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The educator as a facilitator of discontinuity: towards a pedagogy of encounter and difference

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Abstract: In the contemporary debate on engagement in education, attention has often focused on cognitive and motivational dimensions, overlooking the relational root of authentic involvement. This theoretical contribution proposes a reinterpretation of engagement starting from a reconceptualization of empathy, understood not as identification or emotional contagion, but as openness to the singularity and difference of the other. Through a review of pedagogical and philosophical literature (Scilligo, Mastromarino, Guardini, Rogers, Terminio, Stein, Mancuso, Vigorelli, Novara, Castanyer), the essay outlines the figure of the educator as a facilitator of discontinuity: one who, through specific communicative competences, makes possible an authentic confrontation with otherness. Their dialectical acts resemble a dance, articulated in three movements – expressing, listening, transforming – which allows them to stand in conflict without being overwhelmed by it, transforming it into an occasion for growth. The contribution identifies in time and empathy the common denominator of these competences, and proposes a pedagogy of encounter and difference: an apparent oxymoron, whose unveiling can offer the possibility of forming educators aware of the profoundly transformative value that the encounter with the other carries with it.

Keywords: engagement; empathy; discontinuity; educational communication; transformative learning

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary debate on engagement in education, attention has often focused on cognitive and motivational dimensions, overlooking the deepest root of authentic involvement: the quality of the relationship. Yet, as research on Socio-Cognitive Transactional Analysis reminds us, the self is not a static and self-sufficient entity, but the «precipitate of all personal life experiences derived from relational processes» (Scilligo,

2009, p. 45). The self is structured and transformed according to the quality of the relationships a person establishes, and the encounter with "significant others" can strengthen or restructure it (Mastromarino, 2018, p. 38).

Within this framework, the role of the educator takes on crucial importance. The educator is not a mere transmitter of content, but a "significant other" who, through the quality of their presence and communicative competences, can foster a relational climate capable of facilitating the development of the self and of stimulating the person to experiment with new modes of relationship (Mastromarino, 2018, p. 40). It seems to us, on the basis of experience and pedagogical reflection, that the teacher can become a promoter of discontinuity under two conditions. The first is credibility: as Romano Guardini maintained, «life is awakened and kindled only by life», and the most powerful force of education lies in the fact that the educator, in the first person, leans forward and strives to grow (Guardini, 1987, p. 222). It is the adult's personal effort that gives credibility to their pedagogical action. The second condition is the creation of a facilitating, respectful, and welcoming working climate: as Carl Rogers wrote, the task of those who educate is not to mould the pupil, but to offer them a climate of trust and deep listening capable of unlocking their natural potential for growth (Rogers, 1973, p. 121).

But what is this climate ultimately founded on? Our hypothesis is that its prerequisite is empathy, not as ordinarily understood. Empathy is a premise and a demand that runs through every group: without it, no authentic educational relationship is possible. However, the definition we intend to propose shifts the centre of gravity from a conception that promotes similarities to one that welcomes and understands the added value belonging to every discontinuity. It is not a matter of seeking what unites us through a process of identification, of reducing the other to what we already know, of finding reassurance in similarity. It is, on the contrary, a matter of opening ourselves to what is radically other, of recognising in difference not a threat, but a richness.

It is from this reconceptualization of empathy that the figure of the facilitator of discontinuity acquires meaning. This contribution aims to explore this function: the educator who, precisely because they have gained credibility and have been able to create a welcoming climate, can make possible an authentic confrontation with otherness, transforming conflict and difference not into an obstacle, but into an occasion for learning to encounter the other and, at the same time, for deepening the knowledge of those dark and little-known zones of one's own self.

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The path we will follow is articulated in three movements. First, we will clarify what we mean by empathy as discontinuity, distinguishing it from the traditional conception of identification and showing how it is an indispensable premise for every authentic educational relationship. Second, we will outline the figure of the educator as a facilitator of discontinuity, highlighting the communicative competences that allow them to stand in conflict without being overwhelmed by it. Finally, we will show how these competences can translate into concrete practices within the learning group, transforming difference and conflict into resources for engagement and for the growth of each individual.

