

BEING OPEN TO OTHER GENERATIONS: A RESEARCH ON - AND - WITH ADOLESCENTS IN MANTOVA (ITALY).

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ABSTRACT: The research which is presented in this article has been developed in the last school year with adolescents in the secondary schools in Mantova and was sustained by Regional office for education in Lombardia, Lions club Mantova Ducale, CreadaItalia onlus, and chair of Family Pedagogy in Catholic University of Sacred Heart in Milano. The origin of the project was related to the idea that men and women nowadays need educational help to construct their relationships in a correct way in this changing society and the adult educators must reflect on the new educational needs of the adolescents, in order to educate them to the value of reciprocal RESPECT. The chosen method was to investigate students through an “ad hoc” questionnaire prepared and with the CASI system in the computer classroom, with the presence of a researcher involved in the project. The collected data have been analyzed in order to understand the character of these adolescents and the values to which they testify in everyday life with reference to male: female relationships. The result of this research has been published in a book presented to the town, useful to educators in schools and out of schools; and this year there will be a programme of education offered to parents, teachers and students and other adults together.

Keywords: educations, adult and adolescents relations, family education, family and school relations, out of school education, media education, affective and sexual education.

1. The idea and the proposal of the research project

The research project took place in the school year 2014 -2015 and was proposed by the research centre CREADA, founded and directed by Prof. De Natale. CREADA (Centre for educational relations among adults and adolescents) find its roots in 2006 with the aim to be a place where all adults, who are in relationship with adolescents: parents, teachers, doctors, out

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of school educators, could go to discuss about educational problems and where they could receive educational support for their life. It is evident that the intergenerational dialogue among adults and adolescents is difficult because the educators are not prepared to understand the way in which young people act. Creada is characterized by interdisciplinary experts, not only informed by human sciences, but also by medical sciences. For Creada staff, education is *salus*, health, seeking health, through education, in order to improve the whole personality of each one in his physical, psychological, cultural and relational needs, and in the hidden need to take part in a conscious way to the human life in order to give a contribution to the common good. To be in good health means to be in equilibrium with ourselves, with our world, and with our time; that is to say to live a dynamic equilibrium which is different for each person. Good health is a condition which allows us to live the human experience in a whole and complete way (M.L. De Natale, 2008). This Creada approach is referred to the anthropological ideas of “Personalism”, that is to say that each human being is of value in himself and has his own dignity which is a basic right and responsibility. This is because we have a responsibility to look for a meaning in the personal lives, and this is the educated way to live.

The theoretical and anthropological basis of this research project is “personalism”, which operates in the light of what it is to be fully human: it means to place value on the importance of processes of education, including participation, involvement and commitment in time and space... the light of which is not to be prescriptive, but pays attention to a pedagogy designed to be at the service of the person. “It becomes an aid that can and must be guaranteed in relation to a developing person, becoming aware of the demiurgic forces and self-organization that is formed with reason, freedom and the Word which form the individual in his/her development.” (E. Mounier, 1982, p.103). Personalism linked to man as a person, with its potential values, ideas, resources, is a way of responsible growth, in which the person acquires through education the capacity of freedom -a free membership to values that one must learn to know, recognize and make guidelines for their own lives. According to Guardini, in this respect, the pedagogical activity “was born from an impulse and an energy that have roots in the deepest dimension of the human being” (R. Guardini, 1987, p.54).

This Creada centre is engaged in counseling, research and programmes of formation. The research is focused on adolescents’ problems at national and international level; research on new methods for adult education; and courses for all people interested in improving their own

