



Rosa Indellicato

Aldo Moro University Italy, Bari

rosa.indellicato@uniba.it

ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0001-9585-0726

WELCOMING AND EDUCATIONAL CARE IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

ABSTRACT

In a highly multicultural society, it is right to speak of welcome and educational care, a perfect combination that should characterise all educational contexts starting with the family and the school. Welcome and care have a strong impact on the educational and training context. A foreign child who finds himself in a new environment should feel welcomed, recognised, valued in his original and individual way of being, the bearer of his own history, and this should happen during his growth and learning process. Taking care of the child, having a genuine interest in him, in his well-being and growth, requires special attention to his education and training.

KEYWORDS: *education, foreigner, child, intercultural education, welcome*

THE PERSPECTIVE OF RECEPTION AND EDUCATIONAL CARE

In a strongly multicultural society, it is right to talk about reception and educational care^[1], a perfect combination that should characterise all educational contexts starting with the family and the school. In fact, «every real society is a society in which care is dispensed and care is received; that is why it must discover the ways in which to respond to those human conditions of neediness and dependence in ways that are compatible with self-respect on the part of the beneficiary and with the absence of exploitation on the part of the dispenser»^[11].

The dimension of care symbolises the vulnerability that connotes the human condition and the human being's need for support, Heidegger in his work *Being and Time* emphasises the properly *relational* condition of the person in the essential capacity of “taking care”

Caring is a way of relating to otherness, the Heideggerian *Sorge* that is not just *caring for the things* of the world, but *caring for others*, the only authentic way of being with others^[111].

The concept of care is very well intertwined with that of welcome by the etymology of the word welcome, formed by *ad* – and by *colligere*, with the meaning of “to seize, to gather” which represents the act of welcoming, of receiving a person. Welcoming recalls the dimension of encounter, in fact already in the elementary relations of care, as Todorov observed, the child is welcomed by its mother through the fulfilment of the first requests for nourishment and warmth^[11V].

In the same way as the family, it is also important at school to establish caring relationships. It is difficult, if one does not feel welcome, to feel good, to be able to live, express oneself, participate fully, build knowledge, realise oneself

[1] Cfr. C. Palmieri, *La cura educativa*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2000.

[11] M.C. Nussbaum, *Giustizia sociale e dignità umana. Da individui a persone*, il Mulino, Bologna 2002, p. 109.

[111] Cfr. M. Heidegger, *Essere e tempo*, Longanesi, Milano 1976.

[11V] Cfr. T. Todorov, *La vie commune. Essai d'anthropologie générale*, Le Seuil, Paris 1995; tr.it., di C. Bongiovanni, *La vita comune. L'uomo è un essere sociale*, Pratiche Editrice, Milano 1998, pp. 41-42.

to the full; and in the same way it is difficult, if one does not feel good, if one experiences a situation of malaise in a context, in a relationship, in a group, to be motivated, to desire and be open to discovery, curiosity, knowledge; it is difficult to grow and build one's identity in a balanced and harmonious way and to develop one's individual learning potential. Being *con-tact*, care, therefore, «cannot be reduced to single functions, but necessarily evokes a relationship [and therefore opens up to] the intensely relational dimension, of caring»^[V].

This dimension is seen as a participatory and involving process that goes beyond a supposed reduction to a sterile knowledge to become a 'place' of encounter, exchange and dialogue^[VI] and at the same time of training.

Welcoming and caring have a strong impact on the educational and training context. A foreign child who finds himself in a new environment should feel welcomed, recognised, valued in his original and individual way of being, the bearer of his own story, and this should happen during the growth and learning process.

The stories of which all children and young people are bearers are rooted in different contexts, sometimes very different from what they encounter in school spaces and classrooms, from those of their peers, in terms of culture, values, etc.

There are children who come from complicated backgrounds, those from disadvantaged socio-cultural contexts, those from other cultures, those with disabilities. If the learning environment is truly responsive to the training and learning needs and requirements of those who live in it, if the curriculum is centred on those who, as active protagonists, build their knowledge and skills, if, in short, the school is truly welcoming and promotes the well-being of all by recognising and valuing the different identities^[VII], the different learning styles, then diversity becomes a resource for the group and increases collective well-being.

^[V] A Rezzara, «Relazioni e cura», in R. Massa, G. Bertolini (a cura di), *Clinica della formazione medica*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1997, p. 198.

^[VI] Cfr. H.G. Gadamer, *Cura e dialogo*, in H.G. Gadamer, *Dove si nasconde la salute*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 1994, p. 137.

