

The Helping Relationship As Educational Care: Structure, Approaches, Evaluation

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Abstract: In the school of inclusion, the helping relationship becomes a way of structuring a significant and reciprocal relationship. Putting yourself in the perspective of the other allows for complex learning and the development of new skills and cognitive styles. Within a similar perspective, the educator and the teacher present themselves as promoting and facilitating agents of scholastic and social inclusion processes, subsuming the individual conception within a vision of an educating community. The educational value of helping relationship practices emerges, aimed at developing a sense of empowerment in the individual in need. The essay then proceeds to analyze the structure of the helping relationship understood as educational care, identifying approaches and methods of evaluating the helping processes.

Keywords: Help relationship; evaluation; educational consultancy; quality of the process.

1. Introduction

The focus on the conditions that can structure inclusive school environments points to the need to investigate the nature of educational action (Comenio, 1996). In the inclusive school, this conceptual framework needs to be translated into a concrete pedagogical perspective that provides: equal opportunities and social rights of the person with disabilities, whatever the level of schooling and training, for the entire lifetime; guarantee of equal quality teaching and accessibility for all; person-centeredness (Baldacci, 2006) and recognition of the person's potential and specific needs; parental collaboration, the first educators of their children; early intervention in order to reinforce the re-education, autonomy, social and school inclusion of the child who manifests specific needs from a very young age; use of new technologies at all school levels; training programs capable of contributing to the promotion of an autonomous and independent life of the person in the social and professional field, throughout the course of the person's autonomous and independent life, in the social and professional field (European Commission, 2020).

It is, on closer examination, a matter of designing specific elements, proper to an inclusive relationship (Cottini, 2018), capable of building didactic conditions for the personalization of learning. Enhancing the specificities of the human person and, at the same time, considering the natural, social and cultural constraints that determine



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the status of each human being, means designing articulated dynamics that provide inclusive strategies, where suffering is contained (Aiello, 2015).

2. The helping relationship as educational care

There can be no helping relationship without empathy; an indispensable element in understanding the other person's emotions and state of mind (Lazarus, 1991), it is the main way to establish authentic interpersonal communication that can make the observer/listener identify with what the other person is feeling (van Ryn et al., 1997). Empathy is a process where one sets aside one's own way of experiencing and perceiving reality in order to grasp and respond to the other person's experiences (Mearns & Thorne, 1988).

The highest expression of empathy is in accepting and not judging: to be empathic is to see the world through the eyes of the other and not to see our world reflected in his or her eyes (Di Fabio, 2000). A fundamental concept for the helping relationship, empathy is considered one of the basic attitudes for "building an educational relationship, involving the structuring of a meaningful and reciprocal relationship" (Corona & De Giuseppe, 2015, p. 82).

Putting oneself in the other's perspective, avoiding any form of prejudice; enacting active listening, paying attention to nonverbal language as well; knowing how to manage the emotional load, differentiating the other's states of mind without merging them with one's own, become traits of an educational care (Simeone, 2011), understood as competent accompaniment (Cottini & Rosati, 2008) toward inclusion. In fact, it is necessary to note how learning is a complex process, the outcome of the continuous intertwining and exchange between numerous processes, such as perception, memory, attention, language, thinking and executive functions, all under the influence of emotions, motivation, individual characteristics, as well as the knowledge, skills and cognitive style of the learner (Cipollone, 2021).

Emotion becomes the center of the individual, itself an expression of life, while for good emotional literacy, the need to develop specific training emerges.



Fig. 1: emotional training (Ricci & Maggi, 2022, p. 10)

Within such a perspective, where specific stages of emotional training are definable (fig. 1), the educator and the teacher are positioned as agents promoters and facilitators of processes of school and social inclusion, of building community services, where the other is not seen as an object of intervention but recognized as a person, with whom to elaborate a planning to deal with situations-problems, making use of the resources available to her, trying to make her achieve the expected results: "the tu

of confirmation is all the more necessary the more the other person is in a situation of disadvantage in which his or her being a person is exposed more than ever to annihilation," Buber recalls (Buber, 2011, p. 59), helping to highlight some specific elements of the helping relationship (Buber, 1991), which can be declined in the educational field. Caring (educational perspective) concerns in fact the educational process, with objectives related to the elaboration of decision-making modalities; curing (health perspective) indicates the therapeutic process, curative objectives and immediate needs to be treated through diagnosis and treatment (Amenta, 1999).

