



The fears of children at the Coronavirus's time

Le paure dei bambini al tempo del Coronavirus

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ABSTRACT

This is a feasibility study that proposes a work grid for kindergarten teachers - but also for parents, grandparents and babysitters, for helping them to decipher the emotions of children and to start, with their small interlocutors, emotional awareness processes at a time, like the present one, in which we all have to face the great fear of a pandemic.

The methodology is qualitative and inspired by the principles of narrative pedagogy.

In light of these principles, we have prepared a conversation on the theme of the fear of Covid 19 with the aim, on one hand, of helping our little witness to become aware of the fears that agitate her imagination, on the other hand, to adopt some strategies for coping with the problem. The emotion of fear pushes the girl to attribute a certain meaning to an event (LeDoux, 1996) and it is in the exploration of this meaning that the conversation took place. Subsequently, we tried to put in place stratagems for the "management" of fear.

Questo è uno studio di fattibilità che propone una griglia di lavoro per gli insegnanti della scuola dell'infanzia - ma anche per genitori, nonni e baby-sitter, per aiutarli a decifrare le emozioni dei bambini e iniziare, con i loro piccoli interlocutori, i processi di consapevolezza emotiva in tempi, come il presente, in cui tutti dobbiamo affrontare la grande paura di una pandemia. La metodologia è qualitativa e ispirata ai principi della pedagogia narrativa. Alla luce di questi principi, abbiamo preparato una conversazione sul tema della paura del Covid 19 con l'obiettivo, da un lato, di aiutare una piccola testimone a prendere coscienza delle paure che agitano la sua immaginazione, dall'altro, a adottare alcune strategie per far fronte al problema. L'emozione della paura spinge i bambini ad attribuire un certo significato a un evento (LeDoux, 1996) ed è nell'esplorazione di questo significato che ha avuto luogo la conversazione. Successivamente, abbiamo cercato di mettere in atto stratagemmi per la "gestione" della paura.

KEYWORDS

Fear, virus, narrative pedagogy, hermeneutics, emotional education.
Paura, virus, pedagogia narrativa, ermeneutica, educazione emotiva.

Introduction¹

Every day, on the news, in advertising, in interviews with various experts, in the unwary claims of politicians, in perhaps equally misleading reassurances, we are bombarded with messages that make the presentation of this unexpected, invisible, dangerous guest even more striking. How to talk to children about what's going on? How to explain the radical change in lifestyles, spaces and times? But above all how can we explain to our children the sense of what is happening, if this sense is not only largely obscure to us but is confronted with our own fears declared?

Fear, we see it every day on our television, makes it aggressive. Violence, even if only verbal, gives vent to a feeling of annoyance, helplessness, resentment for what happened to us. Finding an explanation and even more an enemy is an impulse, rather than a desire, to react to our fears.

Even children and especially pre-schoolers react to fear aggressively. Often this reaction is directed against the other, the bad guy, who makes them suffer, the hidden monster who wants to devour them or, worse, against themselves. This is a very common fear that manifests itself in the sense of guilt for having deserved, even not knowing how and why, the looming threat of evil.

The resulting alarm is precisely fear. I would like to speak above all about this fear because, from this, most of the others derive, albeit with different shades, and because, in my attendance with preschool children, it has proved to be the most frequent.

My suggestion is not to diminish the fears with their pathogenic charge of malaise, let alone deny their existence, but it is in a process of awareness that leads the little one to give voice to their emotions, to identify them and to attribute them a name, then, to find, in the relationship with others, the fruitful seed of both self-esteem and solidarity. The answer to all fears, including those of adults, is in the relationship of the child with his life context. And it is in their environment that we must be able to tell our children what the Covid 19 pandemic is and why it is revolutionizing our lives. All emotions, even painful ones, are important growth environments because they can help the child deal with those problems that reason alone cannot manage (Goleman, 1996).

Several studies highlight the need for emotional learning that starts from the early years of kindergarten (Collacchioni, 2009).

The proposal therefore consists in developing educational interpretative keys to the phenomenon of emotional disorientation, increasingly evident in the behaviour of many children, and even more so in this period, with the aim of preparing concrete answers.

