

dimension seemed to prevail in which "becoming a grown-up" found its orientation and its *raison d'être* in great collective narratives. Instead, today the actions falling under the verb "to educate" seem to have assumed a markedly subjectivist meaning (Chiosso 2009). The guiding criterion of formative processes would mainly lie in focusing on the growing subject and on the individual's self-realization, rather than on the dialectical tension, though problematic and no less insidious, between the personal and the social sides of education.

Of course, as per Dewey's lesson, the centrality of the subject has been conceived as the activation of the pupil and the minor as the protagonist of his or her growth and education. The perspective of constructivism in school, for example, has appropriately highlighted the role of an active subject in the process of building knowledge: not a passive receptor of content, but a "discoverer" or, better, an "inventor" of reality (Bruner 1994).

Without questioning the validity of these positions, everyday educational practices often describe how, alongside interventions in favor of an active and responsible centrality of growing individuals, there is often also an opposite and more homogenizing tendency, focusing on indulgence, signaling the prevalence of subjectivist and privatist instances, both in formal and in non-formal education (Martino, Perlino & Zamengo 2015; Mariani 2014; Giroux 2014).

This is also confirmed in the field of family education: for example, for some years now, Italian research has been describing the ongoing transition from a "normative family" to a "family of affections", highlighting how contemporary parents appear less inclined to provide normative education models, favoring the construction of symmetrical relationships that are more directed at the self-realization of children, also at the expense of the responsabilization of minors (Alfieri, Marta & Celata 2015; Scabini & Marta 2013; Scabini & Cigoli 2012, Pati 2008).

And it is precisely on this level, in relation to the different expectations that parents and teachers have about the growth of younger generations, that it is possible to interpret the current conflict between the various educational agencies; sometimes it remains implicit and is limited to reciprocal delegitimization, in "private" comments between teachers or parents, while in other situations it is explicit, giving rise to a real clash between the parties. On the one hand, parents are more careful to protect their children, while on the other, teachers often complain about the excessive parental zeal that allegedly frustrates any request in cultural terms (Mariani 2012; Zamengo 2012; Tramma 2009).

Beyond the individual situations - which are rarely so polarized and which, in any case, must always be analytically evaluated without surrendering to the momentary sentiment - the subject's centrality in growth processes represents an important step forward in the pedagogic horizon. However, it is important

to acknowledge and remember that education should also be a concrete stimulus, an invitation to face reality, one that cannot become a simple momentary tool - perhaps even protective - that only offers temporary help.

2.2 Education as learnification

Secondly, a further paradigmatic element characterizes the public debate on education today: the strategic role it allegedly plays in relation to economic-productive needs. This is not, of course, an unprecedented link, but new attention is being given to the various forms of learning and, in particular, to self-learning: an element that is well combined with the aforementioned "subjective focus".

In contemporary times, regardless of one's age and needs, anyone approaching a formative process runs the risk of turning into an unnamed learner able to access the supermarket of training offers ranging from leisure time management to the improvement of professional skills (Biesta 2012; Biesta 2004a). This interpretation of education, however, seems rather forced: it is one thing, and certainly appropriate, to study the learning processes; it is another thing to recognize that education is something more than learning; as in a synecdoche, there is a risk of mistaking a part for the whole.

The very identification of education with the concept of formation - often at the disadvantage of the former, considered too obsolete - also raises some perplexity. G. Biesta, for example, referring to the contemporary pedagogical "new language", argues that there is a process of learnification of education going on (Biesta 2006). The author claims that the pedagogical tension constitutively related to the meaning of one's action (and learning), interested in problematically defining what it means to rely on a "good education", is being replaced by a more generic human learning ability, sometimes disconnected from the contents of what is learned, which appears to be much more neutral than traditional educational language, with its ethical and political connotations.

In the society of knowledge, the aforementioned learnification comes from the umbrella concept of lifelong learning (which in turn comes from the wider notion of lifelong education), interpreted as the key to bringing the economy back to acceptable levels in the face of the employment crisis. In this perspective, therefore, the combination of education and formation is closely linked to the production needs of the market, but is likely to play a purely instrumental role (in function of something else), rather than being recognized as a value and an end in itself. Without denying the social and economic function of education, therefore, many perceive the exclusive insistence on this declination as a dangerous flattening of pedagogical perspectives, both in ethical-existential terms and in relation to the field of democratic participation (Giroux 2014; Nussbaum 2011).

