EDUCATING TOGETHER IN THE DIGITAL AGE: AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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Abstract: *We find ourselves in a real cultural revolution. The digital revolution that occurred in recent decades has led to the spread of new instruments that have rapidly spread at the global level. These rapidly accelerated changes have influenced lifestyles, communication, socialization, study, posing new educative and scholastic challenges and in particular reference to the relationship between parents and children and between teachers and students.The new media are regarded as a great invention. They are valuable instruments that offer many opportunities to learn, retrieve information, discover games, contact friends, make purchases and dialogue with people. But educators (parents, teachers) find themselves in a situation of having to step up and educate their children/students (digital natives) who often use tools unknown to them and use them in the most natural, fast and spontaneous way. Very often it happens that the children discover these programmes and instruments without anyone explaining to them the dangers and potentials or without anyone regulating their exploration and use of them. On the contrary, it happens that the children explain to their parents how to use them. We retain that parents and teachers in the first place must not necessarily provide the technical or computer skills, but rather give the psycho-pedagogical indications to support their daily action in raising children/students: being an agile guide that helps particularly in having a careful look not only on risks but also on the potentials that digital media offer. This idea is to encourage a critical and informed use. So the first educational challenge becomes knowing how to educate to the rules, to affectivity, to being critical and to being responsible.*

Keywords: *educating; parent; teacher; relationship;*

1. Introduction

The art of educating has never been easy. It seems that in our time because of the hasty type of life, the significant increase in virtual relationships, the "premature maturation" in many aspects of our children, the task required of the parent and the teacher increases greatly. In the face of these inevitable personal and social changes at their different levels, collaboration becomes increasingly necessary among adults for the healthy growth of the new generations. This shared responsibility is particularly important between the two basic education agencies, namely the family and the school.

2. Cultural changes and cultural "revolution" in the family and school field

Visible contemporary cultural changes command our attention and whether we want them or not, we are part of them in a more or less conscious way, they also involve the world of the family and the school (Piccone Fiori, 2016; Tanzi, 2012). In this sense, one can also talk of a certain type of cultural revolution (Cazzullo, Cazzullo Maletto, 2018; Scquizzato,

2018). In the Eastern part of Europe and that of the Balkan countries the word "revolution" is not so well recognised in the social field because it inevitably brings ugly memories of the past, and in some cases these memories refuse to fade and to heal. However, for our approach on this matter, in presenting the concept of "revolution", we would emphasise the fact of its rapid change and equally state the fact that it is not always predictable in its directions and consequences. In a particular way, this concept seems very valid in relation to virtual reality, now present in everyday life. This becomes more interesting for the study of the correlations between the real and virtual world, which concern not only the individual person, but also his environments. Our interest is particularly in the psycho-educational world especially as it concerns the changes that are taking place in the psycho-social-relational dimension in the family, in the school and in the person, who falls within the developmental age (Ricci, Formella, 2018; Burley Hofmann, 2015).

According to our own perspective, we could group these changes which happen in our times into three main dimensions. In doing this we always pay particular attention to the factors mentioned above (person, family, school and developmental age):
- The concept of the family and the way of living in it,
- The perception and operation of relating with others,
- The concept of studying, learning and making use of the information.

It seems that these three dimensions are the remarkable factors in the educational and formative discourse that moves both the family and the school.

The Cultural Revolution is experimenting in a special way on the possibilities of the virtual world. True digital revolution (Cucci, 2015) in the last decades that has changed life on a global level. Consequently, life in the family and school has also changed significantly.

From the simple daily observation and also from the scientific studies it is proven that the changes caused by the virtual world influence the modalities of communication between the members of the same family, with the relatives present in the different parts of the world, and with other people not well known. The statements are equally valid in the field of socialization, which increasingly takes place through the virtual dimension and not the traditional type face-to-face which demands the physical presence for a meeting.