Children, like all of us, interpret the events in the light of their previous experiences, which however, more than in us, coexist with an imaginary and a fantastic populated by monsters, dragons, superheroes, witches, fairies and magical objects. It is here that we thought to find hermeneutic tools to name the fear of the Covid 19 virus. The aim is to motivate children to verbalize the feeling of fear linked to the theme of the new pandemic that has hit the world, in order to foster emotional awareness processes and, with the recognition of others' emotions, the progressive emancipation from self-centeredness. This activity is particularly im-

1 Prof.ssa Anita Gramigna: *Introduction* and 1. *Methodology*; Dott. Giorgio Poletti 2. *About Dragoviro, the virus with the crown: conversation with Valentina, who is five years old* and *Conclusion: the analysis and the results*

portant in an age phase during which linguistic and semantic competence is still insufficient to describe the complexity of emotions and feelings (Piaget, 1955).

We do not propose to learn not to be afraid, on the contrary, our idea is that we must learn to be afraid, because its denial has never solved any of the problems related to this feeling. Here, first, we believe that it is necessary to pass from emotion to feeling, or to the awareness of the monster that agitates in our thoughts: identify it, know it and govern it. The evolution of fears depends very much on the relationship that the child intertwines in his living environment, as well as on his cognitive development (Barone, 2007). Finally, the management of his emotions accompanies a growth process that makes his context a more open training space.

1. Methodology

The first phase of our work concerned the analytical recognition of the international debate on the topic. The works of the main authors were therefore examined, who studied the theme of emotions in relation to the educational development of the child. We then made an informative survey of the nature and characteristics of the Covid pandemic. 19.

The conversation that we present aims to explore the processes of construction of meaning with which Valentina interprets this event, which she hears so much about and which has revolutionized her daily life. The properly pedagogical theoretical framework largely refers to Bruner's reflections (1968), especially those concerning the early stages of cognitive development (1971 and 1992), the narrative construction of reality (1991), the relationship between creativity and knowledge (1988) and finally the metacognitive role of symbol and metaphor (1962). However, we are indebted to the thought of Margiotta (2006) regarding the sense of Pedagogy today and the epistemological background of education in the contemporary world.

Damasio and Goleman provided us with a grid for reflection on the cognitive role of emotions from which to draw the educational consequences. Derrida, Ricoeur and Foucault represent the layout of the epistemological system with a clear hermeneutic matrix. A scenario, that of the philosophers mentioned, on which we have placed Margiotta's pedagogical epistemology. The methodological suggestion of which consists in the analysis of a salient educational experience in the light of a clear epistemological framework. The research device on that experience will be used to problematize the field of pedagogical knowledge. The logic of the theory of formation that pursues or, better, that corresponds to that of life, in turn, sheds a clarifying light on the evidence of pedagogy. This is the procedure that we have applied, in the light of an interpretative perspective of Pedagogy. It was our intention first to interact with Valentina and then to analyse the narrative that followed in the light of its principles. Our purpose has an interpretative character, but also wants to show how the narrative device can carry out a fundamental work of diaphanous and emotional awareness.

It is not so much a question of suggesting a didactic guide or a recipe to the teachers of the kindergarten, but rather of proposing an example as a basis for the educational intervention in an emergency such as that in which we find ourselves. Since what we report is an example of narrative pedagogy of a qualitative framework, we did not consider it essential, at this stage of the research, to choose a larger sample of dialogues for which we refer to the continuation of the research.

The conversation reported here took place on April 15, 2020 during an afternoon and involved a meeting of about three hours during which the dialogues alternated with the drawings. Valentina is a real child, but the name is fictional. The conversation was based on a semi-structured scheme that contemplates only some fixed thematic points (the fear of the Covid 19 virus, the related fears, the rest is left to the spontaneity of the dialogue).

Valentina has known me for some years and has participated, together with other children and with the authorization of teachers and parents, in various narrative meetings on the scheme of the one presented here.

The analysis of the conversation took into consideration the following highlights:

- Admit that you are afraid
- Description and definition of a specific fear...
- ... and related fears
- The drawing, its explanation and its subsequent interpretation together with the individual identified.

