability to relate to his fellow human beings. Those who help, one might think, need to know the other. Of course, this is true, but at the same time it is necessary to ask ourselves what we mean by knowledge. It is interesting to try to reflect on three fundamental points to understand what kind of knowledge we want to take charge of: the idea of the objectivity of the world, the progressiveness of knowledge, the neutrality of the observer. To know the other as an object, to know the other thinking that knowledge uses the strategy of reclamation, means both to increase knowledge and to decrease ignorance (Attinà, Broccoli, 2021). Not knowing the one who helps oneself with the neutrality of the observer is another of the essential elements in the construction of the helping relationship. This kind of knowledge is not very useful; indeed, it is harmful to the other, it is not an object, the more you know it, the more the feeling of feeling ignorant increases. There are different levels of knowledge: we know in a relationship; We know and reveal our need to know more, and therefore our ignorance. And we get to know each other in an interested, non-neutral relationship. From knowledge, our reflection moves towards another essential element within the helping relationship: understanding. This word can be interpreted more easily by evoking a relationship with another who is close to me, close to me. Knowledge and understanding are therefore words that seem to have some kinship, but there is also a third: to conquer. The comprehension of the other, the effort to understand the other, costs more effort, the stronger the need and the illusion to understand everything of the person in front of us. And the other who doesn't make himself understood is almost ungrateful. To understand everything about the other is to take an omniscient and even, perhaps, omnipotent position. The effort to understand the other is certainly necessary, but the illusion that he is satisfied by total understanding is dangerous. The formation of the helping relationship must be balanced between an understanding that is illusory and risky, but which can lead to a situation of domination, and a renunciation of understanding, a balance that can only be precarious (Broccoli, 2021).

Today, therefore, to speak of the dialogicity of human thought opens to a very broad and complex reflection that we can and must try to set in some fundamental passages of our debate. Contemporary

pedagogical discourse explores the path of education and knowing how to be critical. A pedagogy as an autonomous science, therefore, with its own object and its own research methodology, epistemologically attributable to a model of “critical-rational knowledge, built on the integration of a philosophical dimension within its scientific structure and of active knowledge aimed at guaranteeing the unity of educational theory-praxis” (Baldacci, 2012, p. 30). This, in fact, implies the intentional assumption of the critical-rational character, typical of every science that faces the problems of praxis without dogmatism, both of a metaphysical and empirical nature. It follows that reflective thinking is the main tool at all levels and on all aspects involved, whether they are of a purely theoretical or practical nature.

However, dialogicity in the field of education and pedagogy has a long history. With reference to historical and cultural developments, this has taken on different facets and meanings: Pellerey (1999), for example, he traces pedagogical discursivity to the various suggestions of post-modern thought, entitled, to the educational conversation, as “a rich and complex metaphor of education as a continuous and prolonged dialogue over time between the student and his educators, also between him and the world of his direct and indirect experience” (p. 177). Baldacci (2012), on the other hand, develops the theme of understanding in the educational field as the ability of the educator to put the learner in the condition of placing the assertion in the space of reasons capable of justifying it, recovering, in this sense, Brandom’s thought (2002). Education, in this sense, takes on an argumentative component in a structural way, such that discourse represents an anti-dogmatic, rational, constructive educational device. Pedagogy, and education, are critical and anti-dogmatic knowledge and know-how, to the extent that their discourse subjects ideas (and facts) to criticism, both from an empirical and reflective point of view, in the tension towards progressive improvement and the solution of the problems posed by practice. A discourse, therefore, that situates the elements it discusses in the logical space of reasons, in an integration between critical activity and argumentative rationality (Baldacci, 2012).

Education is structurally dialogue, constant and prolonged conversation between the educator and the student. Freire, with his proposal, underlined how dialogue is the tool that allows man to transform himself and the world around him, awakening his own creative possibilities. He also warns that “only dialogue, which involves critical thinking, is also capable of generating it. Without him there is no communication, and without communication there is no true education” (Freire, 1980, pp. 112-113). A community that intends to transform reality must dialogue, sharing logos, as thought and word. In this sense, the dialogicity of human thought can be realized as a tool capable of guiding educational relationships, especially in the perspective of help, to place the person back at the center of the debate, with his or her characterizations and intrinsic problematicism.

