Realization of the "Care in Education" Concept in Relations with Children and Teaching Staff During the Implementation of the "Writing for Inclusion" Project[1]

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Abstract. The paper presents the state of the art of the European Erasmus Project KA2 – WIN: Writing For Inclusion – dedicated to school inclusion and the use of alternative teaching methodologies such as Digital Storytelling. Starting from a survey on the theme of educational care from a theoretical and pedagogical point of view, the article focuses - in the central parts - on the activities carried out with the students and teachers at the European primary schools involved. The article highlighted the social, as well as educational and cultural implications of the research work carried out by the educational and university institutions involved, with a broad theoretical-methodological reflection which will close, in the coming months, with the assessment of the project itself.

Keywords. Education - Care - Inclusion - Erasmus Project - Storytelling - School

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1. On Care…

Educational Care is a pedagogical topic that has been much discussed for years. The studies and reflections that go in this direction are many and just as many authors who have made an important contribution to the international debate.

Over time, publications on this topic have proliferated, but, above all, today the number of educational research projects that have placed the category of Care at the center of their epistemology and methodology has increased: both as a scientific focus and as a driving force for develop good inclusion practices.

We are going through a hyper-complex historical moment, marked by dramatic

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epochal changes, which are completely redefining the relations between peoples and the social bonds of brotherhood and respect; all this is undermining the principle of Care, which above all involves collaboration, help and mutual support and, for this reason, taking care of Care is becoming increasingly important.

Since ancient times, every society has put into practice strategies of survival and development, trying to improve its economic, political, and cultural potential, but the quality of life of people cannot be entrusted only to technological procedures: we need a different kind of attention that takes care of all aspects of the human being. First of all, support for emotional and cognitive development.

It is about learning to take care of existence, and this is not a simple process because it implies the precise will of all the actors to act and build experiences that are useful for the good of all (Mortari, 2008).

Ours is a time of great human frailty, an era weakened by personal interests that do not help and support the common good. There is a rampant indifference to the well-being of others and many forms of violence are becoming powerful again: physical, verbal, psychic. All this weakens communication and educational practices and the exponential rise of new technologies (also caused by the planetary pandemic in the last two years) has developed virtual forms of communication that do not help the empathic relationship.

Environmental degradation, emotional distances, the impossibility for all girls and boys to access the school education process, planetary peace continually challenged by devastating war actions, the lack of an ethical conscience: these situations require more and more attention; they want to be continually rethought starting also from the school, to begin to rebuild a fair and democratic society. This is why it is important to take care of the Cure.

The essential quality of Care is that it is a practice: there is Care where we act with gestures and words. These are full of emotions and meanings; they should always be accompanied by feelings of Care. Acting for oneself, for others and for the environment around us is a practice of care if all this is accompanied by an intentional feeling of Care.

Furthermore, Care takes place within a relationship: the relationship between someone who cares and someone else who receives care. This relationship can be informal (such as the maternal or friend relationship) or formalized (such as the educational or therapeutic relationship).

Whatever the perspective from which we look at this pedagogical category, it is accompanied by the principle of responsibility and quality of life, which walk together to promote a sense of belonging and solidarity. Taking care of oneself means opening up to our neighbor and is a very important investment for the future because we teach young people to open up to encounter and dialogue, without discrimination and closure.

Care is therefore an *ontological* category of education and pedagogy because acting with "care" means *intentionally* doing good to the community that support us: it is an *ethical* and, at the same time, pedagogical perspective because it implies a commitment to improve the living conditions of each person and our environment.

Therefore, the Care also needs "physical" places where it can act and the school, as mentioned above, is one of these. The school is mainly a place of experiences (Dewey,2014) that help the youngest to grow by experiencing many different situations:

cultural but also political. Learning to dialogue, to recognize the needs of others, to listen, to build places of understanding and to practice authentic relationships. All this belongs to the school (and much more) and through Care actions it is possible to develop quality educational processes, for the good of everyone.

The current school, that of the curriculum, has set itself more than one goal: to support not only the acquisition of knowledge by students, but also attach significant value and centrality to methodologies, tools, the environment, relationships and, not least, to inclusion as a central educational paradigm.

When you spend a lot of time in a place, you tend to feel it as your own and develop a sense of belonging towards it. This is what happens to children who spend more and more time at school; but this time should be significant since the school is a place that offers the opportunity to express oneself and establish deep and important relationships. However, for this to be possible, the school must be characterized as a place of life (microcosm) where everyone should feel inserted and not live on the margins because not understood by others (Dewey, …..).

The school should above all be a place of welcome and well-being, capable of generating a sense of belonging, but there are circumstances that slow down and hinder the construction of the "good life" and that is why the school is increasingly in need of Care.

The school has therefore become a place of Care and as such is developing and implementing educational and pedagogical research activities in this direction.