The verification of the activity carried out with Valentina concerns the last phase of the conversation, starting from about half, after the execution of the drawing, when we begin to reflect together on what we have learned.

The assessment on verification refers to the results expected at the beginning of this activity, which concern the expression, verbalization and initiation of an emotional awareness process starting from the specific theme of the pandemic.

2. About *Dragoviro*², the virus with the crown³: conversation with Valentina, who is five years old

Valentina. Do you know what *coronaminus*⁴ is?

Anita. I don't know, never heard of it.

V. But how! Everyone talks about it, even television always talks about *coronamirus*⁵.

A. Ah, have you already changed your name? Maybe you're referring to the coronavirus?

V. Yes, I believe so.

A. It is a virus which, they say, would have the shape of a crown.

V. Like the princess one you gave me for carnival?

A. No, to what I understand, it seems to me rather a ball with small tentacles ending in a sucker.

V. What is a virus?

2 **Dragoviro** is a cripple (in Italian) of coronavirus, obtaining an assonant word which is composed of the words **drago** (which in Italian means *dragon*) and **viro** (as a "cripple" of viruses). We get a term that recalls a fear, something dangerous.

3 We talk about **virus with the crown**, and we refer to **coronaviruses**. It is played on the fact that in Italian **corona** means *crown*. A playful expression is thus obtained, but at the same time recalls the strength of this virus. It also refers to the form that is shown of the coronavirus.

4 **Coronaminus** crippling of *coronavirus*.

5 **Coronamirus** is another crippling of *coronavirus*.

A. It is a particle, a very small parasite, so small that you need a microscope to see it, which multiplies inside the cells ...

V. Do I also have cells?

A. Of course. We are all made up of cells. It is the smallest living unit.

But let's go back to the virus that would have the shape of a crown and that seems to me an obese polyp. When this guy meets, for example, a person, usually, that person has his own army which is called "immune defences". This army that we all try to repel or destroy or at least make life difficult for him. And usually it does. When it fails, the virus penetrates and multiplies at the expense of healthy cells, because you need to know that, outside the cells, it does not survive for long.

V. But if you see me, can it also come inside me?

A. Yes, but it is difficult. Seems like he doesn't like children. And then it is not enough for me to see you, it must penetrate your cells to multiply, but, as you know, the cells and especially those of children, defend themselves quite well.

V. What about mothers? Do you like moms?

A. Apparently yes, mothers, uncles, dads and especially grandparents. He has a fondness for adults, in short, go to understand why!

V. Yeah ... why?

A. This is still unknown. There are many things you don't know about this guy.

V. Who has decided that it is called by the name of a crown?

A. Virologists, who are scientists who study viruses.

V. And who decided that virologists are called this way?

A. Always them. It is the pundits who decide the names of things.

V. This time, with the virus, they decided badly.

A. Yeah. But we can change its name, if you want, for example we can find a more appropriate one, what do you say?

V. What does it mean appropriate?

A. Well ... in this case it means that we can give it a name that makes us understand what type this virus is and how it behaves. Let's try?

V. OK ... let's try. I would call it *mostrovirus*⁶, or *dragoviro*.

A. The latter seems appropriate to me.

V. What does it mean spot on?

A. It means adequate.

V. Why didn't scientists give it a proper name?

A. But, you see, they are convinced that it fits perfectly, they saw a crown where I saw an octopus. But the problem is, normally, it's not about people who have a lot of imagination.

V. Why?

A. Because they believe that fantasy is not for science.

V. But then, how do they discover new things?

A. Yeah, good question! I believe that when they discover something new or, for example, invent a medicine that defeats Mr. Dragoviro, they use a lot of imag-

6 **Mostrovirus** (like previously used *dragoviro*) are words that serve to connote the virus in a negative, "bad" way. In this case *mostrovirus* is a term that unites virus with **mostro**, which in Italian means *monster*.

ination together with methods and procedures, that is, the way of doing science. I think they often don't realize it, in fact, they talk about mistakes ... many discoveries are born from mistakes, these pundits are nice guys!

