

## Education for Wellbeing

Marisa Musaio<sup>1</sup>, Carlo Orefice<sup>2</sup>, Natascia Bobbo<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Università Cattolica di Milano*, <sup>2</sup>*Università di Siena*, <sup>3</sup>*Università di Padova*

Neoliberal logic, defined by the standardization of practices, the constant assessment of performances, and the maximization of profits, has turned the workplaces of social and health educators into contexts in which the workers may feel constantly exposed to judgement or the assessment of their capacities as a means of exchange for economic compensation, having already exhausted all other expectations of value, such as human or social recognition. The post-pandemic historical moment is characterized by widespread conflicts (wars, xenophobia, deviance, delinquency, etc.) that led many young and not-so-young people to see the foundations of their identity as persons crumbled: for these reasons, many people have been forced to reconstruct it, day by day, giving new shape to those intentions that the actual socio-economic and cultural deprivation undermines. Fragility has thus become an indelible and widespread mark of our humanity, requiring, when it becomes unbearable, the help and support of professionals capable of offering an accompaniment that could prevent the most vulnerable from slipping into the meaninglessness of behaviour and choices. The anxiety that sometimes turns into rage and violence among adolescents, the recurrence of femicide, the lack of responsibility in the exercise of parental and caring duties, the rapid spread of drug addiction, mental distress, loneliness, and existential suffering are just some of the inhumanities that characterise the current contexts as expressions of a "society of discomfort" (Ehrenberg, 2010).

At the same time, in our focus on planning, managing, and implementing ways to accompany fragility, we lost sight of the fact that professionals of care are exposed daily to pervasive suffering that undermines their personal and existential equilibrium. The well-being of professionals of care has only recently become the subject of attention in the psychological, sociological, and educational literature. Recent studies and reflections have been able to coin terms such as burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, but also emotional elevation, and compassion satisfaction (Stamm, 2013; Figley, 2013; Maslach, Schaufeli, Leiter, 2001). For these reasons, to educate and to educate ourselves how to live a life of wellbeing, and work, while maintaining this wellbeing, this type of education becomes necessary practice that should be included in the pedagogical reflections and actions. With this aim in mind, the discussion between different disciplinary fields would greatly benefit from a more open pedagogy (a practical-poetic science in dialogue with philosophy, medicine, psychology, sociology, law, biology) as the core of epistemological reflection that has to be taken up and strengthened in order to implement a new thought about the paradigm of health and promotion of well-being that care workers refer daily in their work (Orefice, 2020). Taking up Gadamer's question, we could ask: "Where is health hidden?" (Gadamer, 1994). This is a question that is still very relevant today, when the concept of "health" has come to be understood by the public mainly in terms of physical condition, the absence of disease, and less and less in terms of the ability to transmit the assumptions of a healthy education and well-being. Is it enough to look at 'health' from a physical point of view, without reflecting on the state of well-being? As we find in everyday life, a physically healthy person is not always healthy from a psychological, existential, relational point of view, but rather, as confirmed by the many stories of discomfort and hidden suffering, a state of well-being refers to the ability and awareness of knowing how to recognise and experience one's own emotions, of knowing how to cultivate positive emotions and professional satisfaction, of striving to build a

personal, relational, family balance, harmony with oneself and with others, combined with the ability to activate meaningful dynamics in relation to one's own life. As the field of arts-based research stressed (Howley, Gauferg, King, 2020; Brown, Sawyer, Norris, 2016; Lang, 2013), the practices of cultural research and fruition, care interventions with cultural, artistic and social implants, are productive for health and well-being precisely because they are able to refer to the person's state of balance at a social and relational level, to activate his or her ability to know how to cultivate positive relationships and engagement in the community, to care for oneself and others, drawing on a set of experiences of connection between the body and the dimensions of one's interiority.

Feeling well while helping requires several preconditions that are as much related to the practitioner as to the context in which he or she works.