Consulenza educativa	Consulenza clinica
Logica educativa del prendersi cura (<i>caring</i>)	Logica sanitaria del trattamento (<i>curing</i>)
Situazioni di crisi psico-sociale	Situazioni patologiche
Contesto non sanitario	Contesto sanitario
Spessore educativo del processo	Spessore terapeutico del processo
Rivolta a persone momentaneamente disorientate o bloccate da un problema contingente, che crea incertezza e incapacità di azione (<i>crisis counselling</i>) e/o turbate da naturali dinamiche evolutive (<i>developmental counselling</i>)	Rivolta a persone che presentano una significativa sofferenza emotiva
Con obiettivi educativi legati a processi decisionali	Con obiettivi curativi
Non punta a ristrutturazioni della personalità	Punta a ristrutturazioni della personalità
Setting tendenzialmente poco strutturato	Setting molto strutturato
Numero di incontri limitato	Numero di incontri più ampio (a seconda del disturbo)
L'enfasi è posta sulla prevenzione e sulla promozione del benessere	L'enfasi è posta sulla diagnosi e sulla cura

Fig. 2 Educational counseling and clinical counseling (Varriale, 2000)

The individual conception of help is subsumed, therefore, within a vision intended to build a whole educating community, a welcoming and synergistic and above all inclusive social context, part of a scenario characterized by an articulated range of aids, tools and resources (Musaio, 2020). Inclusion takes on the features no longer of the protected (measured) emancipation of special educational needs and the restorative and re-educational response of the social and cultural system, but becomes a path capable of affecting the quality of lives and coexistences (Sibilio, 2017).

In the helping relationship, the other is removed from the stalemate that discomfort opposes it, in the proposal to identify the individual, and not the problem, as the focal point (De Giuseppe, 2016).

3. Framework and approaches

The concept of the helping relationship in its formative value is closely related to competence: the process of accompaniment and mutual growth is activated, in fact, within a competent relationship, in which role difference promotes interchange and bidirectional in attention and care (Gaspari, p. 2021). Caring for the student, his growth, self-actualization and self-determination characterizes an effective helping relationship. Carkhuff (Carkhuff, 1993) articulates the structure of the helping relationship into individual steps: the first two derived from Carl Rogers' non-directive approach (Rogers & Kinget, 1979), the others from a behaviorist approach:

Fasi	Definizione	Esecuzione
1^fase	L'ASCOLTO	Secondo il modello rogersiano l'ascolto è indirizzato sia al contenuto che agli aspetti non verbali (emozioni, sentimenti) espressi dal soggetto (Rogers & Kinget, 1970). A tal riguardo, particolare importanza riveste la capacità di ascoltare con attenzione, mettersi nei panni dell'altro, concentrarsi su quanto viene espresso con il linguaggio verbale oltre che con la mimica, la gestualità, il movimento (Rogers, 1977). Diventa fondamentale riconoscere l'altro, i suoi vissuti, le sue emozioni, gli stati d'animo; ascoltare senza giudicare, indagare, senza diagnosticare.

2^ fase	LA RISPOSTA	Al contempo occorre fornire delle risposte alle richieste degli interlocutori; un ambiente accogliente, una rete di aiuto ben calibrata sui bisogni presentati e che sostenga il percorso legato al cambiamento.
3^ fase	IL PRIMO PASSO	Secondo l'approccio comportamentista l'individuo è un organismo attivo che definisce i comportamenti in relazione agli stimoli dell'ambiente. In questa fase occorre quindi prevedere concretamente un primo passo per cambiare, dando fiducia alle risorse presenti, promuovendo la competenza affettiva, metacognitiva e autoriflessiva (Eisenberg, 1982).
4^ fase	L'AZIONE	La relazione, in questa fase, assume tratti collaborativi, autentici; tutto ciò permette di recuperare le risorse, maturare il senso di <i>empowerment</i> ed assumere delle decisioni che orientino in modo fattivo l'azione (Bacharach, 1993), organizzando un ambiente accogliente, una rete di aiuto ben calibrata sui bisogni presentati e che sostiene il percorso legato al cambiamento.

