

STIMULATING THE SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH THE COOPERATIVE LEARNING APPROACH

STIMOLARE IL VALORE SOCIO-EDUCATIVO DELL'AMBIENTE SCOLASTICO ATTRAVERSO L'APPROCCIO DIDATTICO DEL COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract

The school environment, as the main formal educational context, should have among its main objectives the development of students also from a social, relational and personal point of view. Therefore, the main didactic challenge should be to propose a strategy capable of taking care not only of notionistic-cultural progress, but above all of social-relational progress by directing students towards citizenship and democratic life. In this regard, one element that the school system cannot do without is the presence, stimulation and learning of assertive communication between the various school actors involved. The study proposes a research conducted in secondary schools, with specific reference to students aged between 15 and 16, who were administered an innovative didactic proposal, based on cooperative learning, in order to investigate its impact on the levels of assertiveness compared to the traditional frontal didactic approach. The evaluation phase was based on the administration of the Gillan's Assertiveness Profile.

L'ambiente scolastico, in qualità di principale contesto formativo formale, dovrebbe avere tra i suoi principali obiettivi lo sviluppo degli studenti anche da un punto di vista sociale, relazionale e personale. Dunque, la principale sfida didattica dovrebbe essere quella di proporre una strategia in grado di curare non solo il progresso nozionistico-culturale, ma soprattutto quello socio-relazionale indirizzando gli studenti alla cittadinanza ed alla vita democratica. A tal proposito, un elemento di cui il sistema scolastico non può prescindere è la presenza, lo stimolo e l'apprendimento di una comunicazione assertiva tra i vari attori scolastici coinvolti. Lo studio propone una ricerca condotta nella scuola secondaria di secondo grado, con specifico riferimento a studenti di età compresa tra i 15 e i 16 anni, cui è stata somministrata una proposta didattica innovativa, basata sul cooperative learning, al fine di indagare il relativo impatto sui livelli di assertività rispetto al tradizionale approccio della didattica frontale. La fase valutativa si è basata sulla somministrazione del Profilo di assertività di Gillan.

Keywords

School Environment, Cooperative Learning, Assertive Communication, Innovative Didactic, Social-Relational Progress

Ambiente Scolastico, Cooperative Learning, Comunicazione Assertiva, Didattica Innovativa, Progresso Socio-Relazionale

Introduction

Assertiveness is a personal competence that is decisive in our way of building relationships: it is that peculiar communicative ability that allows people to assert their points of view in full respect of the needs and rights of others; in fact, chi adopts an assertive communication style is able to express its inner experiences – such as thoughts, needs, feelings, emotions and opinions – without causing harm to the other or forcing the interlocutor to express consent towards our thought (Ares, O'Brien, & Rogers, 1992). The term assertiveness comes from the Latin "*ad serere*" and means "to assert, declare, affirm oneself" (Arrindell et al, 2004): thus identifies a declarative, affirmation behavior. Hence, the frequent misunderstanding that sees assertiveness almost as an ability to bend others to one's own will through a form of persuasive, almost manipulative communication (Ayhan & Seki Öz, 2021). None of this. The meaning of assertiveness certainly includes self-affirmation but at the same time it contains, as mentioned above, also the deep respect of the interlocutor (Dastyar et al, 2019). In this regard, it is possible to imagine assertiveness as the point of ideal equilibrium of a continuum at which extremes are placed (Duncan et al, 1991; Cullen & Pratt, 1992):

- 1) On the one hand, aggressive behaviors (verbal and non-verbal conduct, used in order to selfishly impose one's own needs, desires and opinions, with little consideration for others and lack of respect for the needs of others) (Rolla, 2006).
- 2) On the other hand, passive behaviors (those situations in which it is not possible to express one's needs or desires due to internal experiences related to interaction with society – such as fear of judgment, anxiety, guilt – which blocks us no or make us hesitant and not very effective in affirming ourselves in comparison with the other) (Sonnetti & Meneghelli, 2004).