Not alone, of course, but supported by specialized research centers such as Universities and international study and work programs, such as the European Union's Erasmus Plus program.

The WIN project, *Writing for Inclusion*, has moved in this direction and with the help of blended methods and strategies has put young students geographically distant from each other "in dialogue", with the intention of expanding, in future times, the experimentation put in place.

In our opinion, this project has an added value since it involves the Ukrainian University of Poltava and the corresponding primary school. Both have been heavily affected by the war events that have broken out in recent months and now we urgently feel the need for "educational care" and "education for peace", to restore centrality and importance to dialogue and community policies of welcome and democracy.

2. WIN - *Writing for Inclusion*: an educational and social research experience

Reforming the modern school in Ukraine requires a new understanding of the pedagogue role in the educational process and actualizes the growing importance of technologies and methods of professional activity in various types of educational and social institutions, in particular with regard to the socio-psychological support of children and student youth, who are a group of social risk. This problem became especially acute this year.

The start of open military operations in Ukraine in February 2022 fundamentally changed the socio-economic, cultural and educational situation in society. Under the threat of constant military invasion, occupation of the territory and bombings and missile attacks, all citizens of Ukraine feel fear, a state of stress, despair, irritation, and anxi-

ety due to the presence of a real threat to life and health. The entire system of Ukrainian citizens life has been destroyed and changed - the process of gradual realization of life, education, work, raising children has been replaced by constant efforts to find salvation, means of livelihood, and a place to shelter from rocket attacks.

This situation had a particularly strong impact on the educational system in Ukraine. According to official data of the Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine, 2,211 educational institutions were destroyed or damaged. However, in reality, this number is much higher, because even calculating the damage and assessing the degree of destruction is not always possible due to the occupation of the territory and constant shelling with rockets and artillery.

In connection with this, there is an urgent need to provide various qualified assistance to children in the process of learning and life in general. In this context, the implementation of various projects aimed at including children in joint activities with the aim of their adaptation, socialization, and improvement of their psychological well-being is significant.

The purpose of the article is to present the main results of the *Writing for inclusion* project implementation in accordance with the "Care in Education" concept.

Theoretical analysis of the problem. The concept of "Care in Education" has sufficiently versatile foundations and a well-established implementation methodology in the educational process.

School education in many European countries at the document level has its own chapter in the national policy document on curricula for the primary school system, pre-school classes and after-school centers (Haglund, 2019). In addition to providing meaningful leisure time, the concept of European school education should also stimulate the personal development and learning of students, the formation of their competencies. Previously, after-school centers were mainly places of care and recreation (Calander, 2000), where children spent time and did not have such a pronounced orientation to self-development. The educational policy of European countries in recent years says that the concept of an educational program should have a broad interpretation in school-age education, where care, development and learning form a single entity. This actualizes the issue of not only the provision of educational services, but also the implementation of care in the educational process. Thus, care, development and learning can be interpreted as important and inseparable components of the educational process. Strategic documents provide evidence of an ideological transition from leisure and care as the main goal of education to a more comprehensive view of education, where the child in all its diversity is at the center of the educational process.

Learning is described in relevant curricula as situational, activity-based and based on the needs and interests of learners. This means that teaching methods can serve multiple purposes at the same time, be meaningful from the students' point of view, and at the same time improve subject knowledge and develop skills.

However, this entails the risk that traditionally organized learning may reproduce the logic of the traditional classroom lesson system and ignore issues of care and value (Pihlgren & Rohlin, 2011; Boström, & Augustsson; 2016; Holmberg, 2017). Concerns about the increased emphasis on education at the expense of care and concern have also been reflected in concerns about the risk of a "school-based" early childhood education

program (Gunnarsdottir, 2014).

On the other hand, there is an international trend towards the welfare and social-ization of children, embodied in programs such as social and emotional learning (Kim-ber, 2007). These programs move away from a risk perspective by considering children who have to deal with unhealthy relationships, bullying, dysfunctional families, crime and drugs, etc. (Bartholdsson, Gustafsson-Lundberg, & Hultin, 2014). F. Furedi (2004) defines this trend promoted in schools as anti-intellectual because it focuses on the development of emotional intelligence. As such, according to Furedi, it is part of a wider dominant therapeutic culture. The main goal of care and concern in the educational sys-tem is to increase the self-esteem of students and help them develop self-control, gradu-ally including them in a diverse and complexly organized system of activities. Care in this sense concerns the psychological life of students and is based on the idea that posi-tive self-esteem is the basis of learning. However, Furedi (2004) argues that despite the focus on self-control, this tendency makes us helpless and needy of others, and therefore can hinder the development of students' autonomy. It has even been argued that caring teachers are the main obstacle preventing students from developing into democratic citi-zens (Mc Cuaig, 2011).