^[VII] Cfr. B. De Canale, *Identità relazione apprendimento. Percorsi di pedagogia culturale*, Giapeto, Napoli 2014.

Taking care of all participants of educational process is important but taking special care of those with special needs is more than crucial. Educational system should focus on those children who have some kind of behavioral disorders, due to different reasons. If this behavioral disorder are based on disadvantaged socio-cultural contexts, school and teachers should first focus on home environment. Only proper diagnosis as well as knowledge about home environment can help in proper education of those children^[VIII].

Unfortunately, this perspective is not always realised and there are ‘rejecting’, ‘selective’, ‘excluding’ school situations, where a transmissive didactics and rigid modes prevail and reception and care are scarce.

Taking care of the child, having a genuine interest in him, in his wellbeing and growth requires having the child in mind. In fact, the 2012 Guidelines for the curriculum for childhood and the first cycle of education, when referring to the teaching profession, emphasise: “*The teachers’ educational style is inspired by criteria of listening, accompaniment, participatory interaction, communicative mediation, with a continuous ability to observe the child, to take charge of his or her world, to read his or her discoveries, to support and encourage the evolution of learning towards increasingly autonomous and conscious forms of knowledge*”^[IX].

The figure of the teacher is then recognised as “welcoming adult”, “encouraging adult”, “directing adult”, “responsible adult”, “participating adult”. As teachers, operators, trainers who have been involved in schools and the promotion of a culture aimed at children for years, we share this expression dedicated to the teaching profession, understood as a figure who listens, accompanies and supports. The dimensions of welcome^[X] and support thus become part of the language of official documents and constitute the foundations of the teachers’ educational style.

Pedagogy highlights the fundamental role that relationships and emotions^[XI] play in learning processes. The first interactions between adult and

^[VIII] H. Lewandowska, “Objawy i przyczyny zagrożenia niedostosowaniem społecznym dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym”, *Journal of Modern Science*, 1/46/2021.

^[IX] Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo 2012.

^[X] Cfr. R. Biagioli, *La pedagogia dell'accoglienza. Ragazze e ragazzi stranieri nella scuola dell'obbligo*, Ets, Pisa 2008.

^[XI] Cfr. D. Goleman, *Intelligenza emotiva*, Rizzoli, Milano 2011.

child constitute the root of mental maturation: cognitive development is based on relational relationships and is only possible within a positive relational framework. The child emotionally understands and is conditioned by what he perceives, rather than by what he hears, and is attuned to the emotional states of those who care for him. From the initial dialogue that is established with the reference figure, from the relationship that is founded with her, from the looks, the smiles, the tones of the voice, the first forms of mental representation appear, manifest themselves, consolidate.

The relationship therefore constitutes the primary space through which the child learns to order and distinguish everyday experiences, to attribute value and meaning to them, to gradually acquire the criteria for interpreting reality, to build linguistic capacities up to the development of symbolic processes and expressive skills^[XII]. The teacher-child relationship is also complex and intertwined with emotions and affectivity: what structures the child's mind and personality, what organises thought and knowledge processes, is not only the content or knowledge transmitted, but the encounters with the body, affections, experiences. In particular, with foreign children, who speak little or express themselves poorly, there can be no pathway to growth and learning if a relationship is not established first of all.

The chances of scholastic success arise first and foremost from the empathic abilities of an adult, sensitive in accepting even unspoken words, capable of entering into the depths of the child's universe and listening actively. But what is meant by empathic listening?

Empathic listening is a strategy used, in particular, by the psychoanalyst Carl Rogers^[XIII] in therapy and which can be reapplied in the teacher-child relationship: this technique requires the listener to promote opportunities for strong contact, even beyond verbal behaviour.

Empathic listening^[XIV] welcomes without judging, it allows one to be open to the unexpected, modifying from time to time the scenario that the stimuli

[XII] Cfr. A. Mariani, *La relazione educativa. Prospettive contemporanee*, Carocci, Roma 2021.

[XIII] Cfr. C.R. Rogers, *Un modo di essere. I più recenti pensieri su una concezione di vita centrata-sulla-persona*, Psycho, Firenze 1993.

[XIV] Cfr. M. Santerini, *Educazione morale e neuroscienze: la coscienza dell'empatia*, La Scuola, Brescia 2011.

introduced by the children produce. It opens spaces to the children's voices, gathers their conversations, records reflections and discussions, welcomes the fantastic hypotheses that the children make about the world and its origins, the elaborations of complex and articulated theories on the origin and functioning of things.