3. New perspectives of helping relationships in the educational emergency

Listening to others is one of the propensities that should most guide today’s citizen in building a relationship of help within a daily life characterized by a profound educational emergency (Elia, 2016). Learning to listen and to see constantly accompanies those who are in an educational relationship. Learning to see deeply, to listen to what is happening, leads us to take note of insignificance and to know how to adopt a more trained approach in grasping the unique and the singular, to go beyond the plural that unfortunately very often covers those countless singulars that are the people with whom we forge bonds. The gaze of the educator, moreover, is like the gaze of a

poet: an inner perspective that seeks the depth of things penetrates the fabric of our life, in order not only to be able to observe as an activity of psychological knowledge, but to know how to exercise a knowledge praised by our convictions and to reveal what the other carries within himself. When we place ourselves in relation to the meaning and aims of education, in the sense of help, it is not enough to formulate syntheses - in all cases provisional - if we do not first “encounter and go through our own humanity and that of others, as happens, for example, when we take stock of our plans for life and fulfilment, when we take note of the meaning that affections and closeness to the other have for us” (Musaio, 2020, p. 9).

When we experience something unexpected, it is as if we lack words and need to look for them in the confusion of a present that can also obscure the value of everything. We thus find ourselves walking aimlessly, waiting for answers that are slow to arrive, and in the meantime events can cause trauma, a damage that we try to remedy by relying on the passage of time, which in turn does not reassure when it is imperfect, oscillating, steeped in the unexpected, so much so that we are outlined as beings who wander in uncertainty (Tarozzi, 2021). This is what happened suddenly with the arrival of the health emergency, the crisis that has affected the entire planet: the spread of COVID-19. As people died, cities took on faded scenes of loneliness, which evoked pages of history now forgotten, none of us could harbor greater feelings, but we all had monotonous feelings. Alongside the uncertainties caused by this situation, the certainties of science also dissolved and confronted us with a state of lack. Fears, wounds, in turn, make people recline on themselves, looking for valid reasons and reasons to be able to rediscover beauty inside and outside of themselves to understand what happens inside what we can define as our inner underground. Through traumas, wounds, sudden loss of affections and bonds, being close to the sufferings of the body and psyche of others, knowing how to stay in one’s own, are both the negative that we would not like to know, and occasions that announce unexpected possibilities. Well, remember that emotions are part of our lives, and that human beings cannot do without them (Grotlüschen, Nienkemper & Duncker-Euringer, 2020). Thus, the things we remember, and the things we forget, memory and oblivion, are ways of being and ways of living that emotions cannot help but condition against sadness and anxiety, restlessness and joy, nostalgia, and despair, are immediately reflected in the lakes of memory, dilating, or drying it up, obscuring or illuminating it.

For an area that strictly pertains to human formation such as pedagogy, there is an urgent need for reflections that bring attention not only to the front and to the formation of excellence, but more sensitive people. Educating will be, then, much more than offering knowledge. Sensitivity towards a deeper form of self-knowledge even in imperfection, in negative emotions or in the overcoming of difficulties, the lines at times of an exercise of self-understanding of oneself and of the other as a key factor to be able to see people without distortions or exaggerations, as well as seeing oneself, also in relation to having to face explicit forms, obvious, of discomfort. “To take care of others and to take care of life, to make sure that the time of being there is not only what happens, what we suffer for our being conditioned by the world, but what responds to the desire for a life with meaning” (Mortari, 2021, p. 29). Care, in fact, is the factory of being we are the gestures of care received and the gestures of care missed, and we become what we are in relation to what we care for. If we take care of certain ideas, the ways of thinking will be shaped by this work of the mind; if we take care of certain things, it will be the experience of those things and the way we are in relation to them that will structure our essence; If we take care of certain people, what happens in the relational exchange with the other will

become part of us. “Being humanly determined, moreover, the relationship becomes, therefore, a privileged instrument of education, since it welcomes the difference and recognizes the limit of the individual in the richness of the other than himself in the course of a time, not too short but not too long, in which the educational relationship is identified, useful and fundamental not only to promote the intentional and global growth of the student, but also to promote the intentional and global growth of the student. But also, to encourage mutual involvement, to process conflict, to recognize the limit and to facilitate the process of change in which the other is the protagonist, in general, and the educand, in particular” (Balzano, 2020, p. 34).