Fig. 3 structure of the helping relationship (Marchetti, 2006)

The main goal results to be helping the person to become more aware of its emotional problems, and to support the adaptation of the subject, in response to the external events that resulted in the request for help (Binetti & Bruni, 2003). In the psychodynamic approach, the articulation of such an intervention is structured in relation to the person's characteristics, focusing on events/aspects specific to the subject's life. It proceeds to the identification of the existing connections between the situation that invests the subject, the present, and the one that determined the status quo, the past, with the aim of highlighting the role of the iterations experienced, also

in relation to reference figures; in parallel, the relationship with the subject who offers support/help, the counselor, since it is influenced by the dynamics proper to the subject's internal relational models (Jayasinghe, 2001), becomes one of the key aspects on which it is possible to intervene to promote change. The counselor's action (Nathan & Hill, 2006) addresses, in particular, the analysis of the individual's personal and social history; recognizes the importance of unconscious mechanisms in daily life; uses transference and countertransference as means of understanding interacting subjects; provides for the adaptation of settings, in relation to the work to be done with individuals/groups/organizations.

4. Fields of intervention

Counseling presents itself as an intervention characterized by different theoretical approaches, the techniques of which aim to address and resolve a range of issues typical of the individual's development. The proposed interventions can present themselves as either preventive, aimed at informing and educating the patient, or supportive and psychosocial, aimed at supporting the patient and family members in the various stages of the process of diagnosis and treatment of the disease (Carr & Higginson, 2001), or through pain and suffering. Counseling as an intervention based on listening, empathic understanding, and nonjudgmental acceptance of the subject's experience can help him or her express and share anxieties, fears, fears, and expectations, and to live with mild anxieties and anxieties in the different moments of suffering.

Counseling goes to involve a wide network of subjects (fig. 2), going to define a formal system of help, which includes teachers, psychologists, doctors, educators and social workers, and an informal system of help, afferent to relatives, friends natural helpers (Vogel Stahl, 2005), volunteers, parish groups who provide support (often without asking anything in return) going to constitute a push for change.



Fig. 4 (Valerio, 1997)

In the social field, counseling finds application in different areas of help: as an informational, preventive, supportive intervention in situations of personal and social distress and in situations of risk (Trinchero, 2004); as an intervention for conflict

resolution at the personal, couple and family levels; in all stages of the life cycle, as a psychosocial support and intervention in crisis situations; as an intervention for guidance in the labor field. In its various declensions, and in view of the specific interests of the present discussion, we distinguish:

Ambito	Intervento
<i>counseling</i> scolastico	utilizza i principi di facilitazione della comunicazione e dell'ascolto attivo, per strutturare interventi, di primo o secondo livello, che sostengano e migliorino i processi di insegnamento ed apprendimento. Fra gli interventi specialistici, di secondo livello, annoveriamo l'attività svolta nei CIC (Centri di Informazione Consulenza) spazi di ascolto e sportelli per gli studenti, oltre che il counseling di classe, che prevede un intervento collettivo, espresso da una domanda avanzata tramite un componente della classe (AA. V.V, 2004), e finalizzato alla risoluzione di problematiche inerenti la costituzione del gruppo classe, situazioni conflittuali fra sottogruppi, conflitti fra il gruppo e singoli membri.
<i>counseling</i> in ambito universitario	molti atenei italiani hanno istituito dei servizi di counseling psicologico rivolto a studenti universitari, si tratta di servizi di assistenza psicologica che offrono consulenze gratuite agli studenti, con la finalità di affrontare e risolvere difficoltà personali e psicologiche (Iannaccone, Ghodbane & Rosciano, 2005), ridurre l'abbandono scolastico, orientare lo studente nella scelta del corretto percorso di studi, incrementare le abilità necessarie all'apprendimento ed alla formazione, prevenire l'insorgenza di comportamenti a rischio (Bert, Doglio & Quadrino, 2004).
<i>counseling</i> educativo per i genitori	si presenta finalizzato alla valorizzazione degli elementi positivi, alla loro integrazione con nuove e più approfondite competenze, allo sviluppo di risorse che, pur in situazione di disagio, possono esser riattivate e potenziate (Carr,

