

STORYTELLING: PEDAGOGY OF CARE AND INCLUSION OF THE NAIs

STORYTELLING: PEDAGOGIA DELLA CURA E INCLUSIONE DEL NAIs

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Abstract

Assuming that Stories are innate like Man and telling them has allowed humanity to establish relationships, transmit knowledge and develop, this contribution aims to show how Storytelling has come to be considered an innovative and inclusive learning method in schools.

Today more than ever, knowing how to tell stories can allow the student to discern what is virtual from what is real, starting with the Covid-19 pandemic and up to a war that has engulfed our continent, after 70 years of peace and cooperation.

This has brought to the fore the phenomenon of NAI pupils (non-Italian-speaking newcomers to Italy), especially of Ukrainian origin, who have entered Italian schools.

However, the need to proceed with a real and profound inclusion has emerged everywhere: one of the strategies that is proving to be particularly effective in this sense is precisely that of storytelling.

The construction of stories involves the comparison and collaboration of each pupil within the group of peers and therefore allows the recognition of the Other, of his value and his role within the narrative construct, but also of real life, reinforcing both individual and group identity and limiting/overcoming any conflicts, according to the inspiring principles of the "Pedagogy of care".

Storytelling embodies a high pedagogical and didactic potential, especially for digital natives, to help them understand what surrounds them, starting to assume a lucid and aware position, as well as refining a very personal critical spirit.

Partendo dall'assunto che le Storie siano innate come l'uomo e raccontarle abbia permesso all'umanità di intraprendere relazioni, di trasmettere saperi e conoscenze e quindi di svilupparsi, il presente contributo vuole mostrare come si sia giunti a considerare lo Storytelling un metodo di apprendimento innovativo e inclusivo in ambiente scolastico.

Oggi più che mai, saper raccontare delle storie può consentire allo studente di discernere ciò che è virtuale da ciò che è reale, partendo dalla pandemia da Covid-19 e sino ad arrivare ad una guerra che ha investito il nostro Continente, dopo 70 anni di pace e cooperazione.



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Ciò ha riportato alla ribalta il fenomeno degli alunni NAI (Nuovi Arrivati in Italia non italo-foni), soprattutto di origine ucraina, che hanno fatto il loro ingresso nella scuola italiana. Ovunque è nata tuttavia la necessità di procedere ad una reale e profonda inclusione: una delle strategie che si sta rivelando particolarmente efficace in tal senso è proprio quella dello storytelling.

La costruzione di storie, infatti, prevede il confronto e la collaborazione di ogni studente all'interno del gruppo dei pari e consente, quindi, il riconoscimento dell'Altro, del suo valore e del suo ruolo all'interno del costruito narrativo, ma anche della vita reale, rafforzando sia l'identità individuale che di gruppo ed arginando/superando eventuali conflitti, secondo i principi ispiratori della "Pedagogia della Cura".

La narrazione racchiude in sé un elevato potenziale pedagogico e didattico, soprattutto per i nativi digitali, per aiutarli a comprendere ciò che li circonda, iniziando ad assumere una posizione lucida e consapevole, nonché affinando un personalissimo spirito critico.

Keywords

Narrative pedagogy; care pedagogy; storytelling; inclusiveness; NAI.

Pedagogia narrativa; pedagogia della cura; storytelling; inclusione; NAI

1. NAI students today

More than in an era of great changes, we are witnessing an epochal change, marked by the Covid-19 (planetary pandemic), the climate-energy crisis, and the Russo-Ukrainian war, the first real European conflict, after 70 years of peace and cooperation.

The education system is called upon to create new common ground, new meanings and the transmission of values, first of all the care for the Other.

It is time to welcome the identities that surround us and it is precisely in the educational institution that an exchange between cultures, languages, perspectives, ways of perceiving/conceiving the world must take place.

NAI (Non-Italian-speaking Newcomers to Italy) students fit into this complex and articulated scenario, above all of Ukrainian origin, for whom it is essential to share topics relating to the war situation.

In this way their inclusion will be functional to the cultural enrichment of the same teachers and classes.

It is necessary to build a new narration of NAI students (different from economic migrants tout court), starting from the various categories and definitions gradually assigned (Roma-Sinti-Caminanti, Misna-Unaccompanied foreign minors, adopted, asylum seekers, children of reunited immigrants, born in Italy, but children of foreign parents, etc.), who enter the culture in Italy and therefore in the same representation that we create of the NAI.

We must enter into the perspective that we are now faced with a phenomenon that is no longer transitory, but structural and the School can no longer (or at least not only) assimilate the NAI to the profile of the SEN.

