

PARENT'S EDUCATION METHODOLOGY

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"Parent's Education", the enhancement of the educational skills and knowledge of families, was born in Turin as a result of activities that emphasize the leading role played by the citizens who commit themselves to being social workers in mental health in a dynamic of reciprocity, which is nourished by bringing forward interpersonal relationships. Some principles derive from the practice of the assemblies of Popular Therapeutic Activity, born in Modena and developed in Turin from 1978, in which parents take active part, speaking in public and talking about their educational pathways.

Because of the fruitfulness of the parents' desire of being active citizens and first connoisseurs of their children, they have been used as trainers in schools since 1995, date on which the Parent's Education principles and methodology were formalised.

This method is spreading at national and international level, contributing to the training of professionals dealing with human relationships: teachers, educators, medical doctors, judges, social workers, etc.

Educational institutions, ASL (Italian Local Health Authority) and Local Authorities adopt Parent's Education Methodology for the updating of their own operators and for initiatives of social aggregation.

From 2001 to 2004, Parent's Education became a European Project, included in the life-long learning program of Socrates Grundtvig 2 involving Italian, French and Scottish Parents Associations. From 2007 to 2009, the European Community approved the Project called On the side of families-Parent's Education in partnership with France, Greece and Italy.

Parent's Education stresses that:

the family is an essential and irreplaceable component of upbringing. A weak and passive role is often attributed to it, that is why it is usually delegated to experts. The family possesses skills and resources that must be acknowledged by other educational agencies.

The Methodology emphasizes the dignity of the pedagogical activity of parents as educational experts, through initiatives targeted at promoting the knowledge and spread of Parent's Education. It is accomplished through the following actions:

- ❑ **Collection, publication and spread of the account of the educational pathways undertaken by parents**
- ❑ **Training that parents provide for experts and professionals dealing with human relationships (teachers, doctors, educators, judges, social workers, etc.)**
- ❑ **Presentation of scientific principles concerning Parent's Education through studies, research, conferences and seminars.**

Parent's Education expresses itself through:

- ❑ **pedagogy of responsibility:** the family fulfils the tasks related to upbringing and is responsible for it in front of the world
- ❑ **pedagogy of identity:** parents' love leads to the development of an awareness that allows the person to recognize himself/herself
- ❑ **pedagogy of hope:** parents' hope is the soul of the life project, of the "think of me as an adult" hope
- ❑ **pedagogy of confidence:** family's confidence gives life to and supports the potential of the child
- ❑ **pedagogy of upbringing:** parents are actors and witnesses to the development path of their child.

Parent's Education suggests the Educational Deal between school, family and health promoted by the

Local Authority in which parents play an active role through the acknowledgement of their knowledge and skills.

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EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF THE FAMILY

Knowledge and skills of parents

It is necessary to acknowledge the educational action of parents and enhance it, analyze its specificity, clarify the characteristics it is possible to rely on. Knowledge is not only theoretical, formal and abstract, but also situated, concrete and everyday. It is rooted in the continuity of relationships and in the specificity of knowledge. It allows us to make concrete analysis of concrete situations. We often consider as resources only those officially validated by research that are sometimes based only on books.

Acknowledgement of this type of knowledge in human sciences enhances relational skills. Generic and abstract studies are likely to trap people with classifications that often turn out to have been self-fulfilled. Units of measurement for man and comparisons rob those who want to engage in the direction of a greater human promotion of their hopes.

Resources defined non-specific and rough comprise skills that the entire scientific community must validate and respect the same way it respects the "experts' skills". Parents are experts with full rights as regards their children and the choices concerning them. Beside the educational acknowledgement of the pupil's subjectivity, expressed in the "*the child is the teacher of the adult*" formula, the scientific pedagogy of Ms. Montessori lays the foundations for the necessary respect of choices made by parents.

Validation of Parent's Education Methodology

Presenting and setting the scientific bases of parents' responsibilities correspond to suggest trusting their educational activity again. Experts realize that it is necessary to work together and also learn from families¹.

An American expert notes that: "*Traditionally, the prevailing approach towards families, in particular those with disabled children, is derived from the fields of medicine, psychology, upbringing and assistance. By resorting to the methods of social sciences, experts have examined the family in the same way in which a physician examines a patient. The result is that most of the experts argue that families are engaged in a continuous struggle to deal with the devastating problems regarding, for example, the presence of a person with a disability. Parents and other members of the household are considered by most experts on the basis of their weakness and lack rather than of their strength and their resources*²."

Fortunately, this paradigm is changing: "*We are questioning the 'inadequate' models that accompanied the practice of experts, replaced by theories that support the competence of families... Who wishes to understand (and respect) the experience of parents increasingly turns to the parents themselves to obtain their interpretation of the situation they are experiencing. Instead of taking a view from the outside, these researchers depend on parents to define the meaning of their choices and the world that surrounds them*³".

- ¹ The study of the sociologist Frank Furedi, [Paranoid parenting](#), emphasizes the influence of the experts who gather at the bedside of a family supposed to be ill in order to give diagnosis and advice. This often has the effect of confusing parents and especially to make them lose confidence in their skills leading them to delegation or 'resignation'.
- ² P.WICKAM-SEARL, [Mothers with a Mission](#), in P.M. FERGUSON D.L.FERGUSON S.J.TAYLOR, [Interpreting Disability](#), Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York 1992, pages 251-52.
- ³ [Mothers with a Mission](#), page 252.



Parents' dignity

Educators, medical staff and teachers set to *listen* to parents, to learn from them. They restore the meaning of mutual and equal learning of this word that has acquired a therapeutic sense because of the frequent medicalization and pathologising of relations. Listening often means interpreting, or *auscultating*, giving ear to those who have problems, looking for symptoms and clues to detect diseases. *People not problems* is the title of the book by Don Ciotti: people with skills and experience able to enrich those who turn to them.

The accounts of parents are not simple evidence, they are analyses which enclose an objective knowledge and a life project. They are indications for a judge, a health-care worker, a teacher, to be accepted, because the expert on that boy is his parent, it is his parent who has objective responsibilities for the future, it is his parent who has drawn up the boy's growth path. Operators' decisions must be equally taken with parents, holders of educational knowledge.