Shifting the argument into the school field we validate the same statements. As a result, the adults who work in the school: the principal, the teachers, the auxiliary staffs, must adapt more and more both to communication and to the administration of their service that takes place today mainly through digital tools (Troia, 2018; Averame, 2018). In a particular way, this development, introduces new challenge in the field of learning (Baldascino, 2018). In the past, one of the key sources of learning in the educational relationship is between teacher and his students. The teacher was seen as a teacher who guided the research of both the contents, the values and the methods of learning. The teacher, having social authority, professional skills and often being a model in behavior was seen as an authoritative source of both information and value suggestions for his student. The question that could be asked today is: *can virtual learning satisfy the relational need?*

There is no doubt that new media is a great invention and even a great opportunity that should be put at the service of humanity. This great shift is valid both in the family and in the school sector. We are increasingly provided by valuable tools and instruments that offer us many opportunities: finding information, contacting friends, shopping, dialoging and talking to people, finding games, listening to music and many more possibilities. It seems that these tools facilitate everyday life and often saves both time and energy. This it does by abbreviating the distances especially in communication and facilitating the management of things at the administrative, economic and relational level. But as promising as this is, it is not exhaustive. One still needs to deal with another challenge in education which is the method of

accompanying the new generations called "digital natives" (Deriu, Filomia, 2015; Di Stefano, 2018).

3. A necessary alliance in education: between family and school

A child narrates an experience: *at school they asked me what I want to be when I grow up. I wrote: "to be happy". They told me that I did not understand the assignment, and I told them that they did not understand life.*

From this short story we can perceive how difficult it is to face the challenges of education and teaching for the future of this child. We can also pose a question to the two protagonists of this story: *what future are we talking about*?

Increasingly, the concept of learning, education, self-realization, socialization arises as fundamental questions not only within the school environment but equally in the existential area that relate to the future of the child and together with the educational institution (Castoldi, Chiosso, 2017).

At this point we want to reiterate the importance of collaboration between family and school which we consider as inevitable and necessary (Dusi, Pati, 2014; Cardinali, Migliori, 2013). In the last decades these two educational communities have moved too far from each other. Consequently, the price paid for this detachment primarily concerns the child who often finds himself in difficulty in striking a balance between the demands of growth and hardly-compatible training. It is important that the educational proposals from the family and school converge and focus on the good of the child, but unfortunately it is not always the case. This problem does not concern the contents of the subjects studied, but rather the system of values, of the educational style, of the moral, ethical, relational, spiritual and social dimension. In different parts of Europe (and not only for example) one often observes "an abyss" between the family and the school (Ronci, 2010; Cadei, Deluigi, Pourtis, 2016).

This chasm makes it increasingly difficult for the contemporary child to be well-equipped for the future. One wonders how then a child should face the future and the challenge inherent in it. The problem presented in this way concerns the invitation addressed both to the scholastic institution and to the family that programs towards their child/student. For some time now we have witnessed an in-depth reflection on how school planning (at the level of teaching, teaching methodology, content of subjects and the involvement of new technological possibilities) should address the cultural changes and thus respond to new training challenges on personal and social level with a view of the future.

On the one hand we observe more and more a "dangerous" dynamic of both physical and conceptual abandonment regarding the collaboration between the family from which the child comes from (where parents often delegate the education of their child to the school and not desiring to participate actively in it) and the school institution (where the organizational, bureaucratic, formal and control dimension increases "dangerously" and consequently decreases the relational and community dimension). Often one gets the impression that the school, seen in the past as "the second home", is becoming an institution today, compared with "an office" where one has to perform his or her duty.

What would be the main reason for collaboration between a parent and the teacher? A collaboration between *teacher and parent must take place* because both are educators of *the same child*. It becomes necessary between these adults to listen to and accept the needs of the child. To do this, we believe that the following characteristics/skills are important: personal presence, involvement, empathic listening, mutual sharing, collaboration skills, good will, patience, interior freedom in making choices, responsibility and creativity.

4. Compatibility between learning - relationship - emotion

In the past it was often said in common language: "I am going to study in the school". The statement emphasised the principal assignment of the school which was teaching and it is understood in the "traditional" vision as the task of transmitting information and some notions. A classic model consisted in seeing that the school is composed of the teacher that transmits, together with the student who learns and the reference manual that acts as a link between them.

The current changes, mentioned before, require an almost total vision of the tradition school. The different ways of learning (De Toni, De Marchi, 2018; Cavalluzzi, Degli Esposti, 2018) today present in schools, the possibility of widening the "physical" relationship with the "virtual" (Betti, Benelli, 2012; Lancini, Turuani, 2018) and the enormous extension of the "emotional problems" (Goleman, 2014) experienced by both the children and adults (teachers and parents) lead us to affirm the fundamental importance of the dynamics linked to the triangle: *learning-relationship-affectivity*.