But let's go back to our theme: our Dragoviro is scary, isn't it?

V. Do adults also have fears?

A. Of course, grown-ups are cowards, especially now that they have met Dragoviro, they just don't want to say it, because if they say it, children don't take it seriously anymore. So, either they pretend to be very brave, or they say that fears don't exist or, even, that dragons don't exist. But they don't dare say that Dragoviro doesn't exist.

V. Are grown-ups lying?

A. Sometimes, but they don't like to admit it.

V. Are you a liar?

A. Do I look great to you? With all the fairy tales we invent, and the games and everything else ... do I look great to you?

V. No. You are old, more than great.

A. Yeah, well, patience....

V. But not as old as my grandmother, though.

A. Mmm, let's change the subject, do you want?

V. Let's talk about Dragoviro.

A. And the fear it makes us. I propose a game, attention! Like all games, this is also very serious! Are you ready, Valentina?

V. Ready.

The girl comes to attention as if she were a soldier. We decide to make the portrait of Mr. Dragoviro, to get an idea of something that cannot be seen. Let's take as an example the images of Coronavirus that we find in the newspapers, but we decide to modify them by adding legs, hands and mouth. Then we put a beautiful crown on his head, to satisfy the virologists. We decide which are the most suitable colours, Valentina thinks that black, which is the colour of fear, is fine.

A. Why is black the colour of fear, Valentina?

V. Because it is like darkness and like when you are alone, and nobody is there.

We reflect on the fact that we are also afraid of the dark which, in fact, would have the same colour as Mr. Dragoviro, but we also think that the important thing is to always be able to call mom or someone if, in the dark, we are afraid. In this case, we can also keep other fears in check. Then, since Dragoviro has to do with the dark but it is not dark, we plan to add other colours too. We colour the suckers red and the small tentacles yellow, the eyes white, the mouth, and the crown green. We have the portrait of Dragoviro, in our mind now the guy is confronted with the other dragons, with monsters and witches. It is already less disturbing.

V. What does disturb mean?

A. That makes us a little less afraid. But, you see, there is nothing wrong with being afraid, on the contrary, it is an intelligent thing, often those who are never afraid are senseless.

V. What does this mean?

A. Who do not know the risks that are next to them and therefore cannot avoid

them.

V. So does that mean they are stupid?

A. Well, let's not exaggerate, I would say that sometimes they behave like fools.

V. I am afraid of *Dragoviro* because it can enter your mother and make her sick and then she can also enter inside you and make your cells sick and afterwards we don't play anymore, and I am alone.

A. You put together so many fears Valentina. Indeed, fears often take each other by the hand and call others.

V. For example?

A. For example: *Dragoviro's* fear called the fear of being alone. Think of the others he called. Let's see: the fear of being alone calls that of not having anyone to play with ...

V. The fear that you get sick because you are bad when you do not wash your hands before going to the table and then it is right that you get sick. If I don't wash my hands, *Dragoviro* comes into my cells and then I make my mother sick and then you get sick too. Because I'm disobedient and you don't love me anymore and then it's only right that you don't want to play with me anymore.

A. Look, I think that even if sometimes you don't wash your hands, which is still wrong, I, the mom, the dad, the grandparents, the teacher.... we will all continue to love you. Then, I think that all children and even adults must have someone who loves them even if they are bad. But, be careful! This does not mean that we can do the wrong things with impunity.

V. Does Cova mean with impunity?

A. It means that when you do something wrong, it always causes harm, suffering, small or large and therefore because of that damage.

V. Am I punished if I am wrong?

A. Maybe, I don't know, but I know that if you cause harm someone will suffer.

V. Who caused *Dragoviro*?

A. We don't know. But I believe that pollution has something to do with it, the destruction of forests and woods and everything else.

V. What does it mean, Anita? Everything seems terribly complicated to me.

A. Yes, honey, it's quite complicated and I can't explain it well. We leave this topic for the next conversation, do you want?