Learning from parents

Listening to parents in order to learn about a specific type of pedagogy:

- Learning the uniqueness of children from them. Parents possess the secret of their children's growth, they have shared it. They have worked out projects for and with them. They have lived in the same environment. They know the traditions and the social situation in which their children live.

- Learning the specificity of the family upbringing from them. Being parents means possessing a generalizable knowledge that derives from the exercise of that function.

For centuries, Parent's Education has been accepted and never questioned. Our society has always acknowledged it even if we have not encoded it. There was no need. It existed and was enhanced. Various factors lead now to the need to identify its specificity.

- Modernity has destroyed the village community, the extended family and the sharing that supported and handed down Parent's Education.

Parents in their daily action implement pedagogical values.

Pedagogy of responsibility

Fundamental feature of the family action. It is the basis of parental upbringing and, as such, it has a style and a specific approach. There is no one who can deal with it with the same intensity. A very close bond and a form of upbringing that is shaped on this approach develop. The family is responsible for the child's upbringing in front of the world. The child's success and happiness is the family's success and happiness. It cannot quit, it cannot resign. It cannot blame other institutions. This responsibility, taken positively, provides the family with a strength and a capacity that no other educational agency has. It must succeed. It must find solutions. That is why it should have organization and research skills. The pedagogy of responsibility makes it impossible to seek loopholes or alibi: the child must grow up, and he/she must do it properly.

The upbringing of children is up to the couple or, as it often happens, to a single parent. The sense of continuous and conscious responsibility, borrowed from the family, is functional to the tasks undertaken by schools and health institutions which must verify the results of their action in the long term.

Pedagogy of identity

***“Ogni scarrafone è bello a mamma sua”
 (“Even an ugly child is beautiful to his mother”)***

Becoming a person means acquiring identity and, above all, recognizing and accepting it. This does not pass through a single activity linked to the individual, but through a social action. We identify ourselves with the others through the others. And the others, in the most difficult and delicate moment of a child's growth, are our parents. They are the ones who, from the outset, outline the relationship of the man with himself. For both mother and father their child is the most beautiful and intelligent child in the world, he/she is unique, and it must be this way, otherwise that investment of human energies that is the children's growth would not take place. The child has the need to feel that he/she is unique in the world, which is a fundamental condition to

accept himself/herself. Qualities forming the person will develop from this gained awareness and the more they will be based on the acceptance of parents, the greater the self-confidence of the individual will be.

Pedagogy of hope

The drive toward the future, toward a positive development, is deeply rooted in the parents' action. Hope means growth and overcoming of difficulties, investment and tension toward a development that must take place with good results. "Fortis imaginatio generat casum" (*A strong imagination produces results*), as Montaigne emphasizes. Parents' hope is the soul of the life project, of the "think of me as an adult" hope. A dimension that was incorrectly defined irrational. Going beyond any reasonable expectation means encouraging a continuous tension toward the solution of problems.

Parents' hope is measured on the child, on his/her abilities, on the need to go further, to overcome difficulties. In this dimension there may have been excesses, due to the social abandonment of parents, left alone in front of the educational challenge. Hope is the fundamental element for a continuous search for solutions in every field of human sciences and becomes a necessary quality for the development of the person.

Pedagogy of confidence

Whereas pedagogy of hope is characterized by a 'long' dimension (in the course of one's existence, it develops in a project that aims at becoming a life project), pedagogy of confidence has a daily dimension and is more related to the ability of the individual. It is linked to choices and forces that the child deploys. He/She feels that his/her energies are not perceived as hostile or extraneous, but they are accepted and included in a project that his/her parents are aware of and responsible for. Capabilities are nourished and strengthened by a direct relationship: parent's confidence does not only support the potential of the child, but it also helps this potential to grow. In addition, it is necessary when the child becomes aware of his/her own capabilities and begins to make choices. Parents know him/her better than any other person and their support and approval have an incomparable weight. They are instruments of growth through which the family gives autonomy to the child and takes him/her away from itself, while, on the other hand, preserving a very close bond that becomes stronger in the exercise of confidence.

Pedagogy of upbringing

The intervention of parents is characterized by a continuity that other educational situations do not have. Their action has the feature of a scientific experiment of which they lay the foundations and which they can follow in space and time. They witness the development of a personality that they determine and by which they are determined. They are driven and encouraged by the child's physical and spiritual evolution and become more likely to be won over day after day. Upbringing is a continuous bargaining that, on the one hand, does not allow any refusal to collaborate beforehand, and, on the other, requires the will to adapt to subsequent changes. Parents incessantly suggest creative solutions to situations determined by the demands of an individual in continuous development. In the current *liquid* modernity, without stable reference points, their intervention acquires significant importance because, in addition to their necessary flexibility, they must simultaneously set stable guide lines, functional to a safe development, directed towards constant values.

Parents as trainers

Experts dealing with human relationships (teachers, doctors, educators, judges, social workers, etc.) acknowledge parents as people able to provide guidance on children, have equal relationships and make an educational deal. The Framework Law on disability 104/92, for example, emphasizes it when, as regards school integration, it provides for the presence of parents in the working groups in addition to teachers and practitioners. The specificity of the families' knowledge is presented through training courses: after an epistemological overview on Parent's Education Methodology, they talk about the educational itineraries undertaken together with their children.



They are trainers, as a vocation and hands-on practice, they express their skills on their children through their accounts, a non-invasive tool linked to the reality that has the feature of immediacy, of affective and emotional reconstruction of a pedagogical path based on empathy. These are qualities that human sciences have risked losing because of the depersonalization determined by the influence of positivism. They can restore them today if they take Parent's Education into serious consideration both in theory and in practice.