These are students destined at least for bilingualism, having very clear in mind that a bilingual is not simply two monolinguals in one, but an individual with a unique linguistic configuration, which allows him to face any communicative need of his daily life, depending on the interlocutor of the moment.

These pupils live in a bicultural dimension (language and culture are two inseparable aspects), with more or less traumatic experiences, wars, conflicts, loss of family and friends, as well as different socio-economic conditions, which must be taken into account in order to avoid disparities.

As regards the different age groups present within the school population, it is first of all necessary to consider 0-6 years, 6-10 years and 10-13 years.

The older ones (14-18 years), especially if unaccompanied, tend to want to regularize their position as soon as possible by finding a job and supporting their family of origin.

According to the same principle, those few who decide to continue their studies mostly choose technical-professional institutes, unlike their Italian peers, who mostly prefer high schools.

2. Denial

The phenomenon of "denial" of one's own language and culture of origin is very frequent, in cases where the NAI feel the need to quickly adapt to those of the country of destination, to avoid discrimination or to improve their own opportunities.

This can lead to a loss of connection with one's language and culture and a sort of denial of one's roots.

However, this dynamic can have negative effects on the mental and psychological health of young migrants, as it can lead to a loss of identity and a lack of sense of belonging.

Furthermore, it can also make it more difficult to maintain a connection with one's family and community of origin, leading to an identity crisis.

3. Methods and Strategies

To encourage the inclusion of newcomers in the classroom, it is essential to draw inspiration from playful and experiential learning, which places all pupils on an equal footing, irrespective of their cultural, socio-economic, knowledge/skills background.

It is an educational method that combines the use of games with cooperation to create an active, fun and engaging learning environment.

It is based on the idea that play is a natural form of learning for children and can be used to teach concepts and skills in an informal way.

Cooperative learning adds to this realization that we learn best when we work together, sharing information and helping each other.

In a playful and cooperative learning environment, children are encouraged to work as a team, share their knowledge and solve problems together through play.

This can help them develop social skills (soft skills), improve communication and become more independent and responsible.

It is necessary to give life to a "School of doing", based on concrete projects, on authentic and situated learning, which appeals to the cognitive, emotional and social sphere, in real and significant contexts.

These are activities and tasks very similar to those that the participants will encounter in real life and therefore have an intrinsic value for them.

The idea is that students learn best when learning is linked to concrete situations, rather than artificial and abstract contexts.

A knowledge, therefore, that passes through the work environment, the natural or community one, in which to apply and integrate the acquired knowledge.

Both approaches aim to create a more meaningful and relevant learning environment that allows them to apply their know-how, developing skills that are transferable to life outside school.

4. Error, affective filter, scaffolding-prompting-fading

In this way, the stigmatization of the error is put to an end, lowering the so-called affective filter, which prevents NAIs from launching themselves into experimenting with the new language, due to performance anxiety.

In particular, this stigmatization refers to the tendency to judge negatively and to punish mistakes.

This can lead to a fear of self, which can inhibit creativity, curiosity, and willingness to take risks, making students less likely to ask for help or answer questions.

The effect filter, on the other hand, refers to the effect that emotions can have on the perception and interpretation of information.

Negative emotions, fear or shame, can affect the perception of mistakes, making them more devastating and threatening than they are.

In general, when error stigma and affect filtering combine, they can create an inhibiting learning environment, which can make it difficult for students to learn from their mistakes and improve.

Teachers and other adults in pupils' lives must encourage a positive attitude towards making mistakes and help them see them as opportunities to learn and improve.

Precisely to facilitate this process we refer to the concept of "scaffolding", commonly used in education to describe a teaching method, which provides progressive and temporary support, to help students understand and complete complex tasks.

It consists of gradually providing help, guidance, and feedback (prompting) to a student as he tackles a task and gradually removing this support as the student gains skills and self-confidence (fading).

This may include breaking down a large activity into smaller tasks, providing models, examples, and step-by-step instructions, collaborating with a more experienced peer, or the teacher's guidance.

The goal of scaffolding is to help students overcome any difficulties and reach a deeper level of understanding of a topic or task, increasing their ability to work independently in the future.

5. Translanguaging

Translanguaging must certainly be favored in the classroom, of course, by teaching Italian, but from a comparative point of view with the language of origin, to enhance it, precisely to avoid falling into denial.

It is a concept that refers to the flexible, dynamic and creative use of multiple languages or language varieties in a communication situation.

It is different from code-switching, which is the act of switching between languages in a conversation.

In translanguaging, on the other hand, individuals draw on their linguistic resources, to construct meanings in real time, in the most effective way possible, rather than switching from one predetermined language to another.