3. Still Adults: Accepting the Challenge

It is quite obvious that if brought to excess, both the self-construction of the subject with the prevalence of self-made-man models, and the subordination of education to the economic-productive development, which seems to make inadequate everything that you have just learned, end up eroding the interaction between adults and minors. This erosion is realized precisely on the grounds of the abovementioned "extra" experience.

From this point of view, an example might make things clearer. In pedagogical terms, the use of the word "transmission" is rather unpopular in the contemporary age, both in the formal and in the non-formal landscape. This term recalls obsolete pedagogical theories and practices: on the one hand a certain passivity in the recipient, on the other hand a certain presumption in those who express the message. In a postmodern context, the traditional idea of an adult who can transmit something by virtue of his or her experience is certainly being questioned: if what matters is that the subject learns, any "content" proposal may appear like a constriction or limitation of self-learning. In the same way, given the rapid transformation of the knowledge and competences needed in the job market, doesn't the adult's experience quickly lose its relevance?

However, if one sticks to the etymology of the word transmission, it doesn't only mean "passage" but also evokes an act of "giving" the other access to something one owns. Of course, this function doesn't exhaust the growth process of younger generations; also, what is proposed - insofar as it is not imposed - may be rejected or only partly accepted and (which is even more important) in any case has to be reinterpreted, revisited and transformed. Without the recipient's negotiation and activation, there would only be imitation - not education.

In this sense, then, I believe that the initial question "still adults?" can only be answered affirmatively, with some inevitable clarifications.

The above-mentioned transformations, over the last few decades, have changed educational places and practices, although this does not mean that it is automatically more difficult to educate today than in the past. It is certainly different and seems more complex for an adult-educator to manage the different pedagogical spaces. Without doubt, self-education and self-learning are the goal of every formative process: however impressive, the self-made-learner image appears unrealistic. In other words, a "sufficiently good" educator is certainly one who knows - and must know - how to disappear. However, I think it is equally important to note that the uninterrupted process of self-reappropriation supported by education is realized thanks to the intelligent presence of someone else that triggers this process and helps build the subject's autonomous self-direction. As Seneca remarked, in what has become a rather popular social slogan, "you can't save yourself alone".

Of course, supporting the ongoing pedagogical role of adults today doesn't mean overshadowing the formative value of first-hand experience or underestimating the importance of peer education. These modalities are often mistakenly opposed to one another, but being able to rely on an adult doesn't preclude other opportunities to grow. Likewise, self-learning doesn't mean excluding the ability to take an occasional step back and let someone else teach us something. The role of adults – be they teachers or educators – peer education and first-hand experience are not mutually exclusive: rather than reductionists or monochromatic outcomes, the coexistence of these aspects can produce several formative opportunities for younger generations.

So how can the pedagogical role of the adult be re-thought today? Of course, there are no univocal answers. In any critical age – where this expression doesn't necessarily have a negative connotation, but rather indicates a turning point – the “crisis” invites one to rethink what is normally taken for granted. In this case, overcoming the obvious inevitably means rethinking one's role as an adult educator. In an authentically pedagogical key, this means seizing the opportunities coming from everyday experience to build a constant reflective relationship with one's actions. Not only from an “intimistic” or individual perspective, but mainly in the terms of a shared reflection.

For those engaged in adult education, this attitude translates into supporting the emergence and construction of all those opportunities that promote authentic dialogue between the adults involved in the formative processes of younger generations: parents, teachers, volunteers of the extracurricular landscape. This attitude that does not go back to the effort to educate and take no leisurely position, but rather open to the possibility, also seems to be an important message for younger generations in itself. Firstly, because it shows an adult who takes seriously the growth of minors: it leaves a space for their struggle to grow and recognizes the importance of their being in the world. In this way, those who grow are perceived to be considered as an important subject, committed to defining their own identity. Secondly, it is an attitude highlighting a particular “model” of an adult: someone who continues to grow despite being already “grown-up”.

If, as H. Arendt points out, the adults' presentation of the world and to the world seems irreplaceable for minors (Arendt 1991), I think it is important and possible to recover that “extra” life experience of which adults are the representatives: adults can credibly testify, with their daily experience, to a possible generative way of being in the world. After all, this means giving the other access to what one owns, which perhaps is the hardest, but also, technically, the simplest way to educate.