THE INSTRUMENTS OF PARENT'S EDUCATION METHODOLOGY FUNCTIONAL TO THE EDUCATIONAL - HEALTH DEAL

Parent's Education Methodology, which provides for the collection, publication and spread of the parents' educational pathways, the training of professionals dealing with human relations through the families' accounts and research, has developed tools such as:

- *Groups of narration*
- *"With our eyes"*, the introduction of the children made by their parents
- *Visual communication*, enhancement of the educational activity of parents

GROUPS OF NARRATION

*Nessuno insegna a nessuno,
tutti imparano da tutti
(Nobody teaches anyone,
all learn from all)
Paulo Freire*

As an instrument of Parent's Education Methodology, it has the aim of increasing awareness among parents, enhancing and collecting the accounts of the education itineraries undertaken with children.

Parents and all those who are interested in the Methodology participate: teachers, students, educators, administrators, health-care workers, doctors, judges, social workers, etc. They bring their experience about how they bring up their children or how they have been brought up as children.

Each participant responsibly tells only what he wants other people to know, he/she freely talks about the educational itinerary made as a parent or as a child, his/her upbringing, the most significant episodes, his/her character, his/her behaviour, without set patterns, starting from his/her own experience. There are no statements of a general nature: they tell about situations lived and experienced.

Groups of narration are organized at territorial level, in schools (class, group of classes, institute), in associations, in parishes, etc.

In the Groups there are no conductors or experts, some of the participants take responsibility for the group's smooth functioning. They:

- ✓ illustrate the principles of *Parent's Education Methodology*
- ✓ provide continuity
- ✓ ensure time periods and make a schedule of the meetings
- ✓ seek presences
- ✓ allow everybody to narrate in turn without being interrupted and while one speaks all the others listen to him/her
- ✓ collect accounts for possible publications
- ✓ make a report of what is related in the groups, reading it in the following meeting, as the evidence of the educational value of the reflections of participants.

Groups' members orally tell about the itineraries of growth, as a result of this:

- those who have narrated are invited to write what they have told

- accounts are collectively read and collected by the people in charge
- meetings continue on educational themes chosen by participants: everyone tells how he/she has dealt with them according to his/her own experience
- the group periodically deepens the theoretical components of the Methodology
- after a certain period the itineraries of growth are updated
- participants publicly present their accounts in the institutions in which the groups are active (schools, associations, parishes, etc.)
- collected itineraries are distributed on a larger scale, with the consent of participants, as evidence of the family's educational skills.

Groups of narration enable participants to gain the awareness of the parents' educational skills and the need for their promotion. The accounts have a social value: their publication and spread are evidence of active citizenship, they make the share capital represented by the family upbringing visible and are opportunities for the professionalisation of experts involved in human relationships.

The regular meetings of the Groups of narration allow the construction of territorial networks of collective parenthood and the implementation of the deal between generations.

Theory and practice of Groups of Narration

*Non ridere, non piangere,
ma cercare di capire
(Do not laugh, do not weep,
but try to understand)*
B. Spinoza

'Nobody teaches anyone, all learn from all

Groups of narration are based on everyday life and on positivity: they do not start from problems, but from the pride and joy of being parents. The common basis is the children's growth, bringing them up is like building bridges: we do not search for soft or fragile ground, we build on the rock. The groups start from positivity, with the awareness that its promotion will enable participants to overcome negativity.

In the Groups of narration there are no conductors or experts, parents know their children and the story of their growth better than any other person and they are co-authors of such story. The account of their choices and experiences has an educational value for those who have carried them out as well as for the others. They are all on the same level, they are all experts and researchers in the same way. Collective protagonism allows an involvement that becomes common responsibility for the running of the Group. The indication given by Paulo Freire *Nobody teaches anyone, all learn from all*⁴, is the basis of the methodology, the focus of the collective growth.

Groups of narration are open to everybody and functional to the social use of narration. The parental upbringing expressed in the stories has a value for the community, must be spread and become common heritage. It is necessary to promote widespread parenthood in society and the awareness of the parents' educational skills in those who have professional liability in the field of human relations. Groups of narration are part of a social dynamic that aims at creating a sympathetic and conscious social fabric and training professionals able to lead to equal collaborations with families.

⁴ P. FREIRE, *La Pedagogia degli oppressi*, Gruppo Abele Ed., Torino 1998.

Groups of narration, an educational activity

At the basis of the Group's methodology there is the dynamics of narration. At the beginning, every parent introduces his/her own child orally or in writing; in the following meetings, he/she also talks about the choices made according to the topics collectively identified. He/she does not give abstract or generic indications, the knowledge circulating in the Groups of narration is a situated knowledge, rooted in a lived and known reality. The Group of narration's logic is related to the historical and cultural methodology developed by the Russian scholar Lev Semenovitch Vygotskij (1896-1934) who emphasizes the uniqueness of the person, as a result of his/her choices and his/her story and the necessary progressive vision of his/her development. Everyone gives evidence of himself/herself and of his/her own life, which are indications resulting from a specific competence. Lived experiences and narration are linked: life is expressed in the narration that allows to talk about concrete details, real episodes, linked by the thread represented by the existence of the person. Narration allows to consciously express one's own human path: everyone tells what he/she knows. There are no abstract generalizations, but only a contextualized, witnessed and verified knowledge.

Everyone chooses what he/she wants to tell, the episodes that he/she considers to be significant for himself/herself and for the others, certifies what he/she tells with his/her own life. He/she is the author of his/her account and is acknowledged as such.

Participants listen with interest, without interrupting and especially without interpreting: they do not go beyond what one says. Narrations are not evidence on the basis of which one can speculate or make judgments. There is full respect for the story of one's life, which promotes the growth of the person who narrates the story and of those who listen to it. There is a value of reciprocity: whoever listens will become, in turn, a narrator and will claim the same respect with which he/she has listened to the others.

Reciprocity ensures an equal relationship. Narration nourishes the conscience of those who participate. Who attends the group enhances, legitimates and give strength to the speaker, the more so because this is a collective attention. The effect is that of *empowerment*. Feeling that the others listen to you and understand you creates confidence and allows us to organize our thoughts, to give order to our story, to give a personal touch to it.