Style	Conviction	Tone of voice	Behaviour
AGGRESSIVE	My rights are more important than those of others	High	Attitude of prevarication
ASSERTIVE	My rights are as important as those of the others	Moderate	Respectful attitude towards oneself and others
PASSIVE	My rights are less important than those of others	Low	Attitude of submission, flight and avoidance

Table 1: Communication styles

Assertiveness, therefore, is halfway between these two aspects, taking into consideration and – in the right measure – both one's own points of view and those of others: in fact, communicating assertively means placing oneself in an active and proactive way towards people, fully recognizing their rights but at the same time always keeping in mind those of others (Johnson & Johnson, 1991); as a result, assertiveness not only greatly increases the ability to communicate satisfactorily and creates better relationships between people but also has important repercussions on personal well-being (Saito, 2021). Ultimately, assertive behavior is a manifestation of the full recognition – to oneself and to others – of some inalienable rights, including (Zani, Selleri & David, 1995):

- Be treated with respect and dignity, regardless of their social position or role within groups or organisations in society;
- Express their feelings, emotions and point of view;
- Recognize one's own experience as equally important and valuable compared to that of others;

- Choose and prioritize and value what really matters to each individual;
- Say no to a request;
- Ask for what you want or what you feel the need;
- Be able to change your mind.

Affirming these rights and recognizing them to others around us, allows us to take positions and adopt assertive behavior; it is important, therefore, to train assertiveness and, in this regard, research has brought to light the existence of different trainings designed to help individuals not only to become aware of their rights and needs but also to know how to act in life contexts, as assertive skills constitute a powerful tool to improve mood tone and perceived quality of life (Hojjat et al., 2015), manage anxiety, stress and depression (Eslamii et al., 2016), increase self-esteem (Ahyar et al., 2021) and improve relationships (Dastyar et al., 2019).

By virtue of the situation described, it is evident how the school can and should play a fundamental role in the construction and enhancement of assertiveness given the possibility of using multiple techniques and strategies of innovative teaching (Triandis et al., 1963) In this context, the place of learning is modified because the teacher no longer appears to be the only holder of knowledge but, in a role of interaction and co-formation, he too learns in the act of teaching (Sharan, 1980): in light of this, it is evident that the fundamental prerequisite for the implementation of any innovative teaching strategy lies in the fact that the teacher has developed over the years specific and existential skills of school counseling including active listening, communication through feedback phenomenological and the metamodel proposed by the Euro- linguistic programming; moreover, the teacher must be able to promote constructive criticism – aimed at the content and the process (and not at the person) – and assertiveness through the self-empowerment of the individual's resources, in order to become more easily aware of the communicative and relational dynamics that are established in the class and assess whether its communication becomes dysfunctional in relation to the set goal.

2. Cooperative Learning approach for the complete education of students

In the light of what has just been described, a didactic strategy that can be successful in developing assertiveness is *cooperative learning*: it is a method that involves students in group work to achieve a common goal (Sapon-Shevin, 1990), promoting the effect of mutually improving one's own learning; however, to be considered as such, group work must be characterised by the following elements (Meazzini, 1999):

- Positive interdependence: group members rely on each other to achieve their goal; if someone in the group does not do their part, others also suffer the consequences; students must feel responsible for their own learning and that of the other members of the group.
- Individual responsibility: all students in a group must be accountable for both their share of the work and what they have learned; in the tests, each student will have to personally demonstrate what he has learned.
- Face-to-face interaction: although part of the group work can be divided and carried out individually, it is necessary that the members of the group work interactively (verifying with each other the chain of reasoning, conclusions, difficulties and exchanging feedback); in this way another result is also obtained: students learn from each other.
- Appropriate use of skills in collaboration: students are encouraged and helped in the group to develop confidence in their abilities, leadership, communication, conflict management in interpersonal relationships and making and defending their own decisions.
- Job evaluation: Members periodically evaluate the effectiveness of their work and the functioning of the group, identifying the changes necessary to improve its efficiency.