educational competencies. The method is action research, in order to involve educators to take part to the research project together with Creada researchers, so the educators can be helped with scientific instruments which are created just for their use. The idea of this method is: as long as I learn I change myself, because each researcher studies the human phenomenon in reality and then he tries to act on it and to introduce in it some different ways of behavior. Creada staff are close to educators and offer an educational support so that the educators could overcome the feeling of being alone with difficult adolescents. (M.L. De Natale, 2007). The scientific foundations on which the Creada research is based are attributable to “Transformative Learning theory” by J. Mezirow and to “Community of Practices method” by E. Wenger. The first theory, coming from Teacher College in Columbia University in New York, allows us to understand that adults can learn only through reflection on their direct experiences that enable them to modify their personal theoretical assumptions. It is a necessary process which starts with a “disorienting dilemma” on daily life and which opens to the “reflective thinking” and then to the possibility to change the guiding principles of personal life. “Transformation is a process whereby we move over time to reformulate our structures for making meaning, usually through reconstructing dominant narratives or stories. This provides us with a more dependable way to make meaning within our lives, since we are questioning our own point of view, looking and reflecting on alternative points of view, and often creating a new more reliable and meaningful way of knowing that may be different from our old habits of the mind. This requires us to become open to the points of view of others and to be able to reflect on new points of view and information and often go back and reconstruct what we know and how we know it” (J. Mezirow, 2003, p. 20). Etienne Wenger has demonstrated as adult can learn if they are together in groups with a common interest and can share experiences, ”communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (E. Wenger, 2006, p.15). What is necessary is a shared domain of interest, that is to say, a common shared competence, the community, in order to build relationship which enable them to learn from each other, the practice, that is to say that this group develop a shared repertoire of resources in their practice. The combination of these three elements constitutes a community of practice. The adults educators: teachers, parents, need to construct a community to reflect together on their educational needs. On this basis the idea of this research project was to investigate how adolescents, men and women, live their relations: if there is place for the importance of the respect as the most important educational category for the new generations who seem to live the male female relationship in ways that are not always

correct (see the many femicides in Italy), if the equality man woman can be promoted by appropriate educational interventions in the period of adolescence. This idea was accepted by Lions international group Mantova Ducale directed by Dr. G. Oadini, who shared the research project and supported the research together with the The Regional Office for the schools which enabled Creada staff to enter into the schools. (M.L. De Natale and others, 2015)

2 - The research: methods and procedures

The Creada group prepared a specific questionnaire to administer to students in the secondary schools, with the survey monkey platform, that is to say through CASI (computer –assisted self interviewing) and the students were required to fill the questionnaire simultaneously in computer classroom of the school with the presence of a Creada researcher, as tutor to answer to some possible difficulties of students. With this method the questionnaire is administered through a computer programmed to submit applications in a certain order and in a programmed time. The answers are recorded directly by the computer system with the advantage of directly enforce quality control of the data and the responses in the moment of entry of information. The questionnaire was on line in the creada website (<http://www.creadaitalia.it>) in a protected section dedicated to schools. This procedure guaranteed the authenticity, uniqueness, and quality of the data collected. In order to analyze data from a pedagogical point of view the informations have been processed by a computer expert in the staff Creada who has guaranteed the quality of the user data to their normalization. (M. Mascheroni, in M.L. De Natale and others, 2015, pp. 53-65). This normalization of the data provides a process of verification of the data and its reclassification without alteration of the meaning of subjective response provided by the respondent. The questionnaire is structured in 60 questions divided into different sections, each of which contains specific questions to analyze attitudes and behaviours of the research object. The first part of the questionnaire, together with some statistical information, was referred to a personal family life, as the students judge the relationship between men and women in family, as parents or as brothers and sisters. In the course of evolution and mutation of historical time, the face of the family has changed adapting to new settings derived from scientific experience, from the revolution of the customs and the change of paradigms. The perspective is to reflect on the profound socio-cultural and anthropological transformation, in order to emphasize the educational needs of the families which feel the duty to educate their own children and self-educate themselves. (M.L. De Natale, C. Simonetti, 2014). Mounier