It can occur naturally in multilingual communities, where individuals use the languages they know to communicate with each other, recognizing the fluid and dynamic nature of multilingualism.

By embracing translation in the classroom, teachers can help students see the value of their language resources and support their development as multilingual individuals, able to resolve cultural misunderstandings, overcome language barriers, and gain greater fluency.

It is not a simple sum of different languages, but rather an active process of meaning construction, which involves the selection, combination and creation of linguistic varieties, based on communicative and contextual needs.

In short, a resource for communication and learning, rather than a problem to be solved.

Bilingualism has considerable advantages: greater development of executive functions, problem solving and mental flexibility, but also greater metalinguistic competence, continuously introducing, in one's head, the meanings from one language to another, even with overlapping semantic areas.

Rarely does a word have the same meaning in another language; for this reason the metalinguistic competence, in the NAI, is implicit, strong, and must be brought out.

This allows them to maintain an intergenerational dialogue, a contact with the country of origin, to acquire roots and wings.

Bilingualism also ensures greater marketability in the economic sphere, accessing a greater share of the labor market.

6. Cultural Mediation, as a bridge between two educational/cultural systems

Cultural mediation in the classroom makes it possible to bring the didactic-pedagogical-human plans closer, to build bridges between the cultures of origin and of the host.

It acts as a support/connection, decoding and facilitating relationships, the unfolding of lessons, and dialogue with families, also involving the competent actors of the territory (Third Sector).

In this way, an ecosystem is created, generative welfare of proximity, capable of immersing young people in the Italian-speaking community, prompting them to open up to the new language, with osmotic learning.

The NAI will be positively impressed by this demonstration of practical and emotional closeness on the part of the Italians, towards whom they will consequently be well disposed of.

An approach of mutual linguistic-cultural enrichment can instill confidence in a resolution of the conflict, with a relative return to the homeland, without giving false hopes regarding a rapid favorable outcome.

To facilitate this transition, however, it is necessary to keep in mind the varied and historically fascinating Ukrainian linguistic situation, profoundly influenced by Russification.

In 1920, Ukraine was annexed to the USSR, whose role proved to be decisive in eliminating rampant illiteracy.

Indeed, the entire linguistic apparatus was based on the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, according to which education should serve the construction of a socialist and communist society.

Soviet pedagogy was strongly oriented towards the education of Soviet citizens loyal to the Communist Party and the state.

The Soviet education system was highly centralized and hierarchical, with an emphasis on theoretical knowledge learning and moral instruction.

Education, compulsory for all children, was free and secular.

There was a great focus on learning history, mathematics, and science, but also on moral and political education.

Russian culture and language were considered fundamental to the education of Soviet citizens and as a result, local languages and regional cultures were often ignored.

Soviet pedagogy has been criticized for its lack of flexibility and its emphasis on rote learning and conformity rather than independence and creativity.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Soviet pedagogy was gradually replaced by a more Western educational system, based on a more individualistic and less centralized approach.

7. Makarenko's Pedagogy

In 1991, with the fall of the USSR, the Soviet pedagogy of scholars such as Anton Makarenko (1888-1939), based on uniform, hymn, manual skills, help for the most fragile/little ones, and social work disappeared.

The author is best known for his theories on pedagogical work and his experience in the foundation and management of orphanages and agricultural colonies for abandoned children.

His most important work, "The Road to Life – An Epic of Education", describes his experience in founding and running an orphanage in Ukraine (during the October Revolution and the Russian Civil War) and his unique pedagogical approach.

His educational philosophy focused on the importance of work and self-government as a means of producing responsible and socially active individuals.

The book describes how Makarenko tackled the challenges he encountered in bringing up a group of abandoned and abused children, using work as a tool to help them develop a sense of responsibility and belonging to the group.

Through work and self-government, the children learned to care for each other and democratically govern their orphanages.

Makarenko's book was highly influential in Soviet education and inspired many other pedagogical experiences around the world.

Today, "The Road to Life", but also "Problems of Soviet School Education" are still considered classic texts in pedagogy and are studied by educators and pedagogical students all over the world.

Ultimately it was an education oriented towards the formation of responsible Soviet citizens, who worked together for the well-being of society, through the formation of cooperative working groups, known as "pedagogical colonies".

An educational method based on self-management and self-discipline, in which students were encouraged to solve problems and make decisions in groups.

Today the Ukrainian school looks to Europe, to shake off the Soviet approach, not very understanding, focusing on cooperative learning, innovation, attention to SEN, debates in the classroom, art workshops, and sports, online with evidence according to which motor activity in the morning enhances theoretical learning.

