



Introductory notes on care in pedagogy

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1. From etymology to pedagogical meaning.

The etymology of the English word 'care' refers to the word from the Old English and from the Proto-Germanic 'caru', which can be translated with the concepts of 'sorrow', 'anxiety', and 'grief', but also with 'burdens of mind' and 'serious mental attention'(1).

In English the word 'care' is clearly distinguished from 'cure' (which is rooted in Latin), while in many other languages (as in the case of Italian) we have the same word "cura", which is linked to aspects of medical therapies such as the commitment to pursue a purpose or practice an activity. Reference is made to care in medicine, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology of groups and philosophical counselling, but, as Franco Cambi notes, in these areas, it is only partially declined according to pedagogical models: care in pedagogy is focused on creating self-care (cura sui) - on the one hand - and unravelling all the potential of the subject on the other (2).

This second meaning has adopted a crucial role in pedagogy since ancient times. Think, for example, of the centrality of "care" identified by Socrates and Plato: for the first, the art of maieutics can be understood as "care" of the other, fundamental to forming man; for the second, care not only for the body, but also for the mind is basic. It can be argued that care constitutes an original structure of the world of education: "this is attested to by the fact that from its origins pedagogical discourse has focused on educational activity as caring". (3) Therefore, the dynamic and antinomic character of care has been emphasized since ancient times, as in the relationship between teacher and student, various reciprocal tensions come into play that concern maieutics, eros, the awakening of the daimon, but also the auctoritas of the teacher and his role of soliciting the "Nosci te ipso"(4)

The paradigm of care can be considered as a "long-lasting" theoretical model, which is also at the centre of Paideia Christi (and in particular in St. Augustine), extending to the pedagogy of modernity, with Pascal, Montaigne and Rousseau, amongst others. In Romanticism, the paradigm of care is transformed and no longer focuses on the student / teacher relationship, emphasizing the importance of family care and making use of the contribution of human sciences. In this broadening of perspective, a pedagogical look that is able to focus on the reflective nature of care is even more necessary (5)

As Vanna Boffo argues, every form of care is pedagogical, because it supports the change and transformation of single subjectivity starting from every subjectivity that has a bond of attention, support, dialogue, and listening (6). Care can be considered as a pedagogical "a priori", which represents a presupposition and a precondition for every theory and practice and formative educational plan (7). The human condition is "fragile" by nature as the human being is always dependent on: the other, in fact, each one needs to receive care from others and to take care of themselves and others. In this regard, it may be useful to quote the words of Gadamer, for whom man builds his life through his faculty of having care, that is, worrying about many things, constantly taking care of them and living in care, in order to finally be able to create a home in the world that he has shaped (8).

Since human beings are by nature "unfinished", they are called to give shape to their time, destined to a constant and inexhaustible search for their own form, which can be translated as a need for "care". Care constitutes "a key device, with a regulatory function with respect to other pedagogical categories and is capable of giving life, in synergy with these, to a real paradigm, based on ontological, anthropological and ethical assumptions" (9). As many philosophers have argued during the twentieth century and as postmodern thought has strongly reintroduced, man is characterized by vulnerability and it is precisely because of this limitation, for his being exposed to risk that he needs care: from the earliest stages of one's life to reach adulthood and senile age. Care, in this sense, means precisely promoting, propitiating, and channeling the greatest potential for realisation into each one.

In reference to the thought of Martin Heidegger, it can be seen that care represents planning ahead, but in close relationship with "already being", therefore, taking care of oneself means working to live reconciled with the past, in a present that is not perceived as meaningless, which creates hope for the future (10): "care

is that way of being that completely dominates the temporal life of man, it safeguards what belongs to time, what passes through, what is exposed and precarious, it tends to give consistency to that which vanishes, ensuring that time does not dissipate, does not disperse, does not frustrate human potentialities, but guards them, saves them, and makes their realisation possible "(11). Therefore, care takes on the task of guaranteeing man the possibility of becoming a man, through a path of formation: in this sense, caring means "critically ensuring that man is human and non-human and that the formation that leads him to be is 'being able to be', it does not become the deformation, distortion or path towards other directions than that for which it was originally intended" (12).

Concluding with the words of Franco Cambi:

Pedagogical care has gradually taken shape and has come to characterise [...] for its polymorphous, tensional, dialectical face and for its eminently reflective status. This means that pedagogically-caring implies: 1) dislocating oneself on many planes of intention and action, assuming different mental and communicative devices and constantly crossing them with each other. But it also means 2) that there is no for ever educational care, but care is always exercised "in the situation", according to the logic connected to "chance" and "event". In other words, care is marked by the logic of understanding and of a lived and relived understanding, indeed, taken as an open technological device. And then the *cura en pédagogie* 3) has its own problematic and dialectical and critical statute and, therefore, must be metareflexively presided over (as, in fact, it is done), questioning itself - precisely - about its status and its function here and now. Even there and then, but above all here and now (13).



The project Writing for Inclusion (2020-1-ES01-KA201-081827) has been funded with support from the European Commission. This document reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.