	Gibson & Robinson, 2001). Questa prospettiva rimanda ad una cultura di responsabilizzazione a livello personale-interpersonale, come prendersi cura. Si tratta di una metodologia di counseling finalizzata allo sviluppo di una maggior consapevolezza delle proprie potenzialità educative, dell'interdipendenza con quelle del proprio partner e con quelle dei docenti. Ogni individuo, nei momenti di maggiore difficoltà, ha come punto di riferimento la famiglia, a cui si rivolge prioritariamente, per beneficiare del supporto di cui necessita in quello che è un vero e proprio sistema di interazioni in cui ogni individuo ha la capacità di influenzare l'altro. Data l'importanza dei fattori implicati nello sviluppo delle dinamiche familiari, sia per l'individuo sia per il sistema nel suo insieme, non possiamo non prendere in considerazione il servizio di counseling alla famiglia soprattutto come azione di prevenzione del disagio e di sviluppo di competenze nel campo delle capacità comunicativo-relazionali, educative e decisionali. Si mettono in atto una serie di interventi in cui le modalità d'aiuto si concretizzano tramite la relazione interpersonale tra <i>counselor</i> e cliente.
<i>counseling</i> aziendale	è diffuso in particolare negli Stati Uniti e in Gran Bretagna ed è legato ad una concezione del mondo del lavoro e dell'azienda in cui trova spazio lo sviluppo di servizi, interni ed esterni all'organizzazione, finalizzati al miglioramento della qualità della vita del dipendente e della sua produttività. L'azienda mette a disposizione uno spazio di ascolto ai dipendenti che evidenziano problematiche di natura professionale, con l'obiettivo di offrire loro un aiuto. Si intende, così facendo, promuovere la crescita personale dei dipendenti, affrontare i loro conflitti, dare sostegno affettivo e risolvere problemi specifici a livello personale e relazionale. Attraverso questo momento di dialogo con un esperto nei processi di

	<i>empowerment</i>, il soggetto impara a conoscere meglio se stesso e ad individuare spazi di sviluppo di risorse personali, spesso confinate ai margini della formazione professionale (Piccardo, 1995).
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Fig. 5 counseling and fields of intervention (Maier, 2011)

The interventions present in Fig. 3 let some common elements emerge in counseling, regarding a different way of structuring relationships, capable of giving value to the individual's resources and educational potential, contributing to the definition of his or her identity in terms of skills and competencies.

This is a perspective that promotes what we might call empowerment pedagogy, aimed at increasing the person's sense of self-efficacy as empowerment of resources (Grembowski et al., 1993).

Abandoning the problem-centered view in favor of skill- and competence-focused interventions, it promotes the analysis of difficulties, invites the search for help consistent with the need, and the segmentation of the problem so that each of its component parts can be understood.

All this leads to a new definition of self in terms of capabilities thus developing learned power understood as internalizing a new self-image.

Moreover, the emphasis on the recognition and expansion of capability (Nussbaum, 2012), and the capacitation of the subject takes on fundamental importance in the new educational approach; every subject must be able to acquire valid opportunities thus shifting the focus from the realm of means to that of actual opportunities (Sen, 2011).

The strong relationship that exists between rights, justice, equity, equality and freedom as a guarantee of a democratic and ethically just society (Nussbaum, 2002), invests school and social contexts by promoting policies focused on the quality of inclusive processes in the name of solidarity, understanding, reciprocity and authentic recognition of the existential dimension of each person and his or her singular and peculiar Life Project (Schalock & Verdugo, 2006).

The helping relationship, as a complex process, becomes an asymmetrical relationship of non-unidirectional reciprocity, where the involvement of the actors takes place within a relationship of exchange, which stimulates, at the same time, empowerment, i.e., that process of expanding the potential of the subject, in order to promote the possibilities of controlling one's own life, adaptation to change and growth of the individual.

5. Effective counseling

According to Noonan (Noonan, 1983), the counseling relationship, in order to be effective, must be characterized by a therapeutic atmosphere, where the counselor makes available his or her emotional, intellectual, perceptual and intuitive skills in an attempt to identify with the recipient of the relief intervention. The counselor is asked to value the relationship as a tool for change, an aid to facilitate communication, reflection and self-awareness. For this reason, it is essential to understand what personal

and relational skills can make the intervention effective, in order to give impetus to change, helping the person in need to express himself and find new solutions.

Rogers, in his works, thoroughly analyzed the essential aspects of the helping relationship (Hough, 1999), coming to believe that the element of greatest interest was the quality of the relationship between the counselor and the individual, and noting that it is "the quality of the interpersonal encounter with the client that is the most significant element in determining the effectiveness and success" of a helping relationship (Bruzzone, 2007).