The quality of the educator's presence determines the way in which the child can go about his or her experiences and beyond listening; encouragement is also a quality required of the teaching profession. An encouraging adult is a sensitive, present, attentive and aware figure, who accompanies the child in his or her development and exploration, supports him or her in expressing his or her ideas and emotions. Through the participative gaze, the teacher can realise in which direction a child's experience is moving, follow its direction. An adult who observes behaviour in a participative manner, in order to understand their needs and grasp their interests, is capable of waiting for the initiative, of taking a step back, of putting themselves in a waiting position in order to later be able to expand projects and propose enrichments, starting from what has already been done or suggested, without substituting for them, making their research their own

The posture, the looks can be encouraging and at the same time stimulating for the child. In this way, the teacher will no longer be the figure who controls and decides, but will become the presence that plays a meeting role between the child and the educational environment, helping, supporting, without imposing or substituting.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER: A RELATIONSHIP OF RECIPROCITY

Relation and sociality: a perfect binomial to summarise the essential elements that characterise the educational dimension, that context of life and relationships in which each component, carrying a personal baggage, contributes to building a professional educating community.

Inherent in the relationship is the reciprocity^[XV] in which, for the bond to exist, at least two subjects must be involved who have a mutual interest in interacting. The propensity to interact requires complex skills, such as reading the behaviour of others, managing one's own emotions, knowing how to react appropriately to the context, defining roles and undertaking actions, framing the aims and objectives of a journey itinerary to be travelled in order to reach significant goals.

The educational relationship is a particular type of relationship that finds its field of application mainly in the school environment, although it begins in the family sphere.

It can be defined as an accompanying process of more or less lengthy duration, which intervenes in the lifestyle of individuals and aims at leading them to the identification of their own well-being and to equip themselves with the means to achieve and preserve it, by means of a design that requires qualified relational skills.

Talking about the educational relationship does not mean simply analysing an aspect of teaching or learning, but addressing the heart of the educational process as an encounter bond that takes place in the interpersonal relationship of the subjects who are subjected to the biological, social and cultural conditioning of the environment of which they are part.

Through the educational relationship, the process of socialisation, knowledge transfer and the transformation of knowledge into skills takes place.

It is characterised by affective and social components, commensurate with the needs, the characteristics of the individual, the objectives of the educational intervention, and flexible to the circumstances and changes that the relationship itself produces^[XVI]. This entails, particularly in the school environment, the willingness to step out of one's own singularity to meet the other, the acceptance and recognition of diversity as an added value, the understanding of this difference and the implementation of a continuous search for better strategies and paths, supported by commitment and professional passion to help pupils embark on the path towards the conquest of their own autonomy.

[XV] Cfr. R. Mancini, *La buona reciprocità. Famiglia, educazione, scuola*, Cittadella, Assisi 2008.

[XVI] Cfr. A. Mariani, *La relazione educativa. Prospettive contemporanee*, Carocci, Roma 2021.

A school that is capable of dialoguing with the changing times and people, that knows how to narrate and narrate itself, that knows how to preserve traces, how to welcome documentation, that knows how to interpret the value of relationships, needs professionalism that is open in a *metacognitive setting*. Every educational relationship requires giving more space to the emotional-affective, subjective and interpersonal aspects so that everyone can feel part of the growth project and make the relationship meaningful. The complexity of the school communication system requires teachers to be flexible and able to recognise the variables that constitute the communicative situation of an event: context, role of the participants.

The epidemiological emergency seems to have undermined the dimension of the educational relationship in presence, even through distance learning, the categories of care and reception have disappeared. The school is made up of ideas, emotions, feedback, experiences that help maintain an active educational relationship of care and welcome, and as Nussbaum argues “classrooms are not just for promoting intellectual skills: they are also for teaching how to be good citizens”^[XVII]. In her text, Nussbaum emphasises the importance of developing the so-called “narrative imagination” in children, i.e. the empathic ability to imagine ourselves in another person’s shoes, to sense their emotions, desires and hopes. This is a fundamental capacity for establishing relationships of care and proximity^[XVIII], in this case through imagination invites us to reflect on different realities in order to become good interpreters of the pluralism in which we live and strive not only to understand different languages but also to discover distant existences and different cultural habits.

Nussbaum’s approach invites us to meditate on the meaning “of diversity” and the need not to ignore it as irrelevant nor to invoke it as discriminating, but instead to take diversity in the sense of positive specificities whose consideration is fundamental for justice to be implemented^[XIX]. It is clear that in a society that is becoming increasingly multicultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic,

^[XVII] Cfr. M. C. Nussbaum, *Cultivare l’umanità. I classici, il multiculturalismo, l’educazione contemporanea*, Carocci, Roma 1999.