emphasizes “Education must prepare the ground. Today too often reduced to the surface distribution of knowledge and consolidation of social divisions or values of a dying world, it must break with these schemes dead to process a total formation of man, offered equally to all, which leaves everyone free of its latest prospects, to prepare common City balanced men, used to be fraternally with each other.” (E. Mounier, 1948, p.115). Education and the family need to be reevaluated as one indivisible task, as an indispensable right and duty, as an activity to be committed to, exploring their personal qualities of sensitivity, of careful preparation and reflection. This last aspect becomes always more necessary according to the growth of children, because the educational commitment differs over the years, from childhood. Within the family environment, if there is a building-up of the values that will serve as a basis for the development of man, if there is complicity, friendship, love in family relationships, there will be less chance of developing individuals who become violent. The care of children through the family naturally has an educational character. Education has a vital role in the cultural and social production and reproduction and begins in the family. As a method of socialization, education has two dimensions: social, in the transmission of a cultural heritage to the new generation through the work of various institutions, and individual, in the formation of outlooks and visions, acquisition of knowledge, skills and values. In state education systems the individual dimension is subordinated to the social dimension in the context of interests, goals and relations of power and respect, in this case, based on the category of age-generation, whether in the family or in education. Formerly, to educate meant to care for, being restricted to physical care. From the outset, therefore, education is a job and a word gendered, which corresponds to the sexual division of labour in the patriarchal society: the reproductive work of women and the productive and intellectual work of men. Etymologically, in Latin, education referred to a female subject, while teaching and instruction referred to a male subject. This distinction refers to two places: an original place of physical and spontaneous affective relations, of silent nutrition, as in the context of child development – home, family; and the other place of intentional and rational relations, of specific training, and of explicit regulations and control, which expresses a masculine vision of education, namely, the school. The modes of education and of social reproduction vary throughout history and in different societies, as well as among the groups and classes of the same society. Historically, to educate, in the general sense of caring, is not the exclusive role of biological fathers/mothers or of the family or of the school. The care of sons and daughters to early adolescence, from pre-teens into adolescence and youth, in which the parental action is fundamental and underpins not only instrumental and psychosocial values but also values

linked to the sense of life, otherness and solidarity, respect. The family represents a fundamental place for humanization, each individual finding a way that is conducive to the development of rationality and freedom. Man, who is in constant search for his own identity, with the aim of being able to act autonomously and with responsibility, recognizes through family his own value. (L. Musaiò Somma, in M.L. De Natale and others, 2015, pp.123-141). Those who are primarily responsible for this style of behaviour are the parents, who become the reference for in-depth reflection, promoters of life choices: in the lives of the couple nowadays, there should emerge an educational reflection. Then the questions ask the students to make judgements and emotions regarding relationship with their peers and emotional situations that each faces in his personal life path. These questions respect privacy and were organized in a logical and chronological succession. This second aim of the questionnaire was referred to the ways of communication among boys and girls, with reference to stereotypes and prejudices, A third aim was concerned to the personal criteria of the choice for a boy/girl friends and to the characters in the emotional relationship which produce happiness - with questions on intimacy, sexual relations, and motivations in the aftermath. Some important questions were referred to online relation and paid sex among adolescents, about the difference with a relationship face to face. The last part of the questionnaire was referred to the personal couple relationship, if students have and how it was lived, and about the reaction in case of interruption because of a case of treason. In the end the questions ask the personal reaction in front of situations of violence, and as each one dreams the personal life as a couple. The students involved were 439 and were aged between 16 and 18 years old. (L. Odini in M.L. De Natale and others, 2015, p.99-122).

3. Some emerging reflections

Many educational reflections are emerging from the analysis of the responses offered by students. The male female relationship is generally lived on an equal footing, which is an expression of balance in social life, but it is interesting to observe that this relationship is different for adolescents who form a distinctive group according the answers in the questionnaire. It is known that the group plays in adolescence a function of socialization of the interest and proper behavior for heterosexual relationships both because it allows the subject to identify the re-definition of the qualitative aspects of the “self concept”, both because it allows processes of differentiation. The group membership always is lived as an experience of freedom, is a space in which each one can experience transgressive acts, new

