Conflict, Pedagogy, and Supervision. Exploring Theoretical Investigations and Practical Reflections on Educational Work

Conflitto, pedagogia e supervisione. Indagini teoriche e riflessioni pratiche sul lavoro educativo

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Abstract

This paper delves into the intricate relationship between conflict, pedagogy, and supervision, focusing on theoretical investigations and practical reflections within the field of educational work. The theoretical investigations encompass various frameworks, including philosophical, critical pedagogy, and group-analytic perspectives, aiming to better define the complexity of the relationship between conflict and education. In this sense, the study explores the role of pedagogy in understanding social and political conflicts, while also deepening the function of supervision within educational practices. Through pedagogical supervision, professionals can create a reflective environment that fosters personal and professional growth, even in contexts characterized by emergency interventions, trauma, and temporal and spatial limitations within the educational setting. By reconstructing a practical experience, the article aims to provide some interpretative guidelines for educators, supervisors, and pedagogists who work towards establishing critical-reflexive environments, particularly within emergency intervention contexts.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy; Pedagogical supervision; Emergency pedagogy; Conflict; Educational setting.

Sintesi

L'articolo approfondisce l'intricata relazione tra conflitto, pedagogia e supervisione, concentrandosi su indagini teoriche e riflessioni pratiche nell'ambito del lavoro educativo. Le indagini teoriche comprendono diversi quadri teorici, tra cui prospettive filosofiche, di pedagogia critica e gruppo-analitiche, per meglio definire la complessità del rapporto tra conflitto e educazione. In questo senso, il lavoro esplora il ruolo della pedagogia nella comprensione dei conflitti sociali e politici, approfondendo anche la funzione della supervisione entro le pratiche educative. Attraverso la supervisione pedagogica i professionisti possono creare un ambiente riflessivo che favorisca la crescita personale e professionale, anche in contesti caratterizzati da interventi di emergenza, traumi e limitazioni spazio-temporali del setting educativo. Tramite la ricostruzione di un'esperienza pratica, l'articolo mira a fornire alcune linee interpretative per educatori, supervisori e pedagogisti che lavorano all'istituzione di ambienti critico-riflessivi, in particolare all'interno di contesti emergenziali di intervento.

Parole chiave: Pedagogia critica; Supervisione pedagogica; Pedagogia dell'emergenza; Conflitto; Setting educativo.

1. Exploring the Intersection of War and Education: Insights from a "Critical Pedagogy" Standpoint

"There is no domination without resistance: the practical primacy of the class struggle, which means that one must 'dare to rebel'. Nobody can think in anybody else's place: the practical primacy of the unconscious, which means that one must put up with what comes to be thought, i.e. one must 'dare to think for oneself'" (Pêcheux, 1975/1982, p. 220).

The relationship between war and education is not linear, nor is it simple. It is certainly possible to address ethical concerns regarding the nature and history of political conflicts, highlighting the aspects of violence, social disruption, and enforcement that war entails. By doing so, it could be possible to foster educational practices that promote conflict resolution, non-violent peacebuilding, environmental sustainability, and an overall appreciation for the complexity of life[1]. As pointed out by Judith Butler (2020), "nonviolence becomes an ethical issue within the force field of violence itself. Nonviolence is perhaps best described as a practice of resistance that becomes possible, if not mandatory, precisely at the moment when doing violence seems most justified and obvious" (p. 1). In this perspective, peace and nonviolence become two educational issues and goals, thus making nonviolence itself a form of "converted violence" or "beyond-violence" in order to better understand the real conflicts in which people are involved (De Giorgi, 2018, pp. 14-15). Such a shift in the "conflict management" interpretation certainly has an impact on the "formative destiny" of the individual (ibidem).

However, I will explore an alternative interpretive path that is not necessarily mutually exclusive. The aim is to establish an initial connection between war and pedagogy, recognizing the latter as an autonomous and distinct field of study (Massa, 1975; Baldacci, 2012). To identify a concise set of key concepts, it is possible to focus on two distinct areas: the *structure* and the *relationship* (Bleger, 1967/2013; Dozza, 2000; Winnicott, 1955/1975). Therefore, I will delve into the *structural* elements of the discourse, since the perspective stated in the epigraph primarily pertains to the *relational* sphere.

Within the structure of the educational event, it is possible to identify and define at least three distinct moments of practice and meaning.

The *space*, *i. e.* its integrity, practicability, divisions, passages for communication, boundaries, and thresholds. As D. R. Ford states (2020), "[Lefebvre's] Architectronics is a methodology intended 'to describe, analyse, and explain' the manner in and by which 'the preconditions of social space have their own particular way of enduring and remaining actual within that space' [...] The move toward abstract space is concomitant with the rise of private property, which allows space to be striated and owned. Absolute space was abstracted through the process of entering into the realm of signification, as spaces were governed just as much by bodies and labour as by legal codes and tax regimens" (pp. 310-311). As can be seen, the physical space activates a range of political practices that are already embedded within it. Through the lens provided by these practices, such as the movement of the body, labor, legal codes, and private property, we can discern the distinct instances of space itself and outline their effects within the educational field. As Lynn Davies states (2004), "They had to construct a space which allowed distance, in which differences would be respected, not collapsed into a spurious unity. But it also had to be a

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[1] The literature on this topic is extensive and multifaceted. See preliminarily: Reardon, 1988; Malavasi, 2011; Noddings, 2011; Dietrich, 2011; Patfoort, 2013; Bianchi, 2017; Butler, 2020; De Giorgi, 2018, 2022; McLeod & O'Reilly, 2021; Marshall Beier & Tabak, 2021.

space allowing closeness, even intimacy. This seems the classic challenge of pluralism, whether in a school, workplace or community" (p. 78), making it possible to better comprehend the underlying structural dynamics of positioning, conflict/cooperation, and overall possibilities in relationships.