Literature

- Alessandrini, G. 2007. *Comunità di pratica e società della conoscenza*. Roma: Carocci.
- Alfieri, S., Marta E. & Celata C. 2015. Famiglia e scuola: relazioni che producono benessere. *Psicologia e Scuola*, 35, 19–24.
- Arendt, H. 1961. *Tra passato e futuro*. Milano: Garzanti, 1991.
- Argyris, C. & Schön, D. A. 1996. *Apprendimento organizzativo*. Milano: Guerini.
- Baldacci, M. & Colicchi, E., 2016. *Teoria e prassi in Pedagogia*. Roma: Carocci.
- Barber, B. R. 2010. *Consumati. Da cittadini a clienti*. Torino: Einaudi, 2010.
- Benasayag, M. & Schmit, G. 2004. *L'epoca delle passioni tristi*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Bertin, G. M. 1995. *Educazione alla ragione*. Roma: Armando.
- Biesta, G. J. J. 2004a. Against Learning: Reclaiming a Language for Education in an Age of Learning. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 1, 70–82.
- Biesta, G. J. J. 2006. *Beyond Learning*. Boulder: Paradigm.
- Biesta, G. J. J. 2010. *Good Education in an Age of Measurement*. Boulder: Paradigm.
- Biesta, G. J. J. 2012. Giving Teaching Back to Education: Responding to the Disappearance of the Teacher. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 2, 35–49.
- Bosma, H. A. & Kunnen, E. S. 2000. Development of Meaning Making: A Dynamic System Approach. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 18, 57–82.
- Bruner, J. 1971. *Il significato dell'educazione*. Roma: Armando, 1994.
- Chiosso, G. 2002. *Elementi di Pedagogia*. Brescia: La Scuola.
- Chiosso, G. 2009. *I significati dell'educazione*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Chiosso, G. 2015. *La pedagogia contemporanea*. Brescia: La Scuola.
- Contini, M. G., Demozzi S., Fabbri, M. & Tolomelli, A. 2014. *Deontologia pedagogica. Riflessività e pratiche di resistenza*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Côte, J. E. 1996. Sociological Perspectives on Identity Formation: The Culture-Identity Link and Identity Capital. *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, 417–428.
- Dewey, J. 1929. *The Sources Of A Science Of Education*. New York: Horace Liveright.
- Erikson, E. H. 1967. *Infanzia e società*. Roma: Armando.
- Erikson, E. H. 1974. *Gioventù e crisi d'identità*. Roma: Armando.
- Freire, P. 2002. *La pedagogia degli oppressi*. Torino: EGA.
- Freire, P. 2008. *Pedagogia della speranza*. Torino: EGA.
- Freire, P. 2014. *Pedagogia dell'autonomia*. Torino: EGA.
- Giroux, H. 2014. *Educazione e crisi dei valori pubblici*. Brescia: La Scuola.
- Mariani, A. M. 2012. *Dal punto di vista dell'educazione*. Torino: Sei.
- Mariani, A. M. 2014. *Diventare adulti*. Milano: Unicopli.
- Martino, S., Perlino, A., & Zamengo, F. 2015. *I ragazzi del Millennio*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Mezirow, J. 2003. *Apprendimento e trasformazione*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore.

- Milani, L. 2000. *Competenza pedagogica e progettualità educativa*. Brescia: La Scuola.
- Nussbaum, M. C. 2011. *Non per profitto. Perché le democrazie hanno bisogno della cultura umanistica*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Pati, L. 2008. *Ripensare l'autorità*. Milano: Guerini.
- Scabini, E. & Cigoli, V. 2012. *Alla ricerca del familiare*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore.
- Scabini, E. & Marta, E. 2013. *Giovani in famiglia: risorsa o rifugio?*, in Ist. Toniolo (ed.) *La condizione giovanile in Italia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 23-48.
- Schön, D. A. 1993. *Il professionista riflessivo: per una epistemologia della pratica professionale*. Bari: Dedalo.
- Tramma, S. 2009. *Che cos'è l'educazione informale?* Roma: Carocci.
- Wenger, E. 2006. *Comunità di pratica*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore.
- Zamengo, F. 2012. *Affrontare le difficoltà*. Milano: Unicopli.

Federico Zamengo
(University of Turin, federico.zamengo@libero.it)

The Struggles of Educating. And of Being "A Grown-up"

Abstract. In the face of contemporary educational transformations, this contribution aims to analyze the educational role that can still be played by the adult educator. Without restoring old categories of the past, today's adults continue to have a responsibility in the growth of younger generations. Accepting this task means first of all critically and reflectively recognizing one's role and, secondly, accepting the challenges posed by the complexity of today's landscape in terms of credibility and consistency.

Keywords: Adult Education, Adult educator

Ethics in Progress (ISSN 2084-9257). Vol. 8 (2017). No. 1, Art. #15, pp. 241-251.

Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0

Doi: 10.14746/eip.2017.1.15