

QUALE MODELLO PER IL SENSO DI CURA? COME CREARE BEN-ESSERE? CONSIDERAZIONI A PARTIRE DA ESPERIENZE EDUCATIVE

HOW TO MODEL THE SENSE OF CARE AND HOW TO CREATE WELL-BEING? SUGGESTIONS FROM EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Education can be considered either as a process or as an experience. In the first case, reference paradigms, meanings, objectives and methods are defined theoretically. In the second case, one is involved in a situation that cannot be postponed in space and time, in which the educator and the student live an experience that – pedagogically – should be intentional and meaningful. Intentionality and meaningfulness in the educational experience are oriented to promote resources – viable and intelligible – for the quality of life, able to act on the ability to choose, on the need to acquire awareness of what one does, on the ability to generate transformation-growth (personal, social and environmental). The present contribution wishes to propose some reflections on the specific category of well-being, starting from a research that sees a dialogue between the demands of pedagogy and the body-meditative disciplines of the Far Eastern tradition. In this dialogue, neuroscience, the new interpretative paradigms of physics and medicine play an important role in legitimizing the founding intuition of the inalienable unity between mind-body-spirit in the person and the profound interconnection between all existing forms and forces. This assumption highlights the urgency of considering education no longer as a process ascribable to a merely intellectual understanding of “things”, but rather as an existentially rich experience – to be projected as lifelong, life-wide and life-deep education.

L'educazione può essere considerata sia sotto il profilo dell'essere un processo, sia sotto il profilo dell'essere una esperienza. Nel primo caso si definiscono in via teorica paradigmi di riferimento, significati, obiettivi, metodi. Nel secondo caso si è coinvolti in una situazione indifferibile sul piano spazio-temporale, in cui educatore ed educando reciprocamente vivono una esperienza che – pedagogicamente – dovrebbe essere intenzionale e significativa. Intenzionalità e significatività nell'esperienza educativa si orientano a promuovere risorse – percorribili e intelleggibili – per la qualità della vita, in grado di agire sulla capacità di scegliere, sulla necessità di acquisire consapevolezza di ciò che si fa, sulla capacità di generare trasformazione-crescita (personali, sociali e ambientali). Il presente contributo desidera proporre alcune riflessioni sulla specifica categoria di ben-essere, a partire da una ricerca che vede dialogare tra loro le istanze della pedagogia e le discipline corporeo-meditative di tradizione estremo orientale. In questo dialogo giocano un ruolo importante le neuroscienze, i nuovi paradigmi interpretativi della fisica e della medicina a legittimare l'intuizione fondante dell'inalienabile unità tra mente-corpo-spirito nella persona e dell'interconnessione profonda tra tutte le forme e le forze esistenti. Questo assunto mette in risalto l'urgenza di considerare l'educazione non più processo ascrivibile ad una comprensione meramente intellettuale delle “cose”, ma piuttosto un'esperienza esistenzialmente ricca – da proiettarsi come lifelong, lifewide e life deep education.

Keywords

projectuality, well-being, corporeity, awareness, exercise
progettualità, ben-essere, corporeità, consapevolezza, esercizio.