V. Yes, that's fine. So, let's talk about *Dragoviro* and all the fears it makes me come.

A. Right. Let's take stock of the situation a little before moving on. Then?

V. *Dragoviro* is bad, I'm not bad, I'm just a little disobedient and when I cause damage someone has an evil or fear. He, *Dragoviro*, is bad because if he makes my mother sick, I am afraid of being alone and when I am alone, I am afraid of the dark, especially if I cannot call anyone. And then if I'm alone, who takes care of me? Like the children Hansel and Gretel who were alone because they were abandoned. It's terrible. I am afraid of being abandoned because of *Dragoviro*. And if I'm abandoned, there is no one who loves me anymore. But I'm also afraid that my grandmother will die, as happened to Sara's grandfather.

A. It seems to me that you have described a catastrophic situation!

V. What does this mean?

A. It means that it is very unlikely that all these things together happen and then that even if someone happened, they would come looking for you, my

mother, my father, a grandfather, ... the important thing is that you say: "Attention, dear gentlemen, that I feel lonely!".

V. Can I also write a kind of notice?

A. I would say yes.

V. But I can't write!

A. Then we draw a notice with all the fears and then with their remedies and when we do not find them, we seek help, always with our drawn sign.

Valentina arms herself with good will and still draws *Dragoviro*, but much smaller than before and puts a kind of muzzle on him, then she colours the sheet with many black marks and finally the empty circles which, in her opinion, are the places and the moments than when she is alone. I suggest you to add the remedies, apart from the muzzle to *Dragoviro*, to which he had already thought, now he adds some of his favourite toys, the people who can come to his aid when he is afraid, finally a flashlight to be accessed only in certain cases, though.

A. Very good, Valentina, I see that I am there too, and I am very happy with it.

V. Why?

A. Because when I feel alone, I call you to play a bit. Do you agree? But I'm also happy because we understood what our fears are, we designed and named them, just like those pundits of scientists do, only that we have more imagination. Then let's see ... we have established that everyone, really everyone, even when we don't wash our hands, we have people who love us, always. Then we must wash our hands to prevent *Dragoviro* from entering our cells. We don't know much about this guy, but now we know him a little more and will keep him away.

V. Anita, but I'm still afraid!

A. Yes, me too. But the goal of the game was not to eliminate fear, we said that we all have fears, the brave is those who know and govern them.

V. But, what does it mean?

A. Put on the princess crown that is true not like *Dragoviro's*. Here as a princess you must: know the fears one by one, give a name and maybe, if you have a little time, also make a good portrait of her, then establish an anti-risk regulation, attention, not anti-fear.

V. A regulation?

A. Of course, like the sign we drew earlier. When fears want to scold you, do the things that help you keep them under control. For example, is it true or not that if we wash our hands, put on masks and stay at home, *Mr. Dragoviro*, crown or non-crown, does it take a lot but a lot of effort to make Mum's cells and mine, too, of course? Here, governing them means knowing them and finding solutions to deal with them. The brave is those who face them, not those who deny them.

V. In short, fear is a right thing.

A. Yes, if we know it and keep it under control.

V. But, *Dragoviro* is not fair, though.

A. Valentina, unjust things happen, by chance or because they are caused by bad people. It is what we call evil, what causes suffering, pain and, precisely, fear. I'm sorry, little girl, I would like to tell you that in the world there are only beautiful things and good people, but this is not the case. But we can try to do the right things and be good people.

V. For example?

A. Wow Valentina, today you ask me really difficult questions. We leave it for the next conversation, do you want? In the meantime, we've learned to keep Mr. Dragoviro in check with his ugly crown, which is a fair thing, don't you think?

Conclusion: the analysis and the results

Valentina, like every pre-schooler, lives the emotional experience in a confused and chaotic way, struggling to recognize and define it.

This confusion, in addition to generating further affective discomfort, can block it in cognitive patterns of denial or resistance to the recognition and management of fear (Crotti, E., & Magni, A. 2002). In children of this age, fears more easily take on the image of a monster, a dragon, a ghost, a witch. Valentina in fact, first thinks of designating the virus with the name of mostroviro then thinks of Dragoviro. On my suggestion we favour the second option because on another occasion the girl had associated the word monster with situations that were very difficult to dominate on an emotional level. Only in the following years did the development of the little girl allow her a more complex and more clearly articulated articulation to the social sphere. In this phase, we focused on identifying a fear that refers to a radical life change for her and for the people around her.