2. Empathy as discontinuity

If the self is structured in relationship, and if the educator can foster the development of the other through the quality of their presence, then it is necessary to ask: which relationship? Our answer is that the authentic educational relationship is founded on a particular form of empathy, which we intend to redefine in a non-ordinary sense: no longer identification, but openness to difference.

Before proceeding, a clarification is necessary. When we speak of empathy as availability and openness to difference, we do not mean the exacerbation of diversity as a trait that separates and opposes. We mean rather the capacity to recognise the other as an equal in their singularity, without reducing them to what we already know.

Our self is not a closed nucleus that then enters into contact with the world: it is substantiated, grows, and is modified in the encounter with the other. We are what we have become through the relationships we have lived. Precisely for this reason, a common substrate exists among human beings: not a set of contents, but the very condition of being exposed to relationship. And it is from this underlying equality that empathy has its origin. I can understand what the other feels and experiences because, although being other than me, I share with them this common humanity.

The equality we speak of is not uniformity, it is not the recognition that the other is equal to me. It is rather the recognition that the other is a subject like me, who has a dignity equal to mine, whose experience is just as real and legitimate as mine. Without this underlying equality, the encounter with difference is transformed into a threat: the other becomes the one who calls into question my place in the world, the one whom I must control or neutralise.

When equality is recognised, the diversity of the other does not repel me: it attracts me. I recognise the contours of their diversity, and this diversity resonates with a part of me that I have not yet integrated, with my shadow profile. This is the deepest intuition we wish to sustain: the diversity of the other is not only something that stands before me, it is also something that inhabits me. The other reveals to me a part of myself that I did not know, that I had removed or had not yet encountered. For this reason, diversity is not a threat: it is a promise of knowledge, of myself even before the other. This is the discontinuity we speak of: not a wall that separates, but a space in which the difference of the other challenges me and enriches me, because it reveals something of myself that I did not know.

When there is no authentic recognition of the equality of the other, they are no longer a subject with whom I share a world, but a stranger who does not belong to my horizon. Their difference, instead of appearing to me as a richness, appears to me as a challenge: it calls into question my way of seeing things, my certainties, my place in the world. This is the condition that generates fear. To defend itself from what it perceives as a threat, the self entrenches itself, builds walls, sees enemies everywhere. It is an egoic-bellicose consciousness, which transforms every difference into a threat to be neutralised. In this logic, empathy is impossible, because the other is not recognised as an equal, but as an adversary.

The most widespread misunderstanding about empathy is that of understanding it as "putting oneself in the other's shoes", a process of identification rooted in the German concept of *Einfühlung*. In this perspective, the other is in fact reduced to the same: one understands them to the extent that one recognises them as similar to oneself, annihilating their otherness. To this conception is added another, no less widespread: that which reduces empathy to emotional contagion, to an involuntary transmission of states of mind, an emotional osmosis that requires neither distance nor recognition. In both cases, the other is not truly encountered: they are assimilated to the already known, or they are simply contaminated by our emotions. It is an empathy that seeks similarities, that extinguishes conflict, that suffocates confrontation, that feeds on what is already known, that reassures because it confirms one's own categories. But this, for us, is not empathy: it is a subtle form of appropriation. It is the illusion of being able to understand the other without leaving oneself, without calling one's own world into question.

Opposed to this conception is a tradition of thought that understands empathy as the discovery of the other. As Nicolò Terminio observes, authentic empathy is a movement of openness toward a radical otherness that cannot be reabsorbed either through identification or through comparison (Terminio, 2022, p. 162). The other is not the same: it is a presence that marks a difference and a distance that can never be bridged. The path that leads from me to you will never be the same as the one that leads from you to me. This asymmetry is not a defect of the relationship, but its condition: it is what makes the encounter authentic, because it prevents the other from becoming a mere mirror of my projections.