Introduction

Education can be considered either as a process or as an experience. In the first case, we are oriented to theoretically define paradigms of reference on the basis of which we define the meaning of objectives, functions, methods, strategies. In the second case, one is involved in a situation that cannot be postponed in space and time (Iori, 2006), in which the educator and the student live an experience that - pedagogically - should be intentional and meaningful. The intentionality and meaningfulness of an educational experience (Frabboni, 2005) should be oriented towards promoting resources - viable, intelligible and expressible - for the quality of life. In the experiential field one works on the choice of meaningfulness, on the need to acquire awareness of what one does, on the ability to generate transformation-change-growth (personal, social and environmental). The concept of quality of life has made its appearance fairly recently in order to better qualify and characterize the basic dimension of educational intervention: that of well-being. And it is on this specific category that this contribution wishes to propose some reflections, arising from a research that sees the instances of pedagogy and the body-meditative disciplines of Far Eastern tradition dialoguing with each other (Cavana, Casadei, 2016). In this dialogue, neuroscience and the new interpretative paradigms of physics and medicine (Pagliaro, Martino, 2010) play an important role in legitimizing the intuition of the inalienable unity between mind-body-spirit in the person, the profound interconnection between all existing forms and forces. This assumption highlights the urgency of considering education no longer as a process ascribable to a merely intellectual understanding of 'things', but rather as an existentially rich, profound and meaningful experience - to be projected as lifelong, life-wide and life deep education (Dozza, 2018) - which is placed as the director of an existential planning conscious, sensitive, proactive. To this end, the present work, will give relevance to an educational experience of learning through corporeity, identifying in it the space within which the person experiences his wholeness and his power of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual integrity. Understanding wholeness as a key concept-experience from which to work to promote health in its complexity. The wellbeing of the person cannot disregard environmental, social, emotional, mental, relational and spiritual conditions. I am convinced that these disciplines are not only not in contradiction with educational needs and pedagogical perspectives, but that on the contrary, they present numerous tools and methods capable of fostering a virtuous reciprocity between theory and practice, between discourse and exercise. The approach is purely pedagogical and starts from the basic question on the meaning of education to develop it as a project-path-experience for the full flowering of the person, through the promotion of personal well-being and of the environmental context (social, relational, natural). In order for this project to become real, it must concern both the sphere of thought and the sphere of action: thinking and imagining a project, motivating and being motivated to undertake it, putting it into action through gesture, action, conduct and behavior. These factors are necessarily interconnected. It is essential to start from the first reality of being: the body, the space in which one experiences one's own wholeness and physical-mental-spiritual unity. Well-being is strongly connected with the possibility of authentically accessing what the person is, in continuity with the classical teaching "know oneself" - which is not exclusive to Western culture (Panikkar, 2002). Self-knowledge, meant as a care project, opens up an attitude that is attentive to grasping and welcoming the complexity of the constituent dimensions of one's own person, with a view to harmonization and fulfilment. This commitment to taking care of oneself is in fact a practice that expresses the depth of vision of one who is aware of one's interconnection with the whole. Understanding is not only a psychic activity (Mancinelli, 2016), but also involves bodily, emotional, relational, environmental and spiritual dimensions (Fabbro, 2014). All these factors are deeply interconnected, influencing each other and creating a plane of union. What emerges is an image of the person as 'uniqueness' and 'unity' formed by several interconnected areas and, in turn, connected to the Cosmos (Aguirre, 2020). Educating-educating oneself to Life is a project that cannot avoid confronting, concretely, with themes linked to corporeity, the environment, the quality of the inter and intra-subjective relationship, the unity of mind-body-

heart. It is indeed time to unshackle a way of thinking that Edgar Morin would define as reductive because it is disjunctive – tending to separate, divide and analyse in a purely specialized way. This method has now been disproved by the paradigm of complexity devised by Morin himself and by new scientific research that seeks to explore more and more the relationship between the specific and the broader context in which it is contained. This inclusive culture with a complex outlook is struggling to be widely disseminated despite institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) adopting a more integrated concept of health. This institution has set as its constitutional objective ‘the attainment by all populations of the highest attainable standard of health’, defining health as: ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’.