The Coronavirus pandemic also finds us unprepared in this, yet, in its various forms, we should be used to evil: wars, catastrophes, calamities, crimes are commonplace in our newspapers. However, we are not used to seeing our hospitals collapse, to the massacres of grandparents in rest homes, to the overcrowded crematoria of waiting coffins. What baffles us is the manifestation of evil in the pain that grasps us closely, our own unhappiness, the suffering that suddenly takes us, and perhaps it is for this reason that we hide its presence in the eyes of children. "The modern spirit - Bauman writes (2009, p. 62) - was born under the banner of the pursuit of happiness - more happiness, more and more happiness. Each member of the liquid-modern society is educated, trained and prepared to seek individual happiness with individual means and efforts." Children are not told about pain: it is the pedagogical dogma of our time. We don't talk about pain in the family, we try not to mention it, we hide it, we avoid it at all costs. We don't talk about pain at school, we anesthetize with the language of disciplinary formalization. Our children grow in the logic that pain is, for them, an unexpected, annoying, unreal offense like a video game, or impending as a dark fault. In the face of evil and pain "we have been well trained - Bauman clarifies again (2009, p. 81) - to look away and plug our ears". But Valentina, like many children, perceives the worried speeches of her parents, catches the information of the news and lives a situation of radical and disconcerting novelty. She is also unprepared.

Moreover, we think that this concealment of the evil with which we believe to preserve the innocence of children and young people could be one of the causes of the emotional disorientation that many young people seem to suffer today: an emotional malaise that Goleman (1996) has well analysed in difficulties of self-control, in behavioural disorders, in the increase in bullying, as in the considerable increase in relationship problems (Buenasayag M., Shmit G., 2004). Finally, we are convinced that it is precisely this denial that makes our task of explaining the fear generated by the ongoing pandemic even more difficult.

In preschool age, between three and five years, children already have a rich fantastic life animated by imaginary creatures and situations. It is with this fantastic imagination that we must dialogue because there are the interpretative icons that

the child uses in developing answers to problems and action patterns. The answer to a dark fear can be of an anticipatory type, imagining the catastrophe announced by the fear itself, suffering, in preview, from its own presumed or real inadequacy. And it is here that we must intervene with our story, to explain the fear and help the child to interpret a dark and scary event like the virus that is affecting us. The narrative immediately establishes a principle of alliance in this implicit which is against the background of the dialogue we present: *"I am here to help you, you will never be alone, nobody deserves to get sick, no fault deprives us of the dignity of being loved, less than ever, children's pranks.*

No fear is ever banal, every fear has a name, there are no invisible monsters: every dragon has an identity. Dragons can be fought together, we together will not be omnipotent, nobody is, but we are certainly very strong because we are together".

Solitude is the tangle around which many fears coagulate because in solitude the doubt of being alone because one is loved and perhaps does not deserve to be loved. Self-esteem, which is the basis of a peaceful emotional development and which has nothing to do with the almighty narcissism that affects many contemporary children, needs affective sharing because it is based on the assumption of being worthy of being loved and not on that of omnipotence, and not even of the alleged perfection of the budding little genius.

It is no coincidence that the fear of not being worthy of love, consequently of not being loved and therefore of being able to be abandoned, plays a leading role in most classic fairy tales as well as contemporary children's stories. This fear includes many others, because it is a primary emotion (Ekman, 1992). The feeling of abandonment foreshadows and contemplates that of not being loved or, worse, of not being worthy of being loved, and then, almost as a consequence, of not knowing how to defend oneself, of being deceived, of being kidnapped, of being accommodated, of to die. Fear of one's fragility in the face of monsters, dragons, villains. Fear of one's difference, because every child is a carrier of a difference and has his own special sensitivity. Fear of being marginalized.