Finding oneself in a normal environment beyond emergency

The current culture of suspicion, fear and emergency does not favour the process of growth, in particular the upbringing of young generations. In order to bring up children it is necessary to create a peaceful situation, favourable to human development, in which the sense of confidence in the future predominates. It is necessary to have time to plan one's children's growth, to build situations in which the educational commitment is shared. We do not need alarms, sudden fears to which we must give immediate solutions. It is necessary to predict the results of one's actions and incorporate them into more wide-scale situations where there is sharing. Bring up a child is not a single action, limited in time; it needs memory of the past and prediction of the future. It should be situated in a social space that must be collectively created. *To raise a child you need a village*, says an African proverb: a village characterized by lasting and responsible relationships.

It is necessary to consciously reproduce a situation favourable to reflection. Groups of narration offer this opportunity: they determine a context where the account of the educational itineraries made with children creates a situation of confidence in which it is possible to dispel fears and share projects.

Dynamics of Groups of narration

The participants in the Group of narration sit in a circle, a sign of the equal dignity of each one of them⁵. The atmosphere is quiet: the normal situation is functional to the communication. One of the few rules of Groups of narration is not to interrupt the person who is talking. Each one speaks in turn and has the right to all the time he/she considers to be necessary.

5 P. FREIRE, *Pedagogia degli oppressi*, Gruppo Abele Ed.

Who comes first starts off the narration, his/her story serves as a cutwater, it is like a trailblazer for that of the others.

Some participants commit themselves to indicating the appointments, setting the meeting places, requesting the presence of the others. It is not 'management', but a service, an activity, a social commitment for which each one feels responsible. They make the others respect the narration rounds, in order to avoid a debate in which those with more debating ability and more accustomed to public speaking prevail. The debate starts from a person and then continues, following the seating arrangement. Two participants in turn draw up together the minutes of each meeting. Taking a record of what happens testifies to the significance of the topics and the results of the meetings. Reports provide continuity and can be remade in a publication to be spread also outside the group. It emphasizes the dignity of the stories and reflections of families that become socially communicable culture.

Who narrates has a plan in his/her mind that must be respected, he/she speaks with his/her own method and logic that depends on his/her personality and story. Those who listen participate and encourage the other with their attention, they show respect for the speaker and give him/her the time he/she deserves.

Everyone feels he/she is playing a leading role: he/she is in front of an attentive and involved audience, puts order in the actions he/she carries out and in his/her thoughts, and makes projects in a loud voice in the highest activity that man is called to accomplish, the upbringing. Words regain their value because they are included in a real-life context, endowed with meaning, a context as a set of events connected around a life, as a group of people gathered by the attention to and interest in what is told.

“Do not laugh, do not weep, but try to understand”

Participation in Groups of narration involves a moral tension determined by the acceptance and respect for the others' life and choices. Parents in the meetings feel as if they are invested of their dignity as educators.

The ethical dimension is suggested by Spinoza who dealt with moral choices and supported what he said with his own life. The philosopher stresses that, in the face of human facts, it is necessary to suspend one's judgment, which often turns into mockery or condemnation, and to *try and understand*. Understanding has a double meaning: on the one hand, it means reflecting and thinking rationally; on the other hand, it means including and interiorizing what has been said, that is to say putting yourself in the others' place. The logic of sharing and empathy characterizes the Groups of narration. The stories, with their development, episodes and details, promote and facilitate this attitude. From the carrying out of the narration we understand the reason for certain situations and choices.

In her essay *Narrative Medicine. Honoring the Stories of Illness*, published in 2006 by Oxford University Press, Rita Charon stresses that the accounts foster more attention as well as a greater capacity for representation and, above all, they induce a sense of affiliation and familiarity. In the Groups of narration each one offers a part of himself/herself, of his/her own story, he/she tells the others about himself/herself by trusting them. It is an action that fosters reciprocity: we cannot pull back, we must return, with our choices and our experiences, that humanity which others have offered to us.

This creates a desire to stay and grow up together. All the more so because at the centre of the Groups of narration there is the dearest thing we have, our children, whose story is put in common because they cannot be an individual property: children are to be given to the world as a present.

Groups of narration in schools

Groups of narration play a particular role in schools. School is the place where children are brought up, where adults, in an era of confusion of roles, must necessarily assume their role as guidance providers for children without delegations.

At present, the major educational agencies, school and family, are the subject of defamatory campaigns by the media, which spread consumerism among younger generations and not only among them. Parents and teachers have the pedagogical function of combating the unbridled desires not only in order to bring up conscientious children but also to build personalities capable of knowing how to choose.

Groups of narration are a tool for educational collaboration between school and family. Scholastic institution adopting Parent's Education Methodology inserts them among its activities, by including them in their POF, by suggesting them to the Teaching Body so that teachers can choose one among them.

School is the *Square of the Third Millennium*, the place where everybody gathers in spite of belonging to different religions or ethnic groups; it is the place of *reconciliation*, in which a community encloses the most valuable thing there is: its own future. It is the place where, more than any other, the exchange of information between the reference adults, parents and teachers, is necessary. It is the place where children remain for longer periods: in comprehensive institutes children can stay up to eleven years.

Groups of narration are a linking occasion: families follow the methodology to tell children their stories, first orally and then in writing. Teachers participate as parents or as children. This time they are no longer the only ones responsible for an educational situation. A equal dynamic is developed: they are accepted and understood, as far as their family issues are concerned, with a human dimension that favours the educational deal.

The narration of the upbringing paths and the introduction of children create a situation of necessary connection. After these meetings, the others' children will look different, they will look more familiar, because they have been described through the eyes of their parents. The introductions are an instrument of educational delegation to the group: this is our child with his/her merits and faults, you can take care of him/her as well.

It is a way to remedy the solitude of families, also due to a misunderstood sense of ownership of one's children. We no longer accept the collective upbringing that took place in the extended family and in the village community. Currently, if a child behaves badly and a stranger tells him/her off, his/her parents often become upset and do not accept the sharing of their responsibilities.

In the Groups of narration there is the possibility to weave lasting relationships that lead to a widespread parenthood. Introductions of children are collected in a publication sent to all the families of the class. Meetings continue on topics decided together, each parent tells about his/her own choices helping to enrich the educational solutions of the others. This way they create a network between parents that becomes a social model and spreads at a territorial level.