1. Towards a culture of health: cultivating knowledge, exercise and reflexivity

Main topic I intend to describe here as good practice has been developed through a selection of paradigms useful for testing interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches. In particular, Dewey’s pragmatism (Dewey, 1934), phenomenological pedagogy (Costa, 2010), pedagogical problematization (Frabboni, 2013) and humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1971) were considered in order to accredit the corporeal disciplines of the Far Eastern tradition in the educational context and to guarantee scientific legitimacy to the respective methods of knowledge and experimentation of the person (Rivoltella, 2012), which already include a sophisticated health project. The experience I have been carrying out so far draws on this very rich philosophical-experiential repertoire, on its investigative and training method, through a selection of exercises and themes good for reflection aiming at avoiding the theory-practice disconnection and the mind-body separation – in educational, professional and existential dimensions. I start from the shared consideration that the increasingly urgent need to promote health and wellbeing should appeal not only to the scientific community in the health area, but also with increasing commitment to the pedagogical area. Many researchers in the biomedical field are challenging the established mechanistic models of the human organism, as well as those of health and illness. Atomic and subatomic physics has now also revealed the limits of these conceptual references by validating an organic and ecological conception of reality (Schroeder, 2002). The universe can be perceived as a harmonious whole, rather than as a machine composed of a multitude of separate objects. Reality consists of a network of relationships of which the human observer and his consciousness are part (Rovelli, 2020). Space and time are no longer absolute and separate (Krishnamurti, Bohm, 2018), but are perceived as a continuum; this has implications for various scientific assumptions and thus also for the reconsideration of certain value priorities and social practices, including health education and work. The concept of health thus becomes fundamentally dynamic and is therefore increasingly subject to review in a complex key, highlighting the need for a criterion for interpretation and action in respect of which the humanistic scientific sectors – pedagogy, psychology and philosophy – are fully involved (Bottaccioli, 2005). The reconsideration that needs to be tackled does not only concern the theoretical and conceptual bases, but the very reality of the formative, therapeutic, clinical and existential experience. The role of conscious mental activity in the health project has been ignored or underestimated for too long. The importance of mental disposition, of understanding the interdependence between internal and external factors, of knowing one’s own body starting from its health needs and its languages of expression and communication are determining aspects of health in respect of which it is necessary to educate oneself and train oneself. I do not believe it is possible to address the issue of care and health without addressing the theme-matrix of corporeality: as the first reality of existence, it is the heart of education. From these assumptions we can accredit a spatio-temporal vision of the concept-reality of health for which the act of care should include educating to a reorganisation of experience, starting from an elaboration of its perception (Merleau Ponty, 2003). The importance of mental disposition, of understanding the interdependence between internal and external factors (Dossey, 2006), of knowing one’s own body starting from its health needs and its languages of expression and communication are determining aspects of

health in respect of which it is necessary to educate and form oneself. I do not believe it is possible to address the issue of care and health without addressing the theme-matrix of corporeality (Gamelli, 2002): as the first reality of existence, it is the heart of education. An education that concerns corporeality - in its interdependence of physical-psyche-emotional-environmental and cultural factors (Mallgrave, 2015) - cannot really proceed without the direct involvement of corporeality itself, which as the first existential actuality is also the space-time of health. A sound educational design cannot refrain from health promotion as an effective and concrete commitment on the part of the individual to improve knowledge and direct responsibility for his/her own and others wellbeing, concerning behaviours affecting personal growth and social improvement. Health promotion is not only a matter of transmitting speeches or theoretical instructions; instead, it should be based on a “radical” approach: working for a culture of health and for a genuine transformation of behaviour aimed at structuring awareness for cultural and social health determinants (Soresi, 2015). What emerges, therefore, is the importance of a culture of the relationship between personal habits, psychological attitude and health, starting from a culture of corporeality as an exercise for experiencing body-mind interconnection and taking care of it (Pagliaro, 2020). Education in this direction should have an equally strong theoretical and operational aspect. The professional of care – both in educational and sanitary field – might be promoter and witness of an authentic culture of health, through their own professional-existential conduct (Zannini, D’Orta, 2018). One should therefore strive to ensure that every institution responsible for education and formation is a true bearer of messages and a generator of behaviour aimed at promoting well-being; one should be committed in the direction of knowledge, skills and competence and await change. I would like to underline how the temporal dimension through which change can be generated is not inert ‘stasis’, but dynamic volition, aspiration and tension: waiting and expecting imply commitment, involvement and exercise (Casadei, 2019).

2. Key-role of education through corporeality

Here I intend to focus on the theme of corporeality from the perspective of its full and real involvement in educational processes and professional formation; first and foremost, starting from the demands of an education that is careful to promote health. In this regard, the Bangkok Declaration and the commitments already declared in the Toronto Charter are immediately recalled. Both of these actions reinforce the consensus of the scientific community regarding the importance of physical activity promotion for global health promotion and prevention of non-communicable diseases (Global Advocacy for Physical Activities, GAPA, 2010). The objectives are to protect the health and well-being of all people of all ages, to provide quality education and to reduce inequalities: all health care professionals in the different medical, health care and educational settings are called upon to address these priorities. In the light of these documents, which are the result of international scientific-political synergies, a series of questions arise: how, on what scale, in what places and at what times is this activity promoted within our educational systems of various types and levels? What “specific weight” is attributed to physical activity within the educational curricula? What position has the pedagogical scientific community really taken in this regard? Why is physical activity the great absentee in training programs, starting with the pedagogical-didactical area? The absence of this dimension, or its still too scarce and insignificant presence, is an expression of an unbalanced approach in favour of notion over action, of definition over experience, of reserve over commitment, of theory over practice. A further compelling challenge arises from the UNESCO 2030 agenda (UNESCO, 2017), in which education is both one of the urgent goals to be achieved and the key to significant change towards improving the quality of life, in an ecological-holistic-ecosystemic sense¹.