This idea finds a philosophical foundation in the thought of Edith Stein, who distinguishes authentic empathy from *unipathy*: while the latter is a fusion in which the I loses itself in the other, the former maintains distance and the recognition of otherness, welcoming the other's experience without ever confusing it with one's own (Stein, 1917/1999, p. 75). Empathy, therefore, is not an intellectual act, but an emotional practice that calls the boundaries of the self into question. As Vito Mancuso writes, it is «the breaking of the prison of the I, a breaking that does not occur cognitively but emotionally» (Mancuso, 2024, p. 38). It is a movement that exposes us, that makes us vulnerable, that asks us to renounce the security of our categories in order to open ourselves to what we do not know.

But if empathy is openness to the other, it demands that those who educate be willing to put themselves on the line. As Ilaria Vigorelli writes, «no one can say I without encountering the you, and no one can be a you in listening, whether to educate or to care, without continuously traversing the mysterious and dynamic territory of one's own I» (Vigorelli, 2022, p. 12). The encounter with the other is first of all an encounter with oneself: authentic listening requires that the educator constantly traverse their own inner world, confronting their own shadows. There is no empathy without this work on oneself, without this willingness to be transformed by the encounter.

The underlying equality we have described is the condition that makes empathy possible. But empathy, as a posture, is the choice to inhabit that condition: it is not a technique, it is not a set of skills to be applied, but a way of being in relationship that recognises the other in their irreducible singularity. This is the premise that makes discontinuity possible: only if the educator is capable of welcoming difference without annihilating it can they create the conditions for others to learn to do the same.

Who, then, is the facilitator of discontinuity? It is the educator who has accepted their own shadow and who knows how to integrate it and bring it forth through an authoritative and authentic posture. It is the one who has learned to silence the egoic voices of their own self and knows how to dwell in silence, in listening. In this listening, they know how to grasp the harmony but also the discomfort of the spaces they inhabit, and decides with courage to bring to light also the pain and ambiguity, in order to create educational contexts of respect and truth.

3. The facilitator of discontinuity

Let us imagine a common situation. In a training group, one of the participants expresses an opinion that contrasts with that of the majority. The climate becomes tense. Someone raises their voice, someone else withdraws into silence. This is the moment when, usually, the educator tries to restore harmony: minimising disagreement, inviting the group to find a point of convergence, proposing to move on. But in doing so, difference is cancelled, and with it the opportunity that difference carried with it.

Why does this happen? Because in educational contexts it is far more frequent to level out and dampen, even if only superficially, every form of divergence, rather than choosing, for example, the path of structured disagreement, which in pedagogy is a formal educational approach: it uses verbal conflict and the exchange of ideas as an intentional tool for the cognitive, critical, and social development of students. Instead of avoiding conflict or managing it in an improvised way, the teacher creates a framework of precise rules within which students can engage with complex issues. Within this framework, conflict is not an incident to be repaired, but an intentionally designed moment.

The facilitator of discontinuity chooses this path. They recognise that this moment is precious. It is there that discontinuity manifests itself: something that does not fit into the usual categories, that calls the group's certainties into question, that asks to be listened to. The facilitator does not avoid it: they inhabit it. They do not resolve it: they accompany it. And, when the time comes, they structure it: they create the conditions for conflict to unfold fruitfully, without destroying the relationship.

This choice does not arise from a technique, but from a precise interpretation of conflict. Conflict, contrary to what common sense suggests, is not a disease of relationship, nor a degeneration of it. It is relationship itself that, in its unfolding, inevitably produces divergences, incompatibilities, frictions. As Glasl observes, conflict is «an interaction

between actors in which at least one actor perceives an incompatibility with one or more other actors in the dimension of thought or perceptions, in the emotional dimension» (Glasl, cited in Buccoliero & Maggi, 2005, p. 35). It is not violence, it is not war: it is the very physiology of human coexistence. It is not a problem to be eliminated, but a dimension to be inhabited. Only in this way can one learn to dwell within conflict, interpreting diversity as a moment of growth and no longer as a factor of fear or threat (Novara, 2001, p. 182).

