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Introductory notes

War, as a complex human phenomenon, has returned forcefully to the centre of international attention, the subject of military and political interests at a global level, the leading topic in the press of every country. Despite this, it has only been the subject of sporadic reflection by educators over the last two years, and perhaps the reasons for this silence should be investigated.

Now that war has once again dramatically revealed all its horrors in Europe and the Middle East, we should not only ask ourselves about the political, economic or religious reasons that provoked it, or the ways in which it can be ended, but we should also examine the reasons why, in a technologically developed society of communication, people continue to consider the use of violence as the privileged instrument for resolving conflicts.

Maria Montessori (1932-2023) would probably tell us that it is because we have not done enough to build a peaceful society. Peace, according to the educator, must be built step by step, starting with creating the conditions in which violence cannot creep into any human relationship as a means of imposing one's own reasons on another. For Montessori, the first human relationship to be addressed is precisely that between adult and child: perhaps inspired by the idea of Socratic non-violence, of education as a maieutic process, she thought that all too often the first signs of human violence can be seen in the attitude of power that the adult uses to condition the child's behaviour.

For his part, Aldo Capitini (1955) stated that nonviolence (which he used to write as a single word) is a kind of attitude that a man or woman should adopt to reject everything that has been constructed through violence, oppression or humiliation of a living being, be it human, animal or plant. Freire and Gramsci, albeit at different times but based on only partly dissimilar human experiences (they both experienced imprisonment because of a dictatorship), affirmed that the oppression of the other can also take place without the use of physical violence, but simply by using forms of hegemony, extortion of consent and symbolic violence. Gramsci, in his jailhouse notebooks, went so far as to say that every educational relationship is a hegemonic relationship because the adult can decide what the child can and must learn without allowing the child to choose.

We must accept that human life is also made up of conflict, for conflict is part of our nature as men and women evolved in an environment whose resources are not unlimited. But, as Baldacci (2023) reminds us, quoting Hare, one of the conditions for peaceful conflict resolution is reciprocity. Reciprocity has its essence in the question I can do to myself: "What I am about to do to the other, am I prepared to do to myself?". If the answer is no, then my intention is no longer acceptable. Yet there are many narratives that seek to convince us that violence and war are the only way to find peace, a peace that is most often understood as tranquillity, as the satisfaction of the needs of one or a group of people, regardless of what this means for other people, exploitation, oppression or death (Sullivan, 2004).

Finally, the violence of war is not unlike other forms of violence that we see every day in our communities: the exercise of power by one over another, whether physical or psychological, too often characterises the way we deal with the obstacles that life throws at us. Too many of us seem to be constantly worried about having enough (often more than we need) and therefore do not hesitate to raise our voices or our hands to defend what we own. Attacks by parents against teachers, by patients against health workers, by users against service staff, etc. etc.

Our society is dramatically turning into a society characterised by an atavistic saying: homo hominis lupo. Is it possible that there is no way back?

According to some authors, there are not many ways to change the direction of this drift, but education seems to be the most promising of all: educating the new generations for peaceful confrontation between people, teaching reciprocity (Hare, 1972) and the ability to care for the needs of the other as well as our own (Nussbaum, 2016); teaching how to transmit and give to our boys and girls

the tools to defuse those narratives that instil hatred of the other and the search for a relationship of domination with those who, according to this narrative, may represent a threat to us (the other, the different, the foreigner, etc..) (Giroux, 2020); teaching parents that caring for their sons and daughters doesn't mean protecting them from all obstacles or justifying all their mistakes; teaching adults that becoming parents doesn't mean owning someone else's life.

But in the neoliberal society, in a school that is becoming a school of competitiveness (Baldacci, 2019), in the knowledge economy that does not give teachers time to help their students understand the logic inherent in the narratives that fuel hatred and violence, that does not allow teacher to present the history of which we are all children, a history of senseless wars and dictators driven only by self-interest; in a society in which parents are constantly anxious that their children (and not those of others) not only do not suffer but are always happy; in a society in which adults put work before life, in care workplaces increasingly characterised by a lack of resources and the exhaustion of professionals… in communities, schools, health and social services such as these, what space is left for education for peace?

An educational objective with multiple implications, the broad theme of peace in the global context of political scenarios and relations between nations, reaches the depths of education by drawing attention to the centrality of the relationship between those who educate and those who are educated, between young and adult generations, between those who care and those who are cared for. In the perspective of a lasting peace, the educational relationship recalls the importance of building affective and value-oriented relationships, aware of the limits and difficulties that one may encounter in the relationship with the other but leading to overcome them in order to transmit values such as acceptance, understanding, forgiveness, encouragement. Peace education means to educate the new generations to make peace with themselves before making peace with others, to welcome their own limits and contradictions, to forgive those who do not understand their struggle to grow up in a world characterised by fluidity and uncertainty, to educate them to grow up despite uncertainty, to see in the other an opportunity to become more human, rather than a threat to an illusory desire to have everything without giving anything.

The call for papers for the first 2025 issue of Health Education in Practice arising from these considerations could result in numerous articles, ranging from theoretical reflections and research to contributions presenting projects, educational tools, and instruments. Specifically, Nicolella, Arsena, and Berardinetti papers presented interesting theoretical reflections on peace education, building on the work of renowned pedagogists such as Montessori and Freire. Other contributions presented tools proposed by authors with different educational perspectives, ranging from Donato et al.'s Narrative Waving to the theatre of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Lorenza Mazzetti written by Gianeselli, as well as the Rondine Method founded by Franco Vaccari and illustrated by Galatro; Petrini, instead, illustrated the connection between sport and peace education. Finally, Falcone et al. presented a project developed by the PSYLab at Roma Tre University, which uses storytelling and creative activities to help children develop an understanding of peace. The dossier concludes with an article by Bianchi presenting an experimental study and Romano discussing the work of Vimala Thakar, an Indian teacher of peace.

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