In the final classes of secondary school and in high school the Group of narration of the class becomes an instrument for the intergenerational deal: parents read their introductions to their children-students. These meetings have a strong educational and emotional impact; indeed, after listening to the positive indications put forward by the parents many children behave better at home and at school. The implementation of the strategy of confidence bear fruit.

Municipalities often promote Parent's Education Methodology, aware of the need to enhance the value of the commitment of citizens as share capital by creating opportunities for educational solidarity and resuming the pedagogical vocation of each community and administration.

Groups of narration and school integration

Groups of narration derive from the experience of families with children with a disability, accustomed to introducing them in all their aspects to experts who consider only their problems. They are used to creating solidarity networks to resolve situations that could not be endured by a single family.

During school integration, these families ask why they must be the only ones to introduce their children. They want to know about their mates, put at the service of other parents the skills that they have developed in years spent to struggle for the acknowledgement of their rights.

The Groups of narration of the classes that are open to pupils with a disability complete the process of integration in which not only mates and teachers participate, parents are a vital component as well. They support the efforts of teachers, steer the children's behaviour and, above all, become sympathetic with the families of disabled people, aware of their difficulties and especially of the pupil's skills. These meetings foster a greater motivation to stay together, to pursue an educational journey that will not end and will always need everybody's support.

“With our eyes”

Instrument of Parent's Education Methodology is the introduction of the child written by his/her family. Every individual has a personality, as a result of his/her human life and his/her experiences.

Parents know their child very well: it is a genetic evolutionary knowledge, characterized by the specificity and uniqueness of the person, based on the itinerary made together with him/her. The purpose of the introduction is sharing the knowledge of one's child and his/her classmates, in order to build a widespread parenthood.

Parents use the language of daily life, they introduce him/her to the teachers and the other parents in evolutionary terms, following his/her growth process day by day. This way, they integrate the network between the agencies contributing to the development of the student's personality, each with his/her own skills and specificity. Parents introduce their child with the immediacy and empathy that distinguish them. They give a broad vision of his/her subjectivity, by indicating his/her characteristics, preferences, relations within the family, friendships, skills that he/she has developed and his/her potential, elements that only the close relationship, such as that between parent and child, can reveal. They do not hide difficulties or problems, but they do not emphasize them and talk about their child's personality in his/her complexity.

Parent's Education methodologically supports the introduction of the family, which is the basis for the educational deal in which the skills of parents and teachers come together in the interest of the child-pupil. It is a valuable instrument, drawn up in accordance with the characteristics, needs and interests of the child, put in the first place with name and surname.

Introductions may contain some photos and the following information:

WHO AM I?

THINGS I LIKE

THINGS I FIND DIFFICULT

WAYS IN WHICH I COMMUNICATE

WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN HELP ME

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ME (the overcoming of difficulties)

WHAT I WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT ME (the contribution to the others' growth)

With our eyes is a useful tool to promote continuity in the transition from an order of school to another, but not only that. In the path of integration of students with a disability, Parent's Education suggests integrating diagnosis with the introduction of one's child, *With our eyes*, in harmony with the legal indications which highlight the pedagogical dignity of parents' choices. The introduction provides professors, mates, other families and experts with the instruments to interact with the child with a disability. The integration of pupils with disabilities, according to regulations, begins with the medical diagnosis, which is essential from the rehabilitation point of view, but which is not essential in the educational context, given that teaching intervenes on the positive elements. The person is a unity in which everything is connected in the interaction between organs, functions and capacities. This is indicated by ICF (International Classification of Functioning) and approved by the World Health Organization in 2001. It suggests switching from an only medical model to a social model based on the person.

With our eyes

Family and integration

After more than thirty years since the first rules gave legal basis for school integration of students with a disability, we must remember all the efforts, commitment and struggles undertaken by teachers and parents to achieve the right to education guaranteed in the Constitution. This is a right that we cannot consider as realized once and for all. The Constitution itself is questioned as well as the principles supporting the needs for school civilization of each and every one. Resources undermining the rights of disabled people are removed from schools and local entities.

The family is always at the forefront of the realisation of scholastic and social integration of children. An example is the struggle to ensure the access of disabled people to higher education. An example of dignity and legal objectivity was given by a couple who, claiming the right of their daughter to pass from secondary school to the next order of school, obtained the judgment of the Constitutional Court of 1987. The same family, called in 1997 to intervene during a Conference celebrating the anniversary of the sentence, declined the invitation: remembering their difficult path would have caused excessive suffering.

Behind achievements of civilization, there are commitment and energies that should be honoured in the defence of the achieved principles. It is necessary to make a balance of the integration process and promote its validity and the path to reach new and more advanced objectives once again.

Identity and disabled people

Integration consists also of formal acts which mark its achievement. The indications of legal pedagogy guarantee the implementation of the rights in the people's interest. They must indicate due and acknowledged obligations. Legal certainty is always proposed in the interest of weaker people. It is necessary to consider them in terms of civilization and progress, in a condition of evolution and improvement compared to the situation in which they were proposed. The law follows and directs the evolution of human society.

An aspect of the marginalization of disabled people was the lack of acknowledgement of their collective identity: they did not exist from a social, legal or historical point of view. Claiming their presence in all aspects of human activity is an act of justice, a compensation that allows to integrate them into their cultural identity.

Over the centuries, their exclusion was evident and declared. Only after the French Revolution their right to educability was claimed: for the deaf by the abbot de L'Epée, for the blind by Celestino Haüy and later for those who were defined as mentally disabled by Edouard Séguin. Positivists, with their scientism often hostile to the values and rights of the person, thought they had to be re-enabled and attributed their fate to the medical field and to assistance. Who had a deficiency should be classified according to its typology, followed and treated in closed structures, with indications that came exclusively from the health-care field. The struggles of the second half of the past century reiterated the need for scholastic and social integration to acknowledge all the rights of disabled people and claim their right to be a person from all points of view.