Talking about an educational relationship in an emergency phase undoubtedly requires a very important commitment: the practice of care, in fact, is a complex action because understanding how to facilitate the becoming of life in its best forms requires continuous thinking, the one that observes reality as it happens, the one that does not stop at immediate evidence but activates a profound hermeneutic of experience, the one that imagines possible worlds and plans to act in such a way as to implement what reality demands (Rossini, 2022). Thinking about care is not a geometrical and systemic thinking, not thinking sensitive, attentive to the presence of the other. It is a situated and situational thinking, that is, that one keeps oneself focused on the situation experienced by that specific person at that precise moment. Those who are capable of care know how to think deeply about the situation they are facing. It is true that reacting promptly to the other’s calls for care means reacting with regard for his or her emotional experiences, but this affective attention is not devoid of thought, since feeling and thinking go together. The cognitive commitment required by the practice of care requires not only thinking about what is happening, but also reflecting on acting in such a way as to improve the action itself as much as possible. There is no certain knowledge, much less is there a science of educational action, since nothing is certain about the essential things of life (Merrill, Vieira, Galimberti & Nizinska, 2020). It is this constitutive problematic nature of the action of care that requires a high rate of reflexivity. Reflexivity is necessary because the cases we are facing, although they may be analogous to others, are always unique and singular because people are unique and singular. Taking care well requires the educator to continually question the experience he is living, cultivating a thoughtful, reflective attitude, which considers each situation not as a case that can be subsumed in a general rule, but in its singularity. Doing a helping relationship practice means condensing and realizing all today the elements that characterize the commitment to a practice of care for oneself and for others.

4. Conclusions

We have understood how every helping relationship, even in situations of profound educational emergency, requires its own technical specifications. To identify the technique that expresses the essence of the art of educating, it is necessary to examine what has been identified as its own direction of meaning: to make the other open to the call to care. Since, in the perspective of an ontological conception of the Heideggerian type, it is language that constitutes the house of being, the call to exist with authenticity can only be actualized through discourse and precisely in that discourse that calls for self-care. Since the essence of our being can be said to consist already of the thinking we think and the feeling we feel, that is, of the life of the mind, the discourse that calls to the call is the one that takes care of the life of the mind and proposes itself as an element of help and support for the other (Coragliotto, Merlo Pich & Bellando, 2021).

From human thought to practice, the essential and characterizing elements require the educator to have an adequate mastery of both cultural elements and their transmission. Less attention, on the other hand, is placed on the need for the same to possess the technique to educate to think, meaning by thinking the practice of questioning the questions that are significant for human existence, those that one frequents to seek directions of meaning to one's own being. Not to ask these questions means to miss the possibility of outlining a symbolic framework within which to be in search of the right measure of one's existence, an action that is symbolic as it is essential to make one's time an adequately human life. Precisely because it leaves no certain products of thought behind them in whatever form they take are in any case inessential from a utilitarian point of view in a simplistic and simplified conception of education, thinking has no place because it is considered a waste of time. On the other hand, thinking is essential to life, because to learn one's time, one cannot avoid going in search of what is indispensable for a good quality of life. For these reasons, educating to think is an essential act of a good creative practice, and an essential element for the construction of a new idea of a helping relationship that can fit into the emergency educational landscape of our time (Elia, 2021).

In conclusion, the description of the right profile of a helping relationship today fits into the broader panorama of good practices of educational care. There are, in fact, three essential competencies of the citizen capable of maintaining a good relationship with others: science understood as the ability to reason rigorously to cultivate the search for truth; benevolence which, remaining literally faithful to the Greek term, should be understood as good thinking, positive thinking; frankness understood as parrhesia, that is, frank speech. If one agrees with this Socratic theory and with the phenomenal fact that care is a relational practice, and starting from these points of support the discourse conceives educational care as a practice aimed at promoting the flourishing of being and of the other, then it can be stopped that the three competences indicated above are necessary conditions both for educational care and for the practice of helping relationships. Since the search for truth, positive thinking, and frankness are the qualities proper to the authentic friend, it can be said that educational care and the helping relationship are a paideia that assumes as the first and only virtue of friendship and self-giving to the other.

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