The experiments of this method, currently in use in Italy, highlight several advantages:

- First, all students work longer and with better results, increasing their intrinsic motivation and developing reasoning and critical thinking skills (Giannantonio & Boldorini, 2002).
- Relationships between students are promoted, which are more positive and respectful, as all members of the group recognize the importance of the contribution of each one and thus develop team spirit (Hojjat et al, 2015).
- Personal self-esteem and psychological well-being increase (Hibbard, 1992).
- Comprehension skills improve and learned content becomes more meaningful and persistent in memory (Matthews, 1992).
- During the work in groups, the teacher can invite some students to "model" the classmates who obtain medium-high performance in the different areas of socio-relational skills: the modeling, a technique easy to perform and applicable everywhere, can take place in the context of the CL during the phase of comparison between components within their own group of belonging or between those with the same role in and the different groups (leaders with leaders, seekers with seekers, computers with computers...) : discover how your partner has completed his task, in fact, can facilitate the extraction of winning strategies that can then be replicated and adapted to themselves whenever it is deemed useful to do so (Bahn, 1964).

STRUCTURE	Cooperative	Individualistic	Competitive
INTERDEPENDENCE	Positive	None	Negative
Activity didactics	The more demanding the task, the greater the cooperation between pupils must be.	Proposals for educational activities considered achievable with individual effort alone. The teacher clearly specifies what to do, avoiding having extra help.	The teacher establishes clear rules of competition to follow. The purpose of the teaching proposal is to obtain the best performance.
Perception of the objective	The goal is perceived as important. The teacher promotes cooperation and aid among the members for its achievement.	The student perceives the objective as relevant and valuable. The teacher is committed to the recovery of those in difficulty, and to promote the capacity of each according to the own intelligence. The comparison of individual pupils takes place only with the result to be achieved.	The goal is perceived to be of great importance, in which everyone agrees to win or lose.
Teacher-Student Interaction	The teacher intervenes to teach social skills and control their application.	The teacher is perceived as the most important source of help, reinforcement, support. Try to have a direct relationship with each student.	The teacher is perceived as the most important source for directing confrontation, disputes, reinforcement, help.
Disciplinary interventions of the teacher	"Andrea, can you explain the group's response to this question?"	"Mark do not disturb Elena while working" "Raise your hand if you have need help"	"Who finished the job first?" "Who does not respect the rules will be excluded from the task"

	"Before you ask me help, consult all the members of the group" "Compare yourself on that question with your group mates"	"If I find that someone copies, I will cancel the task" "Hand over the work to the chair when some of you have finished it"	"What do you think of do Ilaria to win the next time" "It is forbidden to copy or get help from others"
Student-Teacher Interaction	The interaction between students is intense and prolonged. Mutual help is indispensable for the benefit of all. The acquisition of skills, also passes through <i>peer tutoring</i> (tutoring between students). "Leavening power"	Each student works for own account with little interaction with Fellows. Help is granted to comrades if it does not disturb their work.	Interaction is strongly controlled by the rules of competition. There are emotions of envy towards those who are better or of revenge towards other fields. "Zero-sum power"

Table 2: Differences between cooperative, individualistic and competitive structures

3. Research Design and characteristics of the Experimental Didactic Proposal

In the research path were involved, for a period of time of three months, five secondary schools of II degree of the province of Salerno, with an experimental group of 150 boys who tested the CL and a control group of as many as 150 boys who, instead, continued with the traditional frontal teaching: the two groups had an average age of 14.5 years (group-experimental) and 14.7 years (group-control) with an equally uniform gender distribution (43% males and 57% females; 45% males and 55% females, respectively).