social behaviours, where the adolescent is not just alone in the changes that reality imposes. The group offers support when behaviors supported by parental models should be taken independently, helping to overcome the uncertainty, the anxiety, and sometimes the guilt that often accompanies the restructuring of the personality on the basis of autonomy. The composition of mixed groups is typical of adolescence because in this age interpersonal relationships undergo decisive changes mainly due to the attraction between the sexes and to a larger opening secretive plot between male and female. The perceptions of subjective identity is born from "the reflection in other" through friendship between people of the same gender and the "other's gaze" that identifies the subjective gender belonging. (B. Ravasio, 1998). The mixed group in this age is a privileged occasion of meeting, that also could generate conflicts and ambiguity but in the same occasion permits comparison and knowledge on how people operate in different and complementary manner, and that guides future meeting between men and women. What is surprising is that the category of sincerity is not in the language of youth, it appears when they refer about the relationship in social network and it is presented in a contradictory way, for some this way of relationship is more honest, for others, in the social network it is possible to lie better. These responses denounce a situation of uncertainty, confusion, it seems that adolescents in Mantova have not a clear direction, nor moral compass guide them. If it remains as in the adolescents of all generations the desire to form a beautiful, loving couple, where exchange their first sexual and sentimental experiences, the new approaches show greater reluctance and caution than forms of involvement in a reality of a couple. The changes that adolescents must live with include new forms of communications among people. These create uncertainty how to interpret each person's subjective experience, which they do not like in relation to family norms. It is just the search for their identity which is at the heart of seeking new norms in their social life, in interaction with friends in the same age with whom to share a common journey of life.

In analysing a loving relationship, there is a little space for the shared planning, (only 43%) and that is important from a pedagogical point of view since it is possible that in this period of life during which the adolescent is engaged in looking for the meaning of his own life, to choose values, to define his own identity in relation with others, in building his personality, they cannot think of a shared planning as couple, but only of his own life project. It is possible that the relationship is referred to as more to *hic and nunc*, here and now, because of the uncertainty that characterizes all spheres of life, and the relationship is linked to the emotions of the present moment and it is unable to project into the future. In both cases it is

responsibility of educators to propose dimensions of meaning, to the person's tools, to think critically about reality, to connect past, present and future, because each teenager could take a proactive and planning role in the reality of his life. In the inner life of this teens there is the need for finding profound meaning, even if someone believes that happiness is related over all to sexual pleasure, because when that is over every other aspect of the relationship cannot last. (M.L. De Natale, 2015, pp. 129-131).

Sexual relationships appear as a new category for a social relationship, because the sexual pleasure and the sexual exercises are autonomous criteria to judge a relationship, and that means that sexuality is separate from self- respect and other respect, : it is evident that the sexual behaviour in the adolescents is changed quickly compared to the past and it is without any moral reference point.

There is not a pedagogy of feelings by adults and it is always more urgent education to love, to sexuality in the itinerary of self building as responsible person. Even paid sexuality has been justified by 47 on 414 students as a free choose of the subject and such as legitimate, but to the majority the meaning of *eros* is connected to a love relationship. (L. Musaiio Somma, in M.L. De Natale, and others 2015). Education directed to feelings can lead young people to understand what love is, how to prepare it even when each one is seeking for his identity, knowing that each person is a complex system that requires knowledge and self- awareness, in relation to others, that each one is constantly evolving and the feelings and emotions too have evolutionary character. Young people need help in order to reflect on the lovely relationship as a complex phenomenon which requires equality, between free persons, aimed to human fullness but without depending one by the other, autonomous persons. It is necessary to understand that love has its roots on respect for freedom and sensitivity of each one, in a relationship that is not ownership but reciprocity, correspondence, parity. If adolescents are invited to reflect on that, they could decide if they choose to recognize the value of the person for themselves and the others and which approach the like to choose in their emotional relationship.

To conclude:

The educators, parents, teachers, adults, are invited to promote a culture of responsibility, so that young generation could keep the responsibility for the present and the future, and could

gain their real freedom in this world where our freedom is always threatened by continuous social change.

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