¹ The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are universal, transformational and inclusive, aiming to ensure a sustainable, peaceful, prosperous and equitable life on earth for all, in the present and the future. The goals concern those global challenges that are crucial for the survival of humanity,

Target is a world where human habitants are safe, resilient and sustainable. The challenges and commitments identified are interrelated and call for integrated solutions. To address them effectively, a new approach is needed. Promoting a culture of health and wellbeing means promoting intelligence, sensitivity, responsibility, solidarity and sustainability.

Therefore, it is necessary to know how to relate one's own habits to psychological attitude and health. The state of health of a person is not only the condition of health, but above all the person's perception of his or her own feeling of health, of which the perception of oneself in intra- and inter-subjective relationships is also a part. The term 'wellbeing' identifies the subject-person as an active participant in the quality of his or her own wellbeing and an active participant in his or her own health project, which is also the health of the relational, social and natural environment. The interpretation of the concept of wellbeing and its relationship with the educational instances must be followed by a method to put in place concretely operational paths and to make the declared principles real (Olson, 2014).

Promoting a culture of health and wellbeing means promoting intelligence and sensitivity with regard to the self, to others, to existence, generating close links with the themes and conduct of responsibility, solidarity and sustainability. The intelligence that we intend to encourage is not notionism, nor technicality, but a solid and motivated tension to want to know in order to participate harmoniously in life: it is to inter-read healthy relationships in order to be supportive of the quality of life, to promote health and well-being (Mortari, 2020). Sensitivity is not sentimentalism, but refinement in the exercise of multisensory, perceptive capacity and in the recomposition of the unity between the physical-psychic-emotional state. In its concrete commitment to promote health, educational design considers this concept as a projectual reality, as the active participation of the subject in the process through which to improve the knowledge and direct running of one's own and others' conditions of well-being, to direct one's own existential conduct, to participate actively in the processes of transformation and cure. Therefore, it is necessary to know how to relate one's own habitual behaviours to psychological attitude and health (Le Boulch, 1991). From this point of view, treatment-oriented interventions are aimed at enhancing the organism's ability to know itself and participate in its own healing process, understanding more clearly the close interconnections between wellbeing, psycho-physical state, quality of relational dynamics. This perspective also fits in well with what is argued by humanist psychologists who invite us to highlight the healthy components of the person: the ability to self-organise, self-regulate, expand, discovering and realising one's original potential (Goleman, 2017).

3. A viable model of good practice

Human being needs to regain a genuine sense of reality, through self-knowledge (experiencing his unitary being, body-mind-emotion) that places him in a deep bond with nature, of which he is part and with which he shares strength, energy, fragility and delicacy (Mindell, 2017). The workshop introduces a viable method of education in this direction. A sensory-aesthetic experience - conducted according to a work that crosses bodily gesture, breath and attention - involves the person in developing a look that observes, feels and understands the experience of their own wholeness, in the moment in which it is carried out. Consciously training one's own wholeness is to consolidate a 'matrix experience' of openness and connection with Life, in all

setting environmental limits and critical thresholds for the use of natural resources. They take into account a range of social needs such as education, health, social protection and job opportunities, while addressing climate change and environmental protection. Goals address systemic obstacles to Sustainable Development, such as inequality, unsustainable patterns of consumption, weak institutional capacity and environmental degradation. For the goals to be achieved, everyone must make their own contribution: governments, the private sector, civil society and every human being in the world.

its forms and expressions.

Through the body we move, interact, explore, make ideas and aspirations real. Learning to take care of it activates processes-projects of salutogenesis, an attitude towards a healthy and responsible behaviour of respect for oneself and the Other (Wayne, 2013).