- *Formation of groups*

It was important for the teacher to take into account the aspects highlighted by the summary of the advantages and disadvantages (Kagan, 1994), before deciding which mode to choose for the formation of groups:

Groups	Advantages	Detriments
Heterogeneous	Balanced High level of racial, sexual, capacity interaction High possibilities for students to be followed by a tutor Opportunities to train groups with different abilities linguistics A better student for each group	Use of time by the teacher Few transference opportunities Possibility of high dependence on group mates Implicit imitation of the other Negative stereotypes

	Organization (one student in aid of three)	
Random	<p>Non-ordinary way of making groups</p> <p>Construction in the classroom of interpersonal networks</p> <p>Non-pre-established roles and teams</p> <p>Quick and easy</p> <p>Groups can be formed without knowing their social status</p> <p>Variety and stimulation of novelty</p> <p>Perception of lack of ulterior motives</p> <p>Low resistance</p> <p>Leadership opportunities</p> <p>High transference opportunities</p>	<p>Possibility of groups where no one knows more than others</p> <p>Possibility of high conflict</p> <p>Language incompatibilities</p> <p>Possibility to establish groups of the same sex or race</p> <p>Limited opportunities for bonding</p> <p>Weak identity of the group</p> <p>Imbalance towards "winners or losers" groups</p>
Homogeneous	<p>High possibility of interaction between the best</p> <p>Low level of conflict</p> <p>High chance of more efficient work in good skills groups</p>	<p>Low level of interaction between members of poor capacity</p> <p>High self-esteem in the best groups, low self-esteem in the poorest groups</p> <p>Possibility of competition</p> <p>Fracture between the groups of the best and the poorest</p> <p>Possibility of demotivation among the least gifted</p>

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of group formation in cooperative learning

- *Defining roles within groups*

The roles were by the teacher according to a fixed shift and after clarifying tasks and responsibilities related to:

- 1) the leader assumes the responsibility of those who verify the objectives and adherence to the task assigned to the group, plays his role in a democratic form, but is responsible for the good performance of the research, study and comparison actions.
- 2) the facilitator assumes the task of moderating during group interactions, facilitating dialogue and allowing everyone to speak in equal measure.
- 3) the seeker, the one in charge of which is the collection of materials that then the individual subjects will study independently; generally, they are more than one and their role is

1. I have ease to take charge of any situation	55	14	55	26	26	50	14	60
2. I adapt to the small rites of social life even if I do not share them	31	57	45	38	41	32	33	23
3. When I find myself arguing, I don't alter the volume of the voice	48	22	43	32	37	44	22	52
4. I have no difficulty staring long into someone's eyes	19	60	21	50	55	21	55	19
5. I would feel lost if suddenly I was asked to deal with an emergency.	19	54	24	56	63	26	44	14
6. When I feel nervous I rub my hands	36	59	38	48	40	26	36	17
7. If the situation requires it, I have no hesitation in raising my voice	35	61	45	56	35	18	35	15
8. To make my way in life, I don't use sarcasm or irony	45	14	58	33	33	45	14	58
9. I think every person has the right to behave as they see fit	55	14	55	26	26	50	14	60
10. I have an easy time saying what I think even when it contrasts with the point of view of others	35	25	41	29	39	39	35	57
11. Even when I'm nervous my hands don't shake at all	32	24	43	25	42	49	33	52
12. I'm quite critical of my actions	9	20	16	42	66	44	59	44
13. I have trouble looking straight into the eyes of the person I'm arguing with	23	56	25	56	50	18	52	20
14. To underline a particular point of my argument, I have no difficulty pointing the finger at one of my interlocutors	23	33	40	42	39	43	48	32
15. I am convinced that everyone should behave in the ways required by education	3	0	6	11	50	36	91	103
16. I am tenacious and generally achieve my goals, whatever the cost	55	14	55	26	26	50	14	60
17. I know it makes me nervous the shaking of my voice when I argue	20	32	40	49	42	34	48	35
18. Even when I listen to others I am attentive to my point of view	35	28	41	29	39	44	35	49
19. Even when others get concessions from me, thanks to the sympathy they inspire me, I make sure that they decide their problems.	31	13	45	27	41	48	33	62
20. I am convinced that letting your feelings shine through is useful in creating a good relationship	36	25	38	26	40	39	36	60
21. If someone tries to take over me, I answer them for rhymes	23	52	25	44	50	32	52	22
22. I use sarcasm to let others know what I think of them	9	56	14	54	33	20	94	20
23. I feel uncomfortable when others criticize me	33	61	41	51	43	18	32	20
24. When others strive to make me something I don't like, I can find a compromise that satisfies everyone.	85	14	52	29	6	46	7	61