Years of excess of welfarism and medicalisation have not only segregated them, but have built stereotypes and clichés in the people's mind. People have been led to consider a disability as a disease that had to be treated for life. The pathologizing of problems has led to emphasize the negative aspects rather than the positive ones. A classification based on external or internal symptoms has accustomed us to considering the particularities and the clues without paying attention to the unity of the person. The excess of welfarism has brought commiseration, piety and pity with it. Struggles and awareness should consolidate the respect for the person and his/her rights in the laws. However, there are still traces of old ideas and ways of thinking which are rooted also in the directions dictated by the rules.

Demedicalization of situations

The person with a disability is often defined for what he/she is not or has not: sightless, hearing-impaired, unable to walk, unable to think. Starting only from their deficiencies causes a rejection, which is sometimes justifiable, in those who must accept the student with a disability. If he/she is a sick person, he/she should be cared for, if he/she has specific problems, an expert should deal with him/her, at most a "*school specialist*" in problems, the back-up teacher, should take care of him/her.

Diagnosis is crucial from the medical-rehabilitative point of view: it is necessary to know the pathology and the sick person to intervene, but it is not necessary in the educational field. It is important to know one's decibels and dioptres to put the person in the best condition to be brought up. The teacher, however, intervenes on the positive elements, he/she does not build up on negative elements. Emphasizing the efficient aspects of a person has a knock-on effect: building on what already exists allows to rehabilitate even those parts where there are problems. The person is a unity in which everything is connected in the interaction between organs, functions and capacities.

In the *Documents of experimentation in nursery school and primary school*, published in the "Annals of Education" (5-6 2001, 1 2002), with reference to the chapter Disability and educational culture, on page 141, it is emphasized that: *"We must never define any person by deduction: he/she has not, cannot do, cannot do this and that... Putting the problem of students with a disability in the context of the overall enhancement of differences is useful to condemn technical leaks, both the psychologising ones and the rehabilitative and medicalizing ones. These perspectives are more aetiological than perspective; they focus more on the underlying causes than on the purposes; they detect and work more on deficiencies rather than positive elements"*.

In school it is necessary to know the educational needs common to all, to see the person in all his/her complexity and to consider him/her in evolutionary terms. *"Think of me as an adult"*, stresses Mario Tortello, with a slogan that summarises the values of integration. Considering the student as an adult means imagining his/her growth, involving people interested in his/her changes, which means, as indicated in the letter and in the spirit of the Law 104/92, connecting the medical and educational contexts: practitioners, teachers and parents.

The framework law for deficiencies reiterates the importance of parents in the integration path. The family is the holder of the certificate request and is present in the working groups regarding the individual student, such as the technical Group PEI, or regarding the whole school, such as the institute Group for integration into schools. The family is the owner of rights because it is responsible for children's upbringing and it is rich in skills developed during the educational itinerary of the child. Parents' empathy and sharing determine their child's growth. Their knowledge is not often acknowledged at the scholastic and social level. Media campaigns describe the family as weak and incompetent. In each and every daily or weekly newspaper there are regularly articles on the dangers related to being parents.

Privileged witnesses

Parents who have children with a disability must be more parents than the others, they must respond to special challenges, make difficult choices, address an often unprepared social reality. As the other families do, they practise concrete values: pedagogy of confidence, hope, responsibility, identity and upbringing. They contribute to the physical and moral development of their children in an effective way, sharing every moment of their life, helping them to make choices, supporting them in difficult periods.

Since 1995, many classes have welcomed parents who tell the students about their disabled children's paths of life. Refresher courses for teachers on Parent's Education are set up. Many municipalities organize the training of educational staff according to a methodology that gives the families a leading role. Local Health Authorities ask parents to intervene as trainers with their accounts in front of doctors and nurses.

This helps parents to develop a greater awareness of their skills and social presence, which makes their contribution within institutions even more incisive. Those who are professionally responsible for dealing with human relations consider parents as effective interlocutors with whom they can enter into an educational deal.

Parents introduce their children

Parent's Education Methodology suggests integrating diagnosis with the child's introduction in the official integration path, which is a suggestion in harmony with the legal indications on the pedagogical dignity of the family's choices.



Feature of this introduction is giving continuity to an itinerary that is fragmented between various agencies dealing with the child and in the transition between various orders of school. They are responsible for the upbringing and choices they make in the interest of their child, they intimately know him/her and have evidence of the family time spent outside school.

The diagnosis and profile proposed by parents are integrated by the observational report of the school. This way they integrate the network between agencies contributing to the growth of the student's personality, each with his/her own skills and specificity.

With the eyes of parents

Parent's Education Methodology was acknowledged and funded by the European Community in the context of the life-long learning program Socrates Grundtvig 2. Italian, Scottish and French parents met for three years, exchanging information and methodologies and especially collecting accounts and introductions made by families. In spite of the socio-cultural and economic differences, the parents' commitment and dedication turned out to be the same.

Compared to other European nations, Italy is in a much better position. Its legislation, which is unique in the world, includes the obligation to fulfil school for everyone, whatever the type and severity of the disability are. The heads of institutions who do not accept registrations of students with difficulties may be reported by omission of official records.

The European meetings have been fruitful: a model for the introduction of disabled children called *With our eyes* has been developed and submitted to the European Commission as one of the results of the Project.

In Italy, children's introduction made by their parents is implemented at several levels. GLIP (the Provincial Working Group between Institutions) of Turin has edited and distributed the model *With our eyes* as an example of good practice in all schools. In many educational institutions the introduction *With our eyes* is included together with the official documents about the integration paths of students with a disability.

Protocols and deals between various institutions, schools, regional school directions, municipalities, ASL, associations, welfare consortia were concluded with the aim of formalising Parent's Education Methodology and its instrument, *With our eyes*, as a means essential for scholastic and social integration.

A model of introduction

THE INTRODUCTION OF FRANCES

HELLO

(Photo of Frances at three years old, in the her mother's arms, with the date 1996)

I AM FRANCES

(Photo of Frances at seven years old with the date 2002)

WHO AM I?