At the same time, regardless of the diversity of views, in any case, the implementa-tion of care in the educational process involves focusing not only on the development of students' competencies, the formation of their knowledge and skills, but, first of all, on their psychological development and ensuring well-being in the learning process.

3. Methodologies, objectives, and results: the state of the art of WIN

For the implementation of this concept, an important role is played by ensuring uni-ty in the care of schools children and higher educational institutions, the implementa-tion of a project within the framework of which university teachers and specialists would have the opportunity to ensure the basic provisions of the "Care in Education" concept.

The project of the European Union Erasmus+KA2: Key Action: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, Action Type: Strategic Partnerships for school education Writing for inclusion, project reference: 2020-1-ES01-KA201-081827 is dedicated to this purpose. The "Writing for inclusion" (WIN) project focuses on rais-ing awareness, changing perceptions, and providing resources to implement inclusion in education through the concept of "Care in Education". The project is implemented by consortia from four European countries, which include institutions of higher and sec-ondary education. The following are involved in the implementation of the project:

Fundació Universitària Balmes and School "Les Pinediques" (Escola Les Pinediques) – Spain; Poltava V. G. Korolenko National Pedagogical University and Poltava General Education School of I-III degrees # 18 – Ukraine;

University of Florence (Università degli Studi di Firenze) and Primary School "Le Cure" (Istituto Comprensivo "Le Cure") – Italy;

Eotvos Lorand Tudomanyegyetem University and Budapest Bilingual Vocational School (Erzsébetvárosi Két Tanítási Nyelvű Áltánosal Iskola és Szakgimnázium) – Hun-gary.

The target groups of the project were primary school teachers, teacher assistants, and

primary school students. In general, more than 100 primary school students took part in the project. In addition, a number of multi-auditory events were implemented for teachers, lecturers, students of pedagogical specialties and other educational stakeholders to disseminate the results of the project. The project made it possible to achieve the following results:

1. Materials have been developed and activities aimed at forming a non-discriminatory attitude among primary school students have been organized. In the process of joint creative activity, children not only created products in the form of video files, but also established a qualitatively high level of interaction, saturated with moral principles and mutual acceptance.

2. Created animated resources for digital storytelling. This was extremely important and therapeutically important for the children, as it gave them the opportunity to reveal negative emotions, to release them in the process of creating animated products. By creating videos, children improved their emotional state, developed their own expressiveness, and realized their creative potential. The main thing was that they were involved in the creative process, were they were in a state of active interaction with teachers and each other. In fact, the implementation of this task was the central component of the "Care in Education" concept implementation in the creative activity of primary school students. At the same time, a combination of two levels of "care" for students was observed: a) on the one hand, they developed their multimedia competence; b) on the other hand, students improved their indicators of emotional functioning due to inclusion in a joint system of activities with others.

3. Teachers have formed an orientation to work according to the concept of "Care in Education" with the use of interactive technologies. This allowed us to increase the competence of teachers in the application of digital technologies in the educational process, to promote the full orientation of teachers to the implementation of humanistic values in the educational process. According to the concept of care, teachers were focused on simultaneously promoting the personal development of students and increasing their competence in working with means of creating videos;

4. Relationships between elementary school students of European countries were established using digital storytelling. As a result of the project implementation, an interesting intercultural dialogue of junior high school students was established. At the same time, an important role was played by the processes of using interactive technologies during the creation of video files, interaction of students in a remote format. The implementation of the intercultural dialogue contributed more to the inclusion of Ukrainian children in the European cultural and educational space.

5. The connection between pedagogical institutions of higher education and schools has been strengthened. In particular, the implementation of this project provided an opportunity to improve the communication system between pedagogical universities and actually working teachers in schools. The main thing is that it took place in the format of real interaction, and not just in the format of providing recommendations for teachers. The live interaction of teachers from the university and the school gave the opportunity to maximally implement the main postulates of the "Care in Education" concept in the educational environment.

The positive impact on project participants, both for schools and universities, is due

to the exchange of knowledge and successful practices; broadening the understanding of the inclusive education in Europe policy and establishing partnerships for future cooperation. Primary school teachers increased their understanding of how inclusive practices can be used during the educational process in their classrooms, and also had the opportunity to exchange best practices with foreign colleagues. Children, who were certainly the focus of the project's implementation, used technology as a tool for building their own literacy.

Separate components of this project were also implemented by the employees of the Department of Psychology of the Poltava National Pedagogical University, which provides permanent and qualified assistance to children from immigrant families living in university dormitories. In particular, counseling is carried out, trainings are conducted with children, and various types of therapy are used in order to optimize the psychoemotional state. Such forms of work are permanent, as the restoration of mental health and psychological well-being of immigrants, especially children, is the primary task of psychologists. In this context, some children were involved in working with interactive technologies, creating videos, which was simultaneously a means of their therapy and stress reduction, and was the implementation of the concept of "Care in Education", their assignment to joint intellectual activity with other children.