25. I can't understand many of the criticisms leveled at me	55	23	55	26	26	50	14	51
26. I tend to approach problems in a cautious and democratic way, involving others	31	5	45	12	41	54	33	79
27. I am embarrassed to communicate my feelings and emotions to others	23	55	25	47	50	26	52	22
28. When I argue with someone, I'm ready to prefer their proposals to mine.	36	52	38	50	40	40	36	18
29. When others are in the midst of difficulties, I think it's not my problem.	9	57	14	40	33	30	94	23
30. I have a hard time maintaining my point of view when I come into conflict with others	33	56	42	57	43	20	32	17
31. I learned a lot by listening to others	31	14	45	26	41	50	33	60
32. I am easily intimidated by bullies	9	52	14	49	33	25	94	24
33. I think showing others your feelings is a sign of weakness and that's why I don't	11	82	16	42	43	15	80	11
34. When I establish a relationship with others, I easily find myself sharing their problem	8	51	9	44	54	36	79	19
35. I find that keeping one's point of view firmly encourages the other to accept a compromise	52	17	50	20	25	57	23	56
36. I keep looking at others, until I realize that this embarrasses them	36	14	40	26	38	56	36	54

Table 4: Results - Experimental Group

For each of the statements below, choose a score from 1 to 4:	1 = never or only very rarely		2 = rarely		3 = often		4 = always or almost always	
	Ex-Ante	Ex-Post	Ex-Ante	Ex-Post	Ex-Ante	Ex-Post	Ex-Ante	Ex-Post
1. I have ease to take charge of any situation	55	62	55	48	26	26	14	14
2. I adapt to the small rites of social life even if I do not share them	32	35	43	42	42	39	33	34
3. When I find myself arguing, I don't alter the volume of the voice	47	56	43	54	38	21	22	19
4. I have no difficulty staring long into someone's eyes	19	22	21	38	54	43	56	47
5. I would feel lost if suddenly I was asked to deal with an emergency.	20	24	19	28	68	47	43	51
6. When I feel nervous I rub my hands	24	33	28	48	47	35	51	34
7. If the situation requires it, I have no hesitation in raising my voice	33	34	48	42	35	37	34	37
8. To make my way in life, I don't use sarcasm or irony	44	44	60	60	32	32	14	14
9. I think every person has the right to behave as they see fit	75	60	56	63	12	16	7	11

10. I have an easy time saying what I think even when it contrasts with the point of view of others	34	20	42	19	37	68	37	43
11. Even when I'm nervous my hands don't shake at all	34	34	42	42	37	37	37	37
12. I'm quite critical of my actions	11	7	16	12	63	56	60	75
13. I have trouble looking straight into the eyes of the person I'm arguing with	25	23	26	38	46	42	53	47
14. To underline a particular point of my argument, I have no difficulty pointing the finger at one of my interlocutors	21	25	40	26	41	46	48	53
15. I am convinced that everyone should behave in the ways required by education	4	9	9	6	49	47	88	88
16. I am tenacious and generally achieve my goals, whatever the cost	51	51	63	63	24	24	12	12
17. I know it makes me nervous the shaking of my voice when I argue	23	25	38	38	42	41	47	46
18. Even when I listen to others I am attentive to my point of view	33	36	42	42	40	34	35	38
19. Even when others get concessions from me, thanks to the sympathy they inspire me, I make sure that they decide their problems.	31	34	45	42	41	37	33	37
20. I am convinced that letting your feelings shine through is useful in creating a good relationship	36	33	42	42	34	40	38	35
21. If someone tries to take over me, I answer them for rhymes	34	32	42	38	37	43	37	37
22. I use sarcasm to let others know what I think of them	22	31	38	45	43	41	47	33
23. I feel uncomfortable when others criticize me	34	33	42	42	37	40	37	35
24. When others strive to get me to do something I don't like, I can find a compromise that satisfies everyone.	33	34	42	42	40	37	35	37
25. I can't understand many of the criticisms leveled at me	55	51	55	63	26	24	14	12
26. I tend to approach problems in a cautious and democratic way, involving others	51	55	63	55	24	26	12	14
27. I am embarrassed to communicate my feelings and emotions to others	22	33	31	38	48	42	49	47
28. When I argue with someone, I'm ready to prefer their proposals to mine.	36	34	43	48	35	40	36	38
29. When others are in the midst of difficulties, I think it's not my problem.	11	13	16	18	63	61	60	58
30. I have a hard time maintaining my point of view when I come into conflict with others	23	24	39	42	42	40	47	44
31. I learned a lot by listening to others	34	22	42	31	40	48	34	49
32. I am easily intimidated by bullies	13	25	18	38	61	42	58	45

