

## **EDUCATING FOR COOPERATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CULTURE OF PEACE.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Educating for cooperation in early childhood for the development of a culture of peace. Wonder about the educational perspectives, able to support and activate the process of culture of peace, means to open a discussion on how, starting from the early childhood, it is possible to educate through experiences of cooperation, competition and participation. Their reference seeks to consider the dimension of knowledge, as the acquisition of content and knowledge, we should, necessarily, articulate and modulate with the construction of a social knowledge, supported by references of theoretical models capable to include the meaning of cooperative learning and theory of structural cognitive modifiability. In this perspective of lifelong learning, the ability to readjust so plastic and creative cognitive strategies, form the emotional and communicative development of the needs and the intra and intersubjective stimulus.*

**KEYWORDS:** cooperation, early childhood, culture of peace.

### **Introduction**

Since decades the studies and researches on education have considered the cooperative learning and the learning through cooperation fundamental as well as helpful for the learning itself [1]. With reference to the need of education through cooperation and in a cooperative manner it has been understood that the practices and competences required for a democratic socialisation impose a specific background. Such an element urged us to clarify the meaning and objectives of those aspects related to the socialisation. Being the latter understood as a natural process of school coexistence, we see that it has lived for years in the shadow of school strategies engaged in the definition of programmes and contents of the different matters which the school was imposed to adhere to, because considered priority to guarantee the education of the citizens of next generations. How important was to consider together with the learning of curricula those competences related to the building of ways for a democratic socialization such as the cooperation, the participation, the creativity, the mediation and the negotiation, just to refer to some, it seemed, and partially still seems today, not to deserve a particular consideration within

the pedagogic debate, despite the works of Dewey already circulated in Italy since the Fifties [2].

In accordance with the educational perspectives oriented to the learning to live together, we are called to define new objectives which have at the centre the idea that the understandings acquired, in order for them to become active competences useful to renovate the knowledge, besides contextualising in specific domains, shall also characterise and expresses themselves concretely at the level of individual rights and social wellbeing. Therefore, the social knowledge and competencies shall be learned, to develop and empower the individual success, and to develop and empower wellbeing of community.

Although many teachers share the idea of developing interpersonal skills based on cooperation, mediation and negotiation, especially in those cases where violent behaviours are detected, the school system and the methodologies adopted do not allow a full realisation thereof. The risk is, then, that of leaving space to non-coherent and casual interventions with the result of creating the conditions for the development of learning approach based on individuality, competition and selection. Such approach does not led to anything if not the fostering, already from the first infancy period, of a learning method which risks to be confined within the limits of an antagonism which aims at the individual success, and which does not care of what happens around him. A process, this one, which consequently produces discomfort, stress, exclusion and violence, both within peer groups and in the broader community contexts [3].

### **Learning and social knowledge**

The social constructivism implies the reference to the model, deriving from the analysis of Vygotsky [4], which states that the learning process of human being has a specific social dimension. The learning process, therefore, is based on the interaction, deriving from the interrelation between knowledge and, between imitation and transfer of models, as well as the concretisation, within specific social and cultural contexts, of those elements which the learning process itself has elaborated. Thus, it is within the social interaction which is possible to learn and develop knowledge and competences. And it is in virtue of the social interaction that the language is shaped. The language operates, at the same time, as a cultural medium becoming the instrument that, by acting within the cultural dynamics, make it possible for the social dynamics to structure itself [5]. What has to be underlined, regarding this approach, which here is just partially introduced, is that the theoretic model of social constructivism involves also the practical dimension of the action and the doing. Each child, this, as any other human being, no matter his conditions and age, develop his own perception and understanding of the world, of the reality and of himself not much, or not only,

on the basis of what has been transmitted to him, but mostly on the basis of the quality and ways in which such knowledge are acted and translated in the concrete experiences. Every education programme and projects have to make possible that what is elaborated and developed being referable to social learning experiences. Such concept was then retaken by Cooperative Learning that, by joining the knowledge with the cooperation, focused on the structure and the manners of realisation of educational relationship in class.

Dewey and the philosophies of education, fellow of the Active School [6], had already outlined that the transmission and competitive methods were not adequate to prepare the young generations to the democratic life. The transmission method, we could say “filling” in the sense that the mind of the child is understood as an empty vase to be filled, is the one that more than any other encourages relationships in class or among peers based on competition and antagonism.

To learn in a cooperative manner means, on the contrary, not only to activate cognitive and social abilities and experiences, but also to be able to manage coherently, democratically and efficiently the dynamic and creative relationship between teaching/learning/teaching and learning/teaching/learning. Dynamics which require different understandings on the basis of the position and the starting point of view. Each point of view implies, anyway, that with in the relation being already used different systems of knowledge and of representations and interpretations of reality.