^[XVIII] Cfr. L. Alici-S. Pierosara (a cura di), *Cura e responsabilità. Tra prossimità e distanza*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2022.

^[XIX] Cfr. M. C. Nussbaum, *Giustizia sociale e dignità umana*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2002, p. 109.

the educational discourse^[XX] cannot aim at homogenising people, but must be attentive to the educational needs of each and every one, also respecting their personal and socio-cultural identity. In fact, different cultures are an opportunity for growth and comparison for all students because they are all expressions of humanity, of a *humanitas* that is certainly not the privilege of some but belongs to all as human beings. Only in this way can the school truly valorise everyone and in particular those most at risk, who are the most problematic and most exposed to the phenomena of school drop-out, abandonment and failure, also because socio-psycho-pedagogical research has increasingly recognised that the achievement of optimum educational results is obtained when there is respect for differences in the most diverse forms and therefore with different rhythms and individual learning styles^[XXI].

It also must be said that there is one very important issue. It is security, or social security of the participants of educational processes. They need to sense safety and security in new environment in order to be full member of society as well as the full participant of the educational process. They will feel secure if their needs are satisfied – not only educational need but also all kind of different needs which make possible the sense of social security^[XXII].

The intertwining and weaving of mutual recognitions can bring out new dimensions of identity, but also new nomadisms, new ideas of collectivity and citizenship. It is therefore necessary to explore the new identities that are being defined, identities that are complex, plural, mestizo, multiform, virtual; identities that are constructed, reconstructed and nourished by multiple affiliations, whether national, gender family, or linguistic, cultural, religious, or

[XX] Cfr. G. Burgio, *Pedagogia postcoloniale. Prospettive radicali per l'intercultura*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2022.

[XXI] Cfr. B. S. Bloom, *Caratteristiche umane e apprendimento scolastico*, Armando, Roma 2006; R. H. Gardner, *Formae mentis. Saggio sulla pluralità delle intelligenze*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2013.

[XXII] A. M. Banaszak, Social security of foreigners in Poland – the level of satisfaction of human needs among immigrants living in Poland, in *Journal of Modern Science*, 2/47/2021; more on legal security: M. Sitek, Legal framework for the police cooperation with non-governmental organizations in the field of promoting children's rights, *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego Seria Prawnicza Zeszyt 113/2020 Prawo 31*, DOI: 10.15584/znrprawo.2020.31.17.

value-based, which, despite the diversity of forms, reinforce and do not deny the identity of each individual. Identities that currently define and redefine intercultural social contexts marked by the rhythm of the educational, cultural and social complexity that characterises our lives.

«Intercultural education therefore becomes an indispensable educational dimension that involves children, pupils, adults, educators, and operators. The primary task of intercultural education – by means of appropriate strategies, tools and methodologies – is to engage in a process of management and reconstruction of social relations, characterised by encounters with the differences introduced, in the spaces of life, by those who – although sometimes so distant – live next door to us and with whom, often, we share the same bewilderment, the same foreignness»^[XXIII].

Pedagogical commitment today must be characterised as a radical experience of love for the equally radical human experience of those who come from a culture different from our own. Adults, and teachers in particular, should make education, upbringing and training the main objective of their specific educational mission in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Only in this way can we adults, teachers on the basis of our past knowledge and experience, illuminate the future of young people by trying to «guess in their eyes, as Don Milani wrote, the beautiful things that they will see clearly tomorrow and that we only see in confusion»^[XXIV].

^[XXIII] M. Di Giacinto, “Non uno di meno: contrastare la dispersione scolastica attraverso una didattica inclusiva”, in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis and Education*, IJPE, vol. 1, 1/2009, p. 67; cfr. anche C. Baraldi, *Comunicazione interculturale e diversità*, Carocci, Roma 2003, pp. 170-173.

^[XXIV] L. Milani, *Lettere*, Mondadori, Milano 1970, p. 250. In one of the most vibrant pages of *Pastoral Experiences*, we read: «Friends often ask me how I do school and how I get it full. They insist that I write a method for them, that I specify the programmes, the subjects, the teaching technique. They get the question wrong, they shouldn't be concerned about how you have to be in order to do school, but only about how you have to be in order to do school» (L. Milani, *Esperienze pastorali*, L.E.F, Firenze 1957, p. 239).

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