33. I think showing others your feelings is a sign of weakness and that's why I don't	4	4	9	9	49	49	88	88
34. When I establish a relationship with others, I easily find myself sharing their problem	25	21	28	26	42	43	55	60
35. I find that keeping one's point of view firmly encourages the other to accept a compromise	31	33	45	42	41	40	33	35
36. I keep looking at others, until I realize that this embarrasses them	33	31	42	45	40	41	35	33

Table 5: Results - Control Group

Before proceeding to a qualitative-quantitative analysis of the results, it should be specified that the sum of the scores of the questions "3 - 8 - 9 - 11 - 18 - 19 - 20 - 24 - 26 - 31 - 35 - 36" define the level of the assertive style, the sum of the scores of the questions "1 - 4 - 7 - 10 - 14 - 15 - 16 - 21 - 22 - 25 - 29 - 33" define the aggressive style, while the sum of the scores of the questions "2 - 5 - 6 - 12 - 13 - 17 - 23 - 27 - 28 - 30 - 32 - 34" define the passive style.

After this premise, it is possible to define the analysis of the scores achieved by the two groups for each style of social interaction in the ex ante phase and after the implementation of the experimental teaching protocol (for the sample group) and after the regular course of traditional teaching (for the control group). This calculation is the result of the sum of the number of answers multiplied by the relative score. Furthermore, it is necessary to specify that the data analyzed are evaluated in their aggregate form in order to consider the changes of the entire group of peers and not referring to the single individual.

	Experimental Group Ex-Ante	Experimental Group Ex-Post	Experimental Group Variation	Control Group Ex-Ante	Control Group Ex-Post	Control Group Variation
Assertiveness Score	4010	5364	+ 1354	4207	4255	+ 48
Aggressivity Score	4932	4473	- 459	4811	4786	+25
Passivity Score	5077	3946	- 1131	7301	7233	- 58

Table 6: Analysis of the results relating to the scores on social relationship styles

As can be seen from the results, before introducing the CL didactic strategy, there were no statistically significant differences between the scores of the two groups, which, on the other hand, is well evident in the data recorded at the end of the trial.

Following the experimental teaching approach, there was a significant increase in the level of assertiveness by the sample group, which was accompanied by reductions in the levels of aggressiveness and passivity. These results allow us to appreciate the goodness of the CL-based protocol in terms of its ability to push young students towards an active and proactive attitude towards activities both at school level and in the various socio-relational fields.

Since, in this particular phase of life, children experience the transition to adolescence, assertive skills play a crucial role and become a central part in the construction of life events (Caprara et al., 2006). The related reduction in the other two areas of analysis and intervention leads to the evidence that an effective didactic action has the ability to intervene in an important way in the students' educational

path, helping to fully satisfy the real objective of the school system as an institution educational and not only aimed at satisfying the notional learning of the various school disciplines. The insignificant variations recorded, on the other hand, in the control group are a further element supporting the validity of the experimental proposal implemented and the specific usefulness of the teaching strategy of the CL as regards the construction and strengthening of assertive skills and the simultaneous process of reduction of aggressive and passive states; therefore, in the light of what has emerged, this research could prove useful for the development of programs aimed at promoting the construction of students' assertive personalities understood as elements of a community with which they have to relate, promoting a state of socio-relational well-being and influencing, potentially, on academic performance.