The facilitator of discontinuity is the one who has made this distinction, not only abstractly and theoretically, but in the inner construction of their own cognitive and emotional posture. They know that true human relationships are not those that eliminate conflict, but those that allow it. Confrontation, exchange, divergence, opposition are the sign that something new is emerging, that the usual categories no longer suffice, that the group is called to a further passage, to an evolution. Their task is not to transform others, but to create the conditions for others to transform themselves through the experience of discontinuity.

This, however, does not turn them into a solitary hero: they are not an exceptional being, endowed with extraordinary virtues. They are an educator who has engaged in a path of self-knowledge, and who for this very reason can afford not to defend themselves from the other. They do not perceive difference as a threat, because they do not need continuous confirmation to feel safe. They can listen without judging, welcome without appropriating, remain in conflict without seeking to resolve it at all costs. Their authority does not arise from their role, but from the credibility they have earned through their own path of growth (Guardini, 1987, p. 222). It is an authority that does not impose itself, but offers itself; that does not demand obedience, but inspires trust.

The work on oneself, however, is only the premise. The decisive key is another: it is the conscious use of communicative competences. The facilitator of discontinuity does not limit themselves to "being" in a certain way: they act. And they act through communication, using expressive, consistent, and functional languages, but also remaining silent when necessary, because silence too can be a semantic instrument. Not just any communication, but a communication capable of welcoming complexity, that does not simplify, that does not reduce. It is a communication that takes on pain and ambiguity without being frightened, that knows how to dwell in silence without filling it, that knows how to ask questions without already knowing the answers. Judgement, as Novara reminds us,

is the opposite of listening: «to judge in a stigmatising way implies humiliating» (Novara, 2001, p. 182). The facilitator of discontinuity knows this, and for this reason suspends judgement, practises authentic listening, uses words not to close but to open. They know when it is time to be silent and when to speak, to ask a question and to offer a response, to remain in conflict and to accompany it toward transformation. It is this capacity, oriented by the posture we have described, that makes them a facilitator of discontinuity.

4. Communicative competences for standing in discontinuity

The group is in tension. Voices rise, someone withdraws into silence. The educator does not flee, does not minimise, does not invite the group to find an agreement. They choose to stand in that moment.

One can stand in a conflict as in a dance. The skill lies in shifting the movement from within toward the outside, so as not to remain trapped in certain logics that emerge from the conflict itself, in order to be actors but also impartial directors. The steps of this dance are built through the wise use of communicative competences.

First movement: expressing

The dance begins with a step that is often overlooked: the educator takes the floor. Not to tell others what they must do, not to correct, not to reassure. They take the floor to say something of themselves. It is the most exposed movement, the most vulnerable, and for this very reason the most authentic.

In a group in tension, the strongest temptation is to intervene from the outside. "Calm down", "Let's try to understand each other", "There's no need to get angry". These are phrases that seek to restore order, but they place the speaker above the conflict, as if they were extraneous to it. The facilitator does not place themselves above: they enter the conflict, expose themselves, speak their truth without claiming to be right.

This is representational communication. Not a judgement on the other, not a description of the facts, but the expression of one's own experience. Not "you are wrong", but "I feel that...". Not "this discussion is useless", but "I feel uncomfortable when confrontation becomes clash". It is a way of speaking that does not point the finger, but opens a space. Those who express themselves in this way do not tell the other what to do: they show who they are.

Expressing oneself, however, is not enough. In a group in tension, it is not rare for someone to raise their voice, to interrupt, to occupy all the space. The educator who limits themselves to expressing their own

experience, without setting limits, risks being overwhelmed. They need to express themselves assertively.

Assertiveness is the capacity to affirm one's own needs and rights without overriding those of others. It is not aggressiveness, which cancels the other; it is not passivity, which cancels oneself. It is the balance between the two: the disposition of one who knows how to say "I am here, with my story, with my fears, with my desires" and recognises that the other has the right to do the same.