I am an eight-year-old girl

I am a daughter

I am a sister

I am a niece and a cousin

But

I can also be a friend

I can also be a mate

I can also be a confidant

(I never reveal secrets)



(Photo of Frances while hugging her mother)

THINGS I LIKE

(Photo of Frances on horseback)

Walking
Toys
Soft objects
Eating (especially apples)
Music
Drinking
Swimming
Looking at people
Going to the city
Playing on the beach
Riding a horse
Exploring new places
Going on the tricycle

THINGS I FIND DIFFICULT

(Frances in her brother's treadle toy car)

Understanding the language
Following instructions
Perceiving danger
Dressing by myself
Eating by myself
Using toilets
Keeping epileptic fits under control
Concentrating on the things that do not interest me
Sleeping in a new environment
Walking when my balance is unstable
Understanding others' feelings
Learning new skills

WAYS IN WHICH I CAN COMMUNICATE WITH YOU

Tell my name and look at me when you speak
I will take your hand to indicate what I want
Speak clearly
I sometimes indicate what I wish with my eyes

WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN HELP ME

Make me participate in everything
Allow me to move freely in a safe place
Encourage me to meet other children
Do not be overprotective
Teach me new activities
Help me to do things I like
(such as swimming, riding a horse, going out)

Help me to make new friends

**Be creative!
Create new opportunities for me**

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ME

I suffer from epilepsy - please learn what you need to do in the event of a fit
I follow a diet from which gluten and dairy products are excluded - please ask what I can eat
When I have little balance, you will have to use my 'bridles' in order for me not to hurt myself
When I walk, I have to wear my protective helmet
I am sometimes nervous but I cannot say why

WHAT I WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT ME

I am very good at keeping secrets
I like you reading me stories
If you want, I can take you to go for a walk in my garden
And...
If you put my arm around your neck, I can also give you a kiss.

Some of the terms used by experts to describe Frances

Indefinite developmental disorder
Serious learning disorders
Incurable polymorphic generalized epilepsy
Communication disorders
Autism
Cerebral palsy
Movement disorders
Muscular hypotonia (ataxia)
Sleep disorders
Food intolerance (gluten, dairy products)
Lumbar scoliosis
Early puberty
Unstable walk, uncoordinated movements of her hands
Insufficient control of the end motility
Disorders in her neurodevelopment
Clinical diagnosis of Angelmann
Possible atypical Rett syndrome
Aggressive behaviour
Lack of verbalization
Abnormal but not pathognomic electroencephalogram
Genetic disease

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Visual communication is an instrument of Parent's Education Methodology. The vividness and universality of images allow the spread of the family's skills and knowledge, giving them a social dimension. They use the audiovisual communication means, which is immediate and understandable.

Objectives:

- Enhancing knowledge and skills of parents through visual communication
- Documenting the activities of the Methodology
- Putting the creativity and competence of those who deal with communication at the service of parenthood
- Creating products with a high social circulation to replace negative stereotypes on the family
- Spreading the values present in educational itineraries made by parents together with their children (pedagogy of hope, confidence, identity, responsibility and upbringing)
- Training media operators through the narration of parents' educational itineraries to transmit the family's educational values
- Promoting an educational communication from the bottom where educational agencies, school, family and local authority work together with experts to create a public opinion favourable to the values of parenthood.

Productions are characterized by immediate readability, suggest a positive image of the family, stimulate discussions and are promoted by the institutions (schools, municipalities, ASL, associations) that adopt and spread the methodology. Who produces them is aware of the principles underlying Parent's Education. The vividness of the accounts allows an explicit communication of the values of parenthood. Visual products convey the peacefulness and positivity of parental upbringing and do not exploit the emotiveness characterizing visual communication.

Types

- **Documentation** of paths of the Methodology: Groups of narration, "With our eyes", Guidance – Teaching how to choose, Legality begins within the family ...
- **Presentation** of the Methodology principles outlined by parents' accounts
- **Narrative revision** of itineraries of parenthood carried out by experts
- **Films** produced by professionals with the cinema's production equipment and techniques.

Audiovisual productions allow aggregation at a territorial level, creating moments of reflection, study, socialization on the occasion of Conferences, Seminars, Teaching Bodies and Training Courses.

Visual Communication

Parent's Education and social communication

Parent's Education Methodology aims at including the upbringing of children by their family in the civil dimension of society: acknowledging parents as those citizens who, in the upbringing and growth of their children, collaborate with public institutions for the care of collective interests. Art. 118 of the Constitution



says that State, Regions and Local Authorities favour: *"The citizens' autonomous initiative (...) for the development of activities of general interest"*.

This awareness is spread through the mass media that reflect their educational function of values spreading. The visual productions about the family of Parent's Education give professional and cultural dignity to the action of media operators that contribute to the creation of solidarity.

Thanks to documentation, parents' educational skills and knowledge become common cultural heritage. It creates a sensitivity able to search for them, urge them, spread them, inspiring a civil conscience concerning parenthood that enhances and supports it at the same time.

Technology allows everybody to create formally correct quality products, it gives everybody the possibility to build up a culture of enhancement of what happens in everyday reality, to bring out values, to give voice to those who have no voice. In addition to experts in communication, Parent's Education encourages schools and associations to take control of the media to give alternative voices in favour of a culture of solidarity and promote parenthood in its various aspects.

Parent's Education and visual communication

The means of visual communication have a power of penetration mainly used for commercial purposes and for the conditioning and spreading of consumerism, as Giovanni Sartori states in *Homo videns*, to fill citizens' time and develop conformism. They should be regarded as agents of transformation of conscience.

Social communication is often performed by professionals, the advertisers, accustomed to creating needs, inducing needs that are not real, proposing situations beyond the limit. They are consolatory productions: they overwhelm consciences, without representing real situations. Since they are accustomed to representing perfection, enjoyment and fulfilment, they deal with social communication in a conciliatory, affected, softened way or in an expressive, violent way, shocking spectators and distancing them from reflection. They take people away from real problems by exalting the possibilities of the means or their professionalism, leaving aside people or problems. They must listen to people, learn from families or offer their skills to those who do not have interests to defend.