6. Concluding didactic-pedagogical considerations

On the basis of what has been shown by the present study, it is possible to affirm in the last instance that the school is first of all study, knowledge, culture and learning of knowledge but it is also a place of education and theater of civil growth and (in which the first affections are born and grow): in this regard, it is a question of deciding whether it may be sufficient to interpret the function of teacher in relation to the more or less renewed programs to be carried out or in relation to the needs of the students, which in large part are not immediately scholastic needs but first of all existential (Struyven & De Meyst, 2010; Wesselink, de Jong & Biemans, 2010); in fact, the student builds his identity also in the interaction with significant adult figures outside the family, including obviously those present in school contexts. As has been pointed out from several fronts, the quality of the relationship with teachers is a particularly important aspect in the identification process to the extent that it contributes to forming the self-image of the pupil: in other words, the attitude of teachers affects the training of pupils, confirmed by gratifications or questioned by frustrations that every student encounters in his cognitive and relational learning paths. The school world, although for children a place that requires commitment and that can involve a share of effort, is still an environment that contributes to self-realization and that offers a continuity of relationships: in fact, a characteristic of the school is to provide contexts of relationships simultaneously with adults and peers and, therefore, opportunities to experience their cognitive, relational and affective potential in several directions but within a different framework from the family and more complex from that provided by informal contexts of socialization; in this regard, the obstacles encountered in many cases are often linked precisely to conflicts that adolescents live in the relational field and inevitably go to reflect on the effectiveness of the school path; it is therefore important that teachers do not ignore the importance of the quality of their relationship with students as a factor of well-being / malaise and do not underestimate the function of affective gratification in the process of growth (need for recognition); moreover, it is desirable that the teacher is able to place himself not only as a facilitator and guide on the cognitive level but on the relational and affective level as a figure of positive identification (Kuijpers, Meijers & Gundy, 2010): students ask teachers to accept questions and doubts that sometimes, in the family, they cannot or cannot pose, so it is important to support the ability of teachers to present themselves as competent adults able to support the family in the task of raising children (Wesselink, de Jong & Biemans, 2010).

In this perspective, the opportunity to influence, through didactic action, the style of social interaction towards an assertive attitude, discouraging too aggressive or passive attitudes, is configured as a training opportunity to be seized and valued.

Today more than ever the school has the task of educating: more and more often, however, it happens that it is unfortunately reduced to the mere transmission of cultural contents that children perceive as far from their lives, their interests and their curiosities, ineffective in the task of helping them in their

growth and opening their horizons of meaning and hope; the truth is that the deepest meaning of school in the current social context, as well as the main need of children and young people of this time, is precisely emotional and relational education (Bergsmann et al., 2015). We cannot think that the school has only the task of instructing – often interpreted as an accumulation of notions difficult to place in life – nor can we think that education educates itself and, therefore, ask children to be content with a bookish culture that presents the contents of the different disciplines next to each other without even the effort of no synthesis: if it renounces its educational function, the school fails in its most important task in which it cannot be replaced either by television or by the internet, even if they transmit to children a greater amount of information than can be offered by the school world. A school that today intends to fully assume its educational function is a school that rethinks its project overall and continuously: the school must educate through culture, showing its vital character and making young people savor the tools it provides to understand their humanity, understand reality and interact with it, putting us in communication with others and making us available for comparison (Maglioni & Biscaro, 2014). In this regard, it is certain that the teacher can find in *cooperative learning* on the one hand guidelines that are useful path indicators and, on the other hand, use his relational and communicative competence to enrich the educational offer and build his own "metamodel" of cooperative learning: in conclusion, it is always important to keep in mind the limits of teaching strategies and recognize the intrinsic value of the relationship in the teaching-learning processes because this allows, always and in any case, to have a greater adherence to reality and to offer its students a "knowing how to be" transversal to any context.

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