As Olga Castanyer observes, assertiveness is not a technique for "winning" or for standing "above" others. It is a practice that springs from healthy self-esteem: those who respect themselves also respect the other; those who recognise their own worth also recognise the worth of others (Castanyer, 2006). One cannot be assertive without an authentic relationship with oneself. And one cannot teach assertiveness without practising it in the first person.

Assertiveness, in fact, stands opposed to two equally ineffective relational styles: the passive one, in which the person submits, avoids conflict, lets others occupy all the space; and the aggressive one, in which the person overrides, imposes, cancels the other. Both styles are the expression of a wound: passivity is born from the fear of not being worthy, aggressiveness from the fear of not being heard. Assertiveness is the path that overcomes both, because it seeks neither domination nor submission, but the encounter between two subjects who recognise each other as equals.

Assertiveness is not recognised by a formula, but by a form. The assertive educator does not order, does not threaten, does not withdraw. Nor do they merely express their own experience, as in representational communication. They do something more precise: they affirm a boundary and, in the same gesture, recognise the other. They do not tell the interlocutor what to do, but what they are willing to accept and what they are not. And they say it in such a way that the other does not feel attacked, but addressed. It is a word that does not close the conflict: it keeps it open, but within a perimeter that makes it possible to speak about it.

Second movement: listening

If expressing is the first movement of the dance, listening is the second. And it is not a passive movement: listening, in a conflict, is the most difficult thing. It means suspending one's judgement, placing one's categories in brackets, welcoming the other's experience without reducing it to what we already know. In a group in tension, the temptation is to

listen in order to respond, to counter, to correct. The facilitator, instead, listens in order to understand.

Before using paraphrase and verbalisation, there is a condition that makes them possible and effective: silence. For a teacher, and more generally for a trainer, education in silence is a formidable instrument. To be silent consciously and actively when a student is in the grip of their own emotivity, when they are taken over by anger, is not only an immediate detonator, but gives the other greater possibilities of entering into relationship with the dissonance they are experiencing and manifesting. To be silent, in the initial phase of a conflict, is the wisest choice in order to inaugurate other types of intervention and to give them a more powerful echo.

Silence, thus understood, is not an absence. It is an active condition, which leaves space without filling it, which allows the other to listen to themselves while speaking. It is not an instrument among others, but the condition that makes the use of instruments possible. It is not a step of the dance, it is the breath that holds the steps together. It is the first act of trust that the facilitator offers the group: the trust that the other can, on their own, enter into contact with what they are experiencing.

The first instrument of this listening is paraphrase. Paraphrase consists in reformulating in one's own words what the other has just said, in order to verify that one has understood and to return their communication to them. It is not a simple repetition, nor is it a summary. It is, in its simplicity, a first powerful transformative act and an act of approach to the other. It expresses attention, but also understanding: in re-proposing the other's thought with different words, it offers them the possibility of seeing it with new eyes and of understanding it better. And it arrives, at the same time, straight to the heart of the speaker, to reveal to them, once again, a new truth about themselves and to illuminate words that had remained in shadow.

In a conflict, paraphrase has an almost immediate effect: it lowers tension. When a person feels heard, when they feel that their words have been welcomed and returned without being distorted, they feel recognised. And recognition is the first condition for leaving the logic of clash. Paraphrase does not resolve the conflict, but it creates the space for the conflict to be traversed.

There is a second instrument, even more subtle: verbalisation. If paraphrase focuses on the content of what the other says, verbalisation focuses on the emotion that runs through them. Not "it seems to me that you think this", but "it seems to me that you feel this". It is a more delicate

step, because it touches the affective sphere, and it requires great attention: one must grasp the emotion without amplifying or reducing it, return it without interpreting it, name it without labelling it.

In a conflict, verbalisation is often the gesture that extinguishes the fuse. When a person is angry, frightened, wounded, they do not need to be corrected: they need to be seen. Verbalisation offers them this possibility: it returns their emotion to them, it says "I see you, I feel what you are experiencing". It is not an act of compassion, nor a technique of pacification: it is an act of validation. And validation is the condition for the conflict not to degenerate, for the parties to be able to continue speaking to each other rather than turning into adversaries.