Collaboration with those who have planning, programming, production and spreading tasks is important for parenthood: it has become common sense that the family is somewhat unaware, in need of help, when not even guilty. The media highlight the image of weak and depressed parents who are unable to bring up their children and should learn from experts, from theoretical texts. The mass media, which have spread this message and have turned it into public opinion, can give a correct, real and positive picture of the family. This way, the medium fulfils its function of enhancing the capacity of people, offers the starting point for reflection and meets the needs of society, by representing the citizens' voice and by giving them occasion for human and social growth.

The media enhance parents' skills and knowledge

Communication, also the visual one, is not only built with technical means, but is also performed with one's brain and heart, with correct information and social commitment. Who is in charge of information and training about the family must reflect on its value and function.

Parent's Education Methodology proposes scientific indications that focus on family knowledge and skills. It is from these bases that we must start off. The media help rebuilding a sense of collective responsibility towards those who have the task to bring up young generations.

By including visual communication in its own instruments, Parent's Education aims at restoring its educational function of means essential to the formation of the man. To do this, one of the actions provided for by the Methodology is used: the training of experts made by parents, so that experts in communication can acknowledge parents' knowledge and skills and the need for their promotion and spread.

The main instrument is the narration, the account made by parents of the educational itinerary undertaken with their child. The visual communication of the story makes it possible to convey the condition of parenthood with vividness and spread empathy; this happens if the person who takes the images and puts them together, he/she does it with moral awareness and scientific rigor.

The relationship between those who produce videos and who is the subject of the investigation or reportage in the family context has an educational nature: who is interviewed educates who is making the interview and who is making the interview takes possession of the competences of the subject interviewed giving them back and spreading them. Such relationship is mirrored in the final product. It will be much more effective if the relationship has been correct and equal. This communication model is part of professional ethics.

Types

1. Documentation

In the communication society, documenting means giving social significance to the events and presenting them properly to the public opinion. This is especially true for Parent's Education Methodology, a new intervention that aims at bringing a different culture in relations between society and family. It means organizing all the activities in terms of documentation, using means that allow to fix the itinerary so as to reproduce it and build a final product. Thanks to the use of the camera, images are live and vivid; the result of the shot is analytically examined and put in a unified summary to critically review the going on of the intervention. If the video is made in an effective way, it may suggest the replicability of the educational path of Parent's Education, it gives the sense of his/her activities back to the person who has played a leading role and generates a sense of belonging in the community.

Making

"Progetto RaccontiamoCI (Let's tell about us Project), Parent's Education". 'V. Ramella' Primary School, Vigevano (Pavia) 2010.

2. Introduction

An image is worth more than a thousand words. A mother or a father speaking of their child from the screen are a true image of their skills and knowledge. They convey their commitment with clarity: their gaze, their gestures, their attitudes mix with their words in a synthesis representing the essence of parenthood. In the introduction to Teaching Bodies, hospital wards, students' assemblies, anywhere a projection is possible, Parent's Education videos accomplish and promote the direct intervention of the family and the relevant epistemological framework. They provide a summary of the educational action based on image and word.

Making

"La Pedagogia dei Genitori incontra i Genitori della Pedagogia. La soggettività della persona promossa dalla famiglia (Parent's Education meets Education Parents. The subjectivity of the person promoted by his /her family)", Siena 2005.

3. Narrative revision

Parent's Education can also be expressed through narrative revision. An example of this is represented by the videos produced by the students of DAMS University of Turin within a Laboratory where the pedagogical dimension has been suggested by the Methodology.

The Laboratory started with training in which parents have told students about the educational itineraries made together with their children. The narration is a propaedeutic moment that allows a reflection on parenthood values and is a step towards their visual representation. It started a process of research-action in which pupils have enriched their technical competence by learning the linguistic-expressive coordinates with which they can iconically represent social values to be shared. Simultaneously, they have deepened their knowledge about parents' educational activity in theory and in practice, by reflecting on the specificity of their intervention and on the relationship between today's social reality and the family micro-unit.

On the basis of the training they received, they have developed some subjects for the making of their short film. The final product shows how pupils have been able to grasp the educational relationship between parents and children in daily life, in their small gestures, highlighting the fact that parenthood consists of the continuous training promoted by proximity and example.

Makings



“Crescere insieme (Growing together)”; “(Domani) Tomorrow”; “Assenza e indifferenza (Absence and indifference)”; “Una vacanza in famiglia (A family holiday)”; “Radici e papere (Roots and ducks)”; “Gioco di anelli (Game of rings)”; “Il viso in una mano (The face in one hand)”.
Laboratory of television production, DAMS, University of Turin 2006.

4. Filmed sequences

Parent's Education Methodology can be expressed with the ways and means of film production. An example is the short film about the experience of a family with a daughter with disability. The spirit is the same one that has led Lorenzo's parents to promote the film *Lorenzo's oil*: relating an itinerary starting from a real experience to spread a message of hope for all, revealing a reality made of civil struggle and commitment. The producers have produced a short film that could be described as a *documentary film*: in the scene there are the parents, their two daughters and, together with them, professional actors take part in the dialog. The film deals with the theme of the sense of life of a severely disabled person. The result is a synthesis, in which the value and concrete actions taken by the family acquires the efficacy and representability proposed by the expressive maturity of the cinema.

Makings

“Blackout”; directed by Paolo Valentini; interpreters: the Musi family, Debora Caprioglio, Enzo De Caro. Studio 900 Production, Livorno 2006.

Restoring awareness

Many videos do not mention only the final text, but also the backstage, what there is *behind the scenes*: they present the shots, deal with the creation of the product, its planning, designing and mounting. Objectives are manifold: on the one hand, they are didactic, you can learn how to do, all the equipment functional to the final product is shown; on the other hand, the result is alienating, the spectator is provided with the true sense of visual communication: it is a fiction, a construction, it is not reality. The citizen is given back his/her gaze beyond appearances, beyond what the authors want him/her to see; as a result, he/she becomes aware, regains control of his/her own gaze and of the relationship between reality and fiction.