### **Early childhood and cooperation**

To think about the importance of starting an educational process towards the social competences as fundamental and priority instrument useful to match the relation with the development of knowledge, to learn the variety of actions and behaviours to be adopted in order to interact with the group in a democratic and participative manner, lead to question of whether, how and how much it is necessary to start already at the first infancy. If, indeed, it is not considered only the idea that the cooperative learning refers to the development of social competences in view of the strengthening of curricula, then we could consider, also with reference to the concept of lifelong learning, that the issue of cooperation shall start, adequately and coherently, already during the pre-schooling educational contexts.

Every human being, although with a genetic heritage which provides for the first and not replaceable competences to deal with a variety of relations with the external world, does not have those natural competences required to address interpersonal issues in a cooperative and harmonious manner. To play, to act, to learn and to know, by engaging with the other in a cooperative manner, imply the building in progress of specific cognitive skills which, besides allowing to

listen, to think and to act in that direction, could allow to understand their management and use. The complexity of competences which the primary school should continue to develop and improve if, and only if, the educational process is already introduced in the pre-schooling curricula.

The children experience very early the cooperative educational practices, either through the ways with which they are introduced to the knowledge of life or through the ways of emotional engagement and active hearing that the grown-up people use in the interpersonal relations with them and with the others. In particular, the period when a child is two-three years is the period when the game and the activities start to be shared with the peer-group too, by being the children able to get distance from the related grown-up people. The egoistic phase, when the ego his own position in the world is strengthened, with the consequent perception of the relationship between himself and the Others (a phase that interrelates with that of the “questioning whys”), where the children experience pleasantly a series of playing activities, which sometimes seem to be parallels to and not interrelated, but which, anyway, could open situations of conflicts and frictions. Such a complex context and rich of emotions, feelings, behaviours, request of support, trust and protection requires to give large space to the education to cooperation. An education which develops social competencies such as the positive interdependence through a “*face to face interaction*” which is at the basis of the relations either with the peer-groups that with the grown-up people. Such competences could become a true instrument for the understanding of himself in the relations with the others and with the group, getting the child used to understand how to express his own opinions and to act responsibly towards himself, the others.

To facilitate similar processes it is necessary that the cooperative education gives the children the chance to understand the meaning of his own behave and the sense of competence related to it. The understanding of such parameter is a fundamental component for the construction of the self-confidence and trust towards his own cognitive and operative skills, but also of the abilities that are acted in the social and interpersonal relationships [7].

The contribution given by Feuerstein to how to educate, to mediate in the vygotskiyan perspective, to develop and to consolidate some fundamental parameters useful for the development of the social relations and of cognitive, emotional, creative and operative practices is one of the most complex in the pedagogic world [8]. Feuerstein, by defining the sense of competence, makes clear that “*Being* competent does not necessarily imply to feel competent. *Feeling* competent is not the direct consequence of being competent” [9]. Such point implies the necessity to indicate the methods, the processes, the instruments and the criteria of evaluation which allow that this parameter become as the full awareness of the educational, social, emotional and cognitive acting of the human being.

To tell the same story differently, it is necessary to proceed, through a social interactionism, constructivist and meta-cognitive approach, to the consideration that educate to cooperation means not only to create the conditions so that such actions are realised within the interpersonal exchange, and not only to give the instrument to use them in the exchange of cooperative practices, but also to understand the profound sense of what happens so that what happens in a certain context become the propulsive and stimulating action so that it could then be acted and realised in different contexts from the current one. Feuerstein believes that to mediate in education provides for the child “the instruments and prerequisites *learning to learn*. It gives beyond the immediacy of a particular event and becomes a chance a *generalisation* for an additional development. The more mediation the child gets, more he will be able to learn from the future experience and to get a change: develops a need for the mediation, he waits that the events get meaningful, look for relations, gets beyond the received information through the senses in a certain moment” [10]. The educational mediation of good quality requires to the educators that the educational proposals for the first infancy being, at the same time, an instrument of understanding and learning on how the interpersonal relations are realised in the reality, in the most vast sense of that word. Following this road it is possible to reconsider the importance of cooperative learning and the cooperative education, also during the first childhood. The learning becomes, thus, a process that allows not only to build new knowledge, but also to use this process for a better and creative and efficient functioning of the mind. In those terms, within the cooperation as well as in the learning process the child is accompanied, stimulated and supported in the research of how the building of knowledge open to interpersonal experiences based on the participation and the respect of the other. A process that is at the basis of the development of the interpersonal relationships which include the values for the respect of the human rights and the culture of peace.

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