- The organisational climate can become a place in which psychological security is lacking (Edmondson, 1999), where the perception of being able to express one's own essence and creativity and to continue learning from the experiences and stimuli of the environment as well as from the scientific literature is gradually challenged by neoliberal and profit-maximising logics (Ashforth, Rogers, 2016). The constant control of resources in order to reduce costs, the constant references to competition in a system with strong meritocratic pressures (Lewig, Dollard, 2003), have dismantled and challenged the solidaristic intentions and the creativity of actions that define the essence of the educational helping professions. However, from a pedagogical point of view, we now know that the psychological and identity security of the worker can be guaranteed through actions that also concern coordinators and managers and not only individuals, through the implementation of training and accompanying projects and interventions to promote well-being at work and the ability to personally express one's competences (Bobbo, Ius, 2022).
- The educational relationship itself has become an object of standardisation, transformed into an object measurable in terms of hours of commitment, degree of proximity, number of operators, and practices admitted according to the available costs. It has also been eroded by the lack of human resources, accompanied by the increase in requests for help from marginalised populations, once apparently able to face the challenges of life without any fragility, now made vulnerable by contextual historical events. The cultural, aesthetic approach, which avoids any kind of standardising logic, offers opportunities for creative freedom that can be as helpful to the fragile as to the practitioner (Bruzzone, Zannini, 2021).
- The increasing complexity of situations of fragility that every educator must face, often without any training or pedagogical supervision to support his or her actions, increasingly challenges the ability of operators to express emotional work that does not expose them to the development of harmful vicarious disorders (Hochschild, 2019). Unspoken emotions, unrehearsed emotions that one is forced to express, can become the basis of an emotional dissonance that is able to damage people's ethical and psychological integrity (Marone, Musaio, Pesare, 2023). The mediation, interpretation, understanding and processing of complex emotions can offer a way to rediscover oneself and one's intentionality (Bobbo, Rigoni, 2021).

To sum up, in today's contexts, training operators to a real well-being cannot and should no longer be conceived exclusively as training them to protect themselves, to keep the "right" distance, to find a hiding place where nothing can disturb them. Pedagogy is a reflection pervaded with promotion, growth and hope, and as such it must be able to offer operators opportunities to find in themselves and in communities of colleagues such human and relational resources as to enable them to regain their own path of human growth: a kind of empowerment. As they hand this power, or rather ability, down, to each individual operator and to work communities within organisations, those abilities need to face up to the growing complexity of contexts, utilizing creativity, farsightedness, divergent thinking, and a critical approach.

Thanks to the contributions of many authors, this new issue of Health Education in Practice has been able to gather interesting suggestions and ideas on the complex and challenging issue of education for well-being: In particular, we could achieve contributions of almost four field. Firstly, some authors were interested in addressing well-being as a task in the training of health professionals and patients

(Benaglio & Zannini, Musaio, Righettini, Scardicchio, Bobbo & Marcolongo); secondly, other contributions focused on the well-being of teachers and educators as a condition for the authentic expression of their professionalism (Basanta Vázquez & Urpi, Daniele & Gambacorti Passerini, Mastrosimone); thirdly, other contributions dealt with the need to care for aesthetic beauty in the health care setting (Buccini, Zane). Finally, some authors focused on the importance of caring for the well-being of communities to prevent distress and malaise (Crotti, Di Profio, Zedda). Some narratives and stories from practice (Lazzarotto, D'Aprile & Zarrilli Affaitati) and a book review (Marseglia) conclude our issue.

## References

- Bobbo, N., & Ius, M. (2021). *Lavoro di cura, educazione e benessere professionale*. Padova University Press.
- Bobbo, N., & Rigoni, P. (2021). Il lavoro emotivo tra gli studenti di infermieristica: dagli studi nell'ambito delle neuroscienze alle implicazioni per la formazione emotiva dei futuri infermieri. *Giornale Italiano di Educazione alla Salute, Sport e Didattica Inclusiva*, 2(5), 364-375.
- Brown, H. Sawyer, R. D. Norris, J. (2016). *Forms of Practitioner Reflexivity. Critical, Conversational and Arts-Based Approaches*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan.
- Bruzzone, D., & Zannini, L. (Eds.). (2021). *Sfidare i tabù della cura: percorsi di formazione emotiva dei professionisti*. FrancoAngeli.
- Ehrenberg, A. (2010). *La société du malaise. Le mental et le social*. Odile Jacob
- Figley, C. R. (Ed.). (2013). *Treating compassion fatigue*. Routledge.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1994). *Dove si nasconde la salute*. (a cura di A. Grieco, V. Lingia). Raffaello Cortina.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2019). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California press.
- Howley, L. Gaufberg, E. King, B. (2020). *The Fundamental Role of the Arts and Humanities in Medical Education*. Association of American Medical Colleges.
- Lang P. (2013), *Art-Based Research*. Peter lang Publishing.
- Lewig, K. A., & Dollard, M. F. (2003). Emotional dissonance, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction in call centre workers. *European journal of work and organizational psychology*, 12(4), 366-392.
- Marone, F., Musaio, M., & Pesare, M. (2023). *Educazione, relazione e affetti*. Armando Editore.
- Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual review of psychology*, 52(1), 397-422.
- Orefice, C. (2020). *Lo studio della cura educativa in un'ottica complessa* (pp. 1-128). Pensa Multimedia.
- Stamm, B. H. (2013). *Measuring compassion satisfaction as well as fatigue: Developmental history of the compassion satisfaction and fatigue test*. In *Treating compassion fatigue* (pp. 107-119). Routledge.