Exclusion experiences a sort of distance from the usual sense that is attributed to the world: disorientation and loss. This mood radicalizes the feeling of helplessness. This is the fundamental fear of children, which includes them all, because fear is made up of many feelings.

What I have tried to do with Valentina is to bring to the surface a difficult emotion, such as fear, to bring it to the level of feeling, that is, of awareness. Hence the importance of giving her a name: *Mr. Dragoviro*, with the crown, and of making her the portrait: the drawing, in fact.

Emotions, whether they are aware, have a prolonged effect over time if they change into feeling and reach awareness. That is to say that only with the clear perception of a sense of self does Valentina come to the awareness of the feelings she has. For this reason, and citing a beautiful expression by Damasio (2003, p. 23), we can say that feeling is the mental experience of emotion. Helping Valentina to recognize, give voice and give a name to the fear of the ongoing pandemic helps her in the process of self-awareness. This awareness, albeit in the early stages, helps her make decisions that will help her cope with that fear as others are connected to it. It is a sense of self. According to Damasio (2003, p. 18 and 17), consciousness amplifies the impact of feelings and emotions on the mind. Furthermore, he claims that it is "our first authorization to know" and that therefore "helps us perfect the art of life". And in fact, it is the conscience that makes little Valentina aware of the feeling of an emotion that before was more confused

and therefore more disturbing.

The first goal we achieved was to help the child to verbalize the feeling of fear first, then her deep feeling through the description of the emotions connected to those of the pandemic and the related anticipatory fantasies, as is the case, for example, of the fear that even the parent figures of reference will get sick or die.

The purpose of the educational proposal is not to deny fear, nor the existence of suffering and danger; the aim is to help Valentina to interpret her emotions and to build action plans that do not block her. Experiencing fear in conversation must mean understanding a phenomenon that has an existential nature and that, in the course of life, will have to be dealt with competently. It was an exercise that allowed little Valentina to experience, in conversation, the feeling of fear, to recognize it and, little by little, to start controlling it.

A healthy emotional development presupposes the ability to recognize and own emotions and to know how to control them and to grasp those of others; this is the “empathic” basis for building a good relationship competence (Schaffer H. R., 1998). During our activity, my goal was to help Valentina see the other, that is, my person, not only as other than herself but also in relation to the self. For this reason, my behaviour during the research could not be detached, but rather it was intentionally empathetic. The recognition of the other, his feelings and his closeness is an important first phase of his knowledge. Recognition, welcome, knowledge are the basic needs of any growth. I believe that these activities can help Valentina to build her own difficult self-determination in solidarity, because it is only in self-recognition in the other that we all find acceptance. To this end, the conversation like the drawings tended to make the emotions related to the theme of fear, in its various forms and manifestations, self-evident, to weaken its pathogenic charge and favour empathic awareness processes.

This “movement” that leads from the outside to the inside is a search for meaning that helps the child to emancipate himself from his own self-centeredness and escape the chimeras of narcissism. We believe that it is very important to educate the little ones, since the early years of kindergarten, to undertake guided activities of self-healing, recognition in themselves and in others of movements of the soul which, very often, tend to be denied both by part of the small protagonists as well as families, who increasingly indulge in justifying behaviours (Di Gregorio, 2018).

To this end, the co-construction of new meanings with respect to oneself, and to others, can help to overcome difficulties in the relationship with oneself, and with peers. In this sense, education helps Valentina to build the keys to the world, in a perspective and relational vision that places it within constraints of existential meaning. It is a question of accompanying the progressive expansion of its training space towards the search for social, but also semantic, links that are above all in solidarity. Significant knots that help her build her identity within a plot that connects her to the world and to others. This implies training his sensitivity and his thought to consider the presence of those around him: his points of view, his needs and his joys, which can be shared in a solidarity relationship.

We believe that a wise emotional education favors the ability to manage both internal conflicts related to the presence of fear and relational ones, related to the fear of loss, because it refines empathic skills. Here, therefore, it is necessary to start knowing the emotions and their causes and manifestations from early childhood school. In this way, the adult helps children to endure frustrations, to know their fear, to control anger, to prevent self-injurious behaviour, to tolerate stress. To realize the self in us.

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