This need to be seen is, moreover, one of the most powerful drives of our time. We live in a society that continually asks us to show ourselves, to exhibit ourselves, to make ourselves visible. Yet precisely this hyper-exposure has made our outlines more blurred, has made us homogeneous and formless. Verbal violence, the exasperation of exhibiting oneself, the obsessive search for attention are often the symptom of a vital and unheeded need: that of being truly looked at, recognised in one's uniqueness. Verbalisation, in its small way, responds to this need, offering presence and active listening, in an empathic resonance with the other that does not annul distance.

Listening, however, does not exhaust itself in paraphrase and verbalisation. There is a last instrument, the one in which the listener returns to the other the effect that their behaviour has had on them. It is feedback.

Feedback is not a judgement, nor an evaluation, nor a diagnosis. It is information: "when you do this, I feel this". It does not tell the other what to do, but offers them something precious, the possibility of seeing themselves through the eyes of the other.

For it to work, feedback must circumscribe the reflection of the speaker within the precise and limited boundaries of a situation. This operation makes the affirmation impersonal, lightens it of the burden of judgement and provides the other with glasses to observe themselves in a different and renewed way.

At this point, the dance has already accomplished a transformative movement. The listener does not limit themselves to receiving: they send the other a message not only of visibility, but of positive recognition. And, together with recognition, they also indicate the path to follow, the step that can be taken. They do not push, do not oblige, do not judge. They show a possibility. And, together with the possibility, they also offer

a broader margin of action, in view of an improvement that is concrete and achievable. Feedback, if well given, is always a powerful messenger of hope and of the possibility of renewal.

Feedback, thus understood, is one of the most powerful instruments for transforming a conflict. It does not accuse, does not defend itself, does not demand. It offers the other information they would not otherwise have regarding how their behaviour has been perceived and experienced. And precisely because it does not judge, it does not induce the other to defend themselves. It invites them, instead, to reflect, to consider a point of view different from their own, to see themselves with new eyes.

Third movement: transforming

Expressing and listening are the first two movements of the dance. But they are not enough. A conflict is not transformed simply because the parties express themselves and listen to each other. There is a third movement, the one in which the facilitator accompanies the group toward a solution that does not annul differences, but values them.

It is here that win-win management comes into play. The expression is well known, but often misunderstood. It does not mean finding a compromise, a middle way in which everyone gives up something. It means seeking a solution that satisfies the needs of both parties, without anyone having to give up their own difference. It is not an agreement at the lowest level, but an encounter at the highest.

For this to be possible, it is necessary that empathy come back into play. Not as an abstract concept, but as the concrete faculty that allows one to intercept the emotivity of the other and, at the same time, to self-regulate one's own reactivity. In the moment in which I welcome the emotion of the other, in fact, I do not limit myself to understanding it: I also offer myself the occasion to observe my reactions, to suspend the impulse to defend myself, to choose a response rather than suffer a reaction. I win with the other and I win with myself. This is the deepest sense of win-win: not a negotiation technique, but an experience of mutual enrichment.

The facilitator who practises win-win management does not set themselves up as an arbiter, does not decide who is right and who is wrong. They set themselves up as an accompanist of a process, and together as a master of an art. Their task is to help the parties to make their needs explicit, to distinguish them from their positions, and to seek together a solution that satisfies them both. But their task is also to return to the group the added value of this process: the fact that, in the moment in which one learns to mediate with the other, one also learns to mediate

with oneself. It is not simple work, because it requires leaving the logic of clash, in which the other is an adversary to be defeated, and entering a different logic, in which the other is a bearer of needs as legitimate as one's own.

Teaching the art of mediation does not mean teaching procedures, but educating to a presence: the capacity to stand in the relationship without defending oneself, to welcome the other without appropriating them, to stand in difference without fearing it. It is this presence that makes authentic engagement possible, the engagement that is not born from conformity to the group, but from feeling recognised in one's uniqueness.