This triple dynamic can be confronted in three dimensions. The first concerns the point of view in the learning perspective. It tries not only to review the concept related to what the student should learn (which in itself seems very static, linked to the transmission of information, which in itself today can be found elsewhere, not necessarily just in the school) but also address the fundamental question: *why should I learn these things and not others?* Furthermore, this revision of the learning vision concerns the problem of the integral formation of the person (which is proposed in the world that is increasingly segmented and detailed) and, in the perspective of the changes that happen quickly in the social, working world and generally relational. From our point of view, this vision in no way can be detached from the value speeches, ethics and spirituality, and in the wide sense of this latter dimension.

The second dimension refers to the optical relational. The same problem is faced by using interpersonal relationality as a principle. The teacher and parent is seen and viewed here particularly from their primary assignment as an educator. The relationship with one's child / educator is practiced daily in a "professional" way (Frabboni, Giovannini, 2009); it means that it is based on the motivations of wanting to participate in the process of the child's growth in an appropriate way. That is, knowing its development process and intervention strategies, the contents to be presented, being at the same time a model that is worth emulating (Formella, 2009).

The third dimension emphasizes the importance of affectivity both in the educational relationship and in the learning process. During the period of growth of children it is necessary to attach importance and value to dialogue because affectivity is "Socratic learning": the scholastic problems does not constitute that an overall difficulty of the student addresses the developmental task of the adolescent stage. Learning is born through a process which we consider to be affective and cognitive and therefore only an authoritative teacher, who possesses this quality, in addition to notions and values, an open mind and a critical capacity, allows his disciples, through active participation and co-responsibility and cooperation, to develop healthy and balanced interests and also psychic structures that can achieve this aim.

5. The axioms of the educational relationship

This point focuses on a proposal which is based on the concept of Paul Watzlawick[xi] and his axioms on human communication (Atzlawick, Beavin, Jackson, 1971). Inspired by the

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[xi] Paul Watzlawick (1921-2007) was an Austrian-American family therapist, psychologist, communication theorist, and philosopher. A theoretician in communication theory and radical constructivism, he commented in

classic manual on communication, we propose the axioms of the educational relationship. These statements are addressed to adults who play the educational role in society.

- Be present, being personally involved in education ... not online.

Being present, here and now with the other person is the first fundamental rule to active listening and it helps the other party. Virtual communication can be effective and useful, but it cannot replace a human face-to-face relationship. The child who is growing has a strong need for the physical presence and the significant figure of an adult (parent, teacher, and educator).

- First the person, then teaching, the program, the homework etc.

Putting the person at the heart of the educational activities and not the realization of the program, the concerns for order and things that necessarily must be done, that is treating intrapsychic growth and not just only the external environment. What remains in the person is not the information acquired, but the conviction that in dialoguing and communicating one can always find a resolution of things.

- You do not always have to say what you know, but you always have to know what you are saying.

Here we speak of the educational responsibility related in a very direct way with the maturity of the educator. Knowing how to "dose" the right information in the right moments is a true art of education. Being prone to welcome the person in difficulty with personal encouragement and adequate content in an effective educational communication becomes a real "sharp weapon" of those who "fights evil and multiply the good" in the person who is growing up next to him or her.

- Better a live dog than a dead lion[xii]

A living dog can act; a dead lion cannot do anything. That is to say, it is better have a weak person who acts than a strong person who does nothing. The Bible emphasizes through this expression the importance of hope. The true educator (parent, teacher) never gives up in his own "sowing" of the good. He is constant and in a certain sense tenacious his performing its educational action and equally being convinced that "the seed thrown before will then grow."

6. Conclusions

Sometimes between students and teachers exists some inadequate relational modes and defensive strategies which impede or make difficult the empathic relationship and dialogue. Students can implement three types of defensive strategies and they include the following; evasion, seduction and rebellion. Sometimes it is the teachers who tend to evade the relationship with a too technical and rational attitude or trying to seduce their students by demonstrating in the eyes of colleagues, parents, superiors, etc. that they are good (risks of narcissism). Often to guard against the hostility of the students, the teachers assumes a punitive and authoritarian rule.

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the fields of family therapy and general psychotherapy. Watzlawick believed that people create their own suffering in the very act of trying to fix their emotional problems. He was one of the most influential figures at the Mental Research Institute and lived and worked in Palo Alto, California. In 1967 Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin and Don D. Jackson, published "Pragmatics of Human Communication, A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes", which reports the studies conducted on the pragmatic effects that human communication has on interactive models and on pathologies, with a review of the role of communication paradoxes.

[xii] Cfr. Qoelet 9, 4.

The teacher must set up an authentic relationship with the student and rich in emotional tensions: only his humanity can determine in the heart and mind of the student an unrepeatable creation of emotions to be transformed into meanings, notions and knowledge.

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