According to this perspective, in interventions of lesser as well as of longer duration, the quality of the relationship thus turns out to be a decisive element, relevant for the purpose of defining the theoretical orientation of the counselor, the specific techniques used and, even, the degree of experience and professional preparation of the practitioner (Calvo, 2015). The quality of a relationship is configured as the element that determines the extent to which the encounter with the counselor can turn out to be an experience capable of stimulating the individual's personal and psychological growth or, on the contrary, a barrier to the realization of an adequate relationship; it is, on closer inspection, the necessary condition, and, for Rogers, even sufficient (Rogers, 1942), for the individual to reflect constructively on his or her difficulties, conflicting aspects to be resolved, for the structuring of new possibilities for adaptation and solution. Therapeutic tool becomes the ability to create an interpersonal context in which the individual can express himself freely, feeling heard and understood by the interlocutor not being inhibited, but, instead, enhanced and facilitated. The chances of successful help intervention depend, above all, on the conductor's attitude of listening and participation. Rogers, in this regard, identified three personal attitudes of the counselor, three human dispositions, which are the foundation on which to base an effective helping relationship (Rogers, 1978), these personal dimensions or attitudes are defined, as the basic characteristics of an effective counseling intervention which are as we mentioned earlier, authenticity, unconditional acceptance and empathic understanding. The latter is the means by which the counselor enters into a relationship with the individual, approaches his or her subjective world and seeks to understand his or her feelings, moods, and points of view. The empathic listening attitude creates the relational context on which to build help and change (Di Tore, Di Tore, Mangione & Corona, 2014).

6. Assessment of the help process

The outcome presents itself as the most significant measure of the degree to which the purpose of an intervention has been achieved; definable as the relationship between the expected results and the results obtained (Di Fabio, 1999), it depends on the appropriateness of the interventions, their quantity and quality, and their mode of execution, but, at the same time, it involves, a series of elements that cannot be predicted according to the norm of objectivity (Blythe, Tripodi, Fasolo & Ongaro, 1993).

Applied to an internal planning of complex systems, such as those under discussion here, it needs adaptations and corrections, as the logics proper to process quality, determined by the productive factors related to what is done and how it is done (Pompei, 2002), will have to be declined within a broader scenario of promoting people and their life project. From this perspective, the evaluation of the helping process (Figure 6) can be defined as the relationship between the degree of protection

that is intended to be made enforceable and the protection achieved (Leone & Prezza, 2011).

$$\text{Qualità del processo di aiuto} = \frac{\text{grado di tutela reso esigibile}}{\text{grado di tutela perseguito}}$$

Fig. 6 - summary formula of the quality of the helping process (Tommasi & Caramia, 2009)

We need to consider how in the design and implementation of the helping process (Pompei, Costanzi & Risso, 2000), professional documentation of the helping process (Diomede Canevini, 1993) is therefore essential, in order to be able to account for the protection and promotion of factors such as personalization, taking care of the totality of the person's needs, appropriateness of services, involvement of the person and his or her family, and participation of community stakeholders (Minghelli, D'Anna & Gomez Paloma, 2021).

5. Conclusions

In 1899, Dewey (Dewey, 1949) argued that in order to discuss a new movement in education, it was necessary to put oneself from the social point of view; education understood as a process that faces and leans toward the entire social evolution (Cambi, Certini & Nesta, 2010), and that in this dimension acquires value as an interlocutor, both of the subject in formation and of the interacting institutions in shaping individual life experiences, becomes the way to contribute to the self-formation of the person and teach how to become a citizen (Morin, 2015).

Social acting, that is, educational acting within social groups through communication, becomes an application model with multiple variations within which individuals become points of reference and knowledge for one another (Di Gennaro, Aiello, Zollo & Sibilio, 2018).

Relationship, understood as thoughtfulness, diligence, and accuracy, becomes responsibility to oneself and others. This implies mutual recognition, knowing how to build or re-build an educational relationship, but also the definition of a foundational category of special pedagogy, understood as a science attentive to the constant reinterpretation of educational professionalism engaged in the process of school and social inclusion of people (Ianes & Canevaro, 2016).

It is therefore up to the professionals of educational care and help to promote the re-opening of an existential project that, due to the presence of special educational needs, may present itself prematurely interrupted or already predetermined (Gaspari, 2013), and to education to take care of the process of forming the identity and personality of each person, to reactivate in the other the engine of the desire to live and re-exist.

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