5. Time and empathy

If we look at the competences we have described, we realise that they all have a common denominator: time. Representational communication requires the time to stop, to look within, to say "I feel" instead of reacting. Assertiveness requires the time to affirm a boundary without snapping. Silence is literally suspended time, the space between stimulus and response. Paraphrase requires the time to repeat, to verify, not to pass immediately to the counter-reply. Verbalisation requires the time to feel the other's emotion, instead of judging it. Feedback requires the time to describe a behaviour instead of labelling a person. Win-win requires the time to distinguish needs from positions, to seek a solution that satisfies both, instead of imposing one's own.

In a conflict, the first thing that is lost is time. One reacts on impulse, one responds instinctively, one snaps. The facilitator of discontinuity is the one who restores time to the relationship. They do not slow down out of cowardice, but to create the space in which something new can happen.

But time, alone, is not enough. Time is the condition, not the content. What fills that time, what gives it substance and direction, is empathy. Not empathy as identification, as fusion with the other, but empathy as openness to difference, as resonance with discontinuity. Empathy is the privileged receptor for intercepting the emotivity of the other, but it is also the stimulus that allows us to self-regulate our own impulses. It is this empathy that makes silence possible (without it, silence is indifference), paraphrase (without it, it is a mechanical repetition), verbalisation (without it, it is a diagnosis), feedback (without it, it is a judgement), win-win (without it, it is a compromise at the lowest level). It is this empathy that holds the competences together and makes them authentic.

Time and empathy, therefore, are not two separate experiences: they are the two expressions of a single gesture. Time is the space that opens; empathy is what fills it. The facilitator of discontinuity is the one who knows how to open that space and how to fill it with presence. They are the one who restores to the relationship the time it needs in order not to be a battle, and the empathy it needs in order not to identify the other as an enemy to be confronted, but as the one who externalises what intimately already belongs to us.

6. Conclusions

We started from an observation: engagement in education is not only a cognitive or motivational matter. It is, first of all, a relational matter. Authentic involvement is born from the quality of the relationship, not from the quantity of stimuli or the perfection of methods.

We have sought to show how a reconceptualization of empathy – from identification to openness to difference – can offer new interpretive keys for the trainer's communicative competences. We have outlined the figure of the facilitator of discontinuity, the one who does not resolve conflicts but traverses them, does not eliminate differences but welcomes them, does not impose their own truth but seeks it actively and critically with the other. Their dialectical acts resemble a dance, which is articulated in three passages: expressing, listening, transforming. And we have identified in the relationship with time and with empathy the common denominator of all these competences.

Along this path, we have contributed to overcoming some current notions that reduce empathy to something other than what it is. Not only identification, which annuls otherness by reducing it to the same, but also emotional contagion, which confuses empathy with an involuntary transmission of states of mind, devoid of distance and recognition. Authentic empathy is something else. It is the openness to an otherness that cannot be reabsorbed, the recognition of a distance that cannot be bridged. It is the capacity to stand before the other without fleeing and without appropriating them, to welcome their difference without reducing it to what we already know. And it is, at the same time, an honest and difficult dialogue with the shadow that is within us: because the other, in their irreducible diversity, reveals to us a part of ourselves that we did not know, that we had removed or that we had not yet encountered.

The proposal of the facilitator of discontinuity is not a technical model, but a pedagogical orientation that calls the educator into question

in their entirety: in their competences, but also in their capacity to traverse their own self in order to encounter the other. It is a pedagogy of encounter, because it is not founded on the transmission of content, but on relationship; and it is a pedagogy of difference, because it does not seek to annul otherness, but to welcome it as a resource. Recovering the uncomfortable dimension of the educational relationship – made of conflict, difference, discontinuity – appears not only urgent, but profoundly evolutionary.

Future research perspectives could concern the empirical validation of the model, through case studies or intervention research. But they could also explore a different direction: that of educator training. How are facilitators of discontinuity formed? What paths, what practices allow an educator to stand in conflict without being overwhelmed by it? And further: how can the art of discontinuity be taught in an educational system that often encourages conformity and superficial harmony? How can we recover the value of time and silence, in an era that has identified in speed and clamour its own coordinates?

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