Method

Codified exercises to regulate posture, breath, attention (weight distribution, coordination, visualisation). Silence-listening exercises marked by intervals, to refine attention, perception, relaxation, well-being. Dialogue sessions, to learn to ask questions, reflect, express one's own thoughts and emotions, listen to the vision of others, learn to think together. (The resources used will also include the use of artistic language). Experiencing the interconnection between body, emotion and thought as a condition for a philosophical practice attentive to the aesthetic dimension and to the promotion of the integral development of the person. An introduction to the theoretical-experiential aspects can be useful to grant legitimacy and accreditation of the practice proposed. Reflections should be taken up at significant moments only, taking care not to be redundant or verbose. Silence is functional to the activation of attention in order to observe and correctly reproduce the exercise, as well as to enter into a state of vigilant recollection. Here I would like to outline a viable model of practice, a concrete educational experience based on the following macro-steps:

- - *Self-massage* (in a sitting position). Warming up the body, through the revitalisation of the muscular districts, exploring the contact of one's own body surface, its materiality, density.
- - *Exercises for spinal mobility*, joint fluidity, muscle elasticity. Fluidity of movement is also important to free the mind from rigidity.
- - *Exercises to regulate posture*. Tuning into the forces inherent to the human being in his-her living in a space: rootedness and extension. Knowing how to express them by consciously connecting gesture and attention.
- - *Attention regulation exercises*. Visualising, concentrating, directing and radiating attention. Exploring and training the sensory-perceptual potential.
- - *Breath regulation exercises*. Observation of one's own breath, observation of breath rhythm in silence and vibration through sound emission. The voice is explored as a modulation of breath and an expressive resource, in connection with posture and emotion.
- - *Meditative practice*: body must be prepared and the knowledge of one's own body trained, before embarking on a meditative exercise. This is also part of meditation itself: to have attention, care, thoughtfulness. It is not a strenuous exercise of endurance, but an exercise in learning to be with oneself, to observe in stillness the movement-distraction of the mind-emotion. Learning to be in the mind-body unity in a time of attentive-silent posture which is not to exasperate mechanical reactivity-alertness, but to develop calm vigilance, presence and openness. It is also important to get familiar with oneself with the oscillation of one's attention: present-distracted-present. Meditation can be experienced as an exercise of conscious "return" (Tarthang Tulku, 1978).

All mentioned exercises involve training in various static and dynamic positions and situations (all characteristic of everyday human life): standing, sitting, lying down and walking. Some exercises can involve the synchronous coordination of gesture, breath and attention. Methodologically we learn separately skills but in reality we experience them as interconnected. It is possible to train awareness of this interconnectedness and consciously access internal resources to guide oneself.

Objectives

To explore and realise the circularity between concrete experience - abstract conceptualisation - representation through active experimentation and reflective observation:

- - I know how I occupy space (through body, speech, representation and thought).

- - I know how to give meaning to the relationship.
- - I know how to situate myself in relation.
- - I know how to listen to my body, my breath, my emotion, my thought.
- - know how to respect the other person, his/her body, thoughts, emotions and vision.
- - I can recognise the need for expression (mine and the other person's).
- - know how to value the languages of exploration and expression of body, heart and mind
- - I can collaborate to promote a community of dialogue and create contexts of well-being.

Final remarks

What implications can education through corporeality have in educators training?

Why is it important to aesthetically explore the vision of oneself and the world?

Why orient education towards the exercise of wonder, creativity and transformation?

This issue intends to rise radical questions about what educational experiences can be meaningful for a sound change in life, health and well-being promotion. In this regard, we think that eastern corporeal disciplines and meditative practice are relevant at improving critical, creative and reflective thinking as well as expressive and relational skills, crucial factors of well-being (Block, Cardaciotto, 2016).

It is important to exercise self-awareness through movement and posture that activate the finesse of both attention and gesture, engaging the mind, body and breath in their interconnection. Through body exercise it is possible to expand the perceptive-sensorial field in support of harmonious expressiveness, to activate profound qualities of listening, observation, concentration and contemplation. Self-experimentation through the body stimulates reflexivity and the exploration of one's own thinking as a movement of the self. Experiencing silence trains the ability to direct this movement so that it is intentional and not dispersive, balanced and not confused, divergent and not standardized. To achieve silence is to experience space-time in order to connect with inspiration, with the arising of the not yet happened, the not yet thought, the not yet said, to awaken one's contemplative and creative spirit.

Exploring oneself through one's own corporeity (including the breath), enables one to increase one's ability to observe and express. But in sharing the experience one learns to have respect so that the other is listened to and has the possibility of expressing him/herself and being welcomed. Expressing oneself is a creative act of openness and communication towards oneself and the world (Balconi, 2020).

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