The psychological service of the university also provides constant advisory assistance and carries out the process of psychological support for internally displaced persons at the university. Employees of the psychological service were also involved in the implementation of this project, providing recommendations on organizing the optimal level of emotional interaction with children in the process of joint work.

The implementation of the *Writing for inclusion* project made it possible to ensure the full inclusion of children in the interactive educational space and implement the "Care in Education" concept. The creation of video files and various animated products by children contributed to the improvement of their competence in the use of technical teaching aids and made it possible to include them in the international educational space. The simultaneous directions of work by teachers and children made it possible to implement and approve the postulates of the "Care in Education" concept in educational practice at many levels.

As prospects for further research, we see the gradual deployment of this concept, its implementation in the educational activities of junior high school students with the aim of expanding their digital competences and fully implementing a humane approach in education.

4. WIN for the future

Among the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, we find "Quality Education", "Reduced Inequality" and "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions". These three specific objectives guided the realization of our European project. We have tried to create school and university courses that combine the mutual perspectives linked to the concept of "Educational Care", as a common horizon for the harmonious and authentic growth of every young person. The results achieved so far by the project, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, show that the university team, together with the school team, have worked to

implement the feeling of closeness and humanity that should always belong to education professionals.

Through storytelling and the narration of personal stories by children, and the sharing via virtual platform of personal experiences (stories that speak of migration, bullying, uprooting, poverty, marginalization, but also talking about holidays, Christmas, village traditions, etc.) WIN has promoted non-discriminatory attitudes. This not only meets the objectives required by the 2030 Agenda, but has responded to a real civil need, which has been highlighted by the University, the school and society.

The need to orient young people towards the acquisition of inclusive knowledge and attitudes, towards the appropriation of a specific vocabulary and language, which had at the center words such as meeting, dialogue, knowledge, respect, openness, peace, and democracy was very evident. The University of Florence, with the first module of the project, has amplified and extended the concept of "Educational Care" to many aspects of the social and scientific life of the educating community and, in practice, this epistemological action has been transformed into oriented action to everyone's well-being.

The project is strongly oriented towards the transformation of obstative and dogmatic attitudes and ways of being that prevent the proximity and free dissemination of knowledge. The teachers, during the construction of stories through storytelling, used a checklist of words full of meanings related to friendship, mutual respect, closeness, and peace and during the weeks and months foreseen for the carrying out of the activities, within the school community, moments of discussion and confrontation have been activated on these issues of inclusion (Certini, 2021).

The concept of inclusion has its own fragility and incompleteness: it is complex and polymorphic and does not only concern some aspects of human vulnerability or only some particular subjects, but it concerns each of us and our right to be recognized and accepted as persons of value. Every living being should not be on the sidelines of the social and political choices decided by the community to which it refers but should be "at the center" of an emancipatory project that directly involves it.

Taking an inclusive attitude means reflecting above all on what are the exclusionary behaviors. We think of those who are not welcomed in our "comfort zone" because they do not have all the characteristics consolidated and accepted for a long time, by tradition and habit; we think of the removal from the communities of all those people who are not autonomous and need continuous attention and economic investments for their maintenance; or when "exclusive" spaces come into schools for all those children and young people who need special tools and attention, because they have "special characteristics" – which does not mean better or worse characteristics than the so-called "norm", but they are "uniqueness" that each of us possesses.

We should, therefore, learn to respect this uniqueness and diversity without necessarily having to include the other in our baggage of rules and vice versa and, perhaps, through good educational practices, oriented to the recognition of diversity as a value, it will be possible to create places of understanding, where to dialogue and freely build a process of shared growth and development. This was one of WIN's most important objectives: mutual knowledge while respecting their own characteristics and uniqueness. It is an ongoing path that promises good developments for the future. But there is not only this. The project also dealt with developing disciplinary knowledge and learning:

digital writing, language skills, grammatical and lexical insights related to a community language. For this reason, WIN provides for a double evaluation matrix: quantitative and qualitative.

It is a process under development, and it will certainly take significant lead times. The schools have not used the same storytelling tools (some have made videos with the construction of animated stories; others have digitally written stories about migration; photo-voice, etc...) and this implies an evaluation system mixed and attentive to the intrinsic differences in the procedure. This aspect also represents an element of richness and variability of the educational systems, which are able to adapt to the needs of the social context and the scientific project.

Finally, working on the issues of inclusion also means carrying out (or above all) political work: because it "imposes" a critical dialogue on the issues of hospitality and diversity; because it highlights the responsibilities that all participants have in the management and development of good educational practices; because it continually reminds us to rethink the principles that bind together the countries of the European community, which is not only a geographical place and not only has economic and financial responsibilities, but should guarantee a democratic and egalitarian future for present and new generations.

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