Indeed, according to Ukrainian pedagogy, teachers are the founders of culture, thanks to their ethical and social role; engaging in learning words and phrases in Ukrainian allows Italian teachers and students to discover new curious formulations and structures, opening up to a new culture, different from the Russian one, more widely spread beyond national borders.

8. NAI in the classroom and Rogers and Erickson's Pedagogy of Care

We are talking about highly traumatized young people, for whom even the simple sound of a bell can trigger a sudden cry or a run toward the exit.

This is why the same welcome should softly take place, on tiptoe, with grace, without overemphasizing, making their entrance to school spectacular, but simply taking care, naturally and in everyday life, of their needs.

After all, at least in intent, the presence of the NAI on Italian soil should be transitory, certainly not by choice.

Therefore, we can rightly speak of "Pedagogy of Care", referring to a pedagogical approach that focuses on the relationship between the educator and the student and which emphasizes emotional, physical, and psychological care, as the basis for a meaningful learning process.

The "pedagogy of care" is a relatively new and still developing field in educational theory and practice, however full of references to some of the most accredited schools of thought and reflections of contemporary authors.

Education is considered a form of care and the educator is a support figure, who helps the student to develop their self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-realization.

We start from the assumption that individuals' emotional and relational experiences have a significant impact on their development and long-term well-being.

The educator who follows this approach tries to create a safe and welcoming learning environment, where the student can explore and develop his skills and interests independently.

Pedagogy of care is often used in child education and adult education, but it can also be applied in other contexts, such as in the education of the elderly or work environments.

This approach was developed by educators and psychologists, including Carl Rogers and Erik Erikson, and is based on several psychological theories, such as attachment theory and identity theory.

Carl Rogers was an American psychologist and therapist who developed a line of pedagogical research known as "client-centered pedagogy" (from the famous text "Client-Centered Therapy") or "pedagogy of care".

This approach emphasizes the relationship between the educator and the learner and considers education as a form of care.

According to Rogers, caring and empathy are the foundations of a positive and meaningful learning environment.

In his books "Psychotherapy and human relationships. Theory and practice of non-directive therapy" and "Freedom in learning" the scholar argued that the educator should create a learning environment that allows the student to feel accepted and respected for what he is, regardless of his experiences and knowledge.

Rogers believed that caring and empathy allow the learner to develop his self-esteem and self-knowledge, and to explore and develop his skills and interests independently.

The educator thus became a figure of support and guidance, while the student was at the center of the learning process.

Rogers' approach to the pedagogy of care has been highly influential in education and training and is still used today as a reference model for many training and counseling techniques.

His philosophy continues to inspire educators, psychologists, and trainers as they seek to create positive and meaningful learning environments.

Erik Erikson, on the other hand, was a German-American psychologist and psychoanalyst who developed a theory of psychosocial development, often associated with the pedagogy of care, as it emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships and experiences, for the psychological and emotional development of individuals.

According to Erikson, in the text "Youth and identity crisis", psychosocial development is influenced by a series of crises that must be overcome in a precise order, to ensure harmonious development.

They are related to different stages of life and concern issues such as identity, loyalty, generosity, and self-care.

As argued in the text “The cycles of life. Continuity and changes”, education thus becomes a way to help individuals overcome these crises and develop higher self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-realization.

The educator who follows this approach seeks to create a safe and welcoming learning environment, where the student can explore and develop his skills and interests independently, receiving support and guidance during the psychosocial development process.

Erikson's influence on the pedagogy of care was important because he emphasized the importance of relationships and interpersonal experiences for the development of individuals.

His theory continues to be used in many areas of psychology and education, and the pedagogy of care approach continues to inspire educators and trainers as they seek to create positive learning environments.

And it is precisely in this context that storytelling can be a useful tool, to create a more meaningful and intimate relationship between teacher and student, by sharing personal stories and creating a welcoming and safe learning environment.

Storytelling helps to make learning more engaging and memorable, encouraging students to understand concepts and establishing emotional connections with the creative material.

Furthermore, the process of sharing stories increases intercultural understanding and sensitivity towards diversity, creating an inclusive learning environment.

In summary, caring pedagogy and storytelling work together to promote student well-being and growth.

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9. Natural cultural mediators

Finally, a role of strategic importance is played by realities such as the G2 Network (second-generation migrants), as real natural cultural mediators.

These are young people who, based on their personal experiences and their knowledge of their home and host culture, play an important role in facilitating communication and understanding between different cultures.

They help migrants navigate the host society, providing them with information and support, to face the daily challenges related to integration.

The Second Generation Migrant Network represents an important source of support and opportunities for NAIs, raising public opinion and institutions' awareness of their rights and needs and promoting a more inclusive and respectful society, helping them to feel more at ease and accepted into the host society, to contribute fully to the community.

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