The *time*, *i. e.* its linear, plural, or differential features (Althusser, Balibar, Establet, Macherey, & Rancière, 1965/2015); its rhythms, repetitions, periodicities, compressions, and expansions. As stated by M. Alhadeff-Jones (2017), particularly concerning the intersection of temporality and trauma, "Time is felt through the experience of rhythms as a flexible and subjective organization of systems of instants […]. Therefore, dealing with psychological suffering requires some form of rhythmanalytical work to reorganize the way the succession of instants and discontinuities are experienced, challenging inadequate feelings of 'permanence', calming down 'forced rhythms', stimulating 'languishing rhythms' and regulating 'temporal diversity' so that 'the rhythms of ideas and songs could progressively command the rhythms of things'" (p. 180). Not only are different times and instants significant for healing or grief (Fabbri, 2003), but the very temporality of the educational encounter and its predictable structure also have an impact on the establishment of a pedagogically structured *setting* (Dozza, 2000). This impact even extends to "forced rhythms" experienced in emergency situations (Annacontini & Zizioli, 2022; Vaccarelli, 2017; Zizioli, 2021). Since temporalities and rhythms are closely tied to educational rituals (such as welcome greetings, structured activities, rest, breaks, interludes, counselling, group work, leave-takings, etc.), it is crucial not to overlook this distinctive dimension of education within the discourse's structural framework. As Peter McLaren asserts (1988), "The roots of ritual in any society are the distilled meanings embodied in rhythms and gestures. Rituals suffuse our biogenetic, political, economic, artistic, and educational life. To engage in ritual is to 'achieve... historico-cultural existence'. Our entire social structure has a pre-emptive dependence on ritual for transmitting the symbolic codes of the dominant culture. Rituals are not ethereal entities distinct from the vagaries of everyday living, as though they are somehow perched atop the crust of culture as a bundle of abstract norms and ordinances to be enacted apart from the concrete constitution of individual roles relations out of which daily life is built" (pp. 170-171). It is for this very reason that we can now transition to the third moment within the structural area, seeking a connection between all three.

The *rules*, that encompass the possibilities and restrictions, the necessary steps to accomplish individual or group tasks, the delineation of restricted areas, the taboos, the jargon and languages, and the overall defining elements of a specific culture of service, whether they are explicitly stated or implicitly understood. Since the very concept of *rule* conveys the dynamics enacted by disciplinary discourse, it is important not to overlook the effects of discipline (in a broad sense) on the educational settings established in emergency situations. As Henry Giroux states (2020), with reference to the work of Antonio Gramsci, "Gramsci's emphasis on intellectual rigor and discipline can only be understood as part of a broader concern for students to develop a critical understanding of how the past informs the present in order that they could liberate themselves from the ideologies and common-sense assumptions that formed the core beliefs of the dominant order. Gramsci was quite clear on the distinction between learning facts that enlarged one's perception of the larger social order and simply gathering information. Even in his earlier writings, Gramsci understood the relationship between a pedagogy of rote memorization and the conservative nature of the culture it served to legitimate" (p. 61). The problem introduced here by Giroux, as per the framework outlined above by Peter McLaren, does not solely pertain to individual habits or general behaviour, such as actions during work, in the classroom, or in

intergenerational and peer relationships. Rather, it encompasses the issue of ideology in education[2], highlighting how institutions are interconnected with the broader contradictions and conflicts within society. These institutions *ritualize* specific habits within themselves, which in turn have an implicit educational effect.

This link between ideology, education, conflict, and social contradictions allows for a more comprehensive interpretation and critique not only of Critical Pedagogy itself but also of the fundamental connection between war and Pedagogy. As David Backer states (2022), "Structural education is a class struggle framework whose concept of causality, for example, is asymptotic rather than reflective. In education this means a kind of structural determination that reverses the bourgeois stupidity of the liberal sociology casting inequality as an effect of education rather than the reverse. When schools reproduce relations of production in the class struggle, they do so as condensations of class relations which [...] means that they mediate contradictions in the midst of struggle. They are subject to those contradictions but can also soften them" (p. 142). In a structural education framework (which Backer refers to as "Althusserian Pedagogy"), war involves the implicit learning of spatial, temporal, and regulatory frameworks that not only impact the individuals experiencing it but also affect the educational institutions themselves in a dual manner.

Firstly, it necessitates the promotion of curricular designs or extracurricular debates that address issues of difference, acceptance, peace, nonviolence, protection, ghettoization, exclusion, and racism. It is important to note that these debates should strive for inclusivity and horizontal participation and avoid implicit conceptions, bureaucracy, and colonial educational styles (Catarci, 2016; Fiorucci, 2020; Lapassade, 1974; Tramma, 2008), whose effects represent a segment of the conflict within educational environments.

Furthermore, it places a greater responsibility on teachers, educators, and social workers, extending beyond addressing traumatic experiences to also encompass the impact of disruptions in the educational setting during emergency situations (Alayarian, 2023). These disruptions can lead to personal and professional challenges, making it difficult to give meaning to the educational experiences (Riva, 2021).

2. Enhancing Education in Emergency Situations through Pedagogical Supervision: A Case Study

"For a long time pure linear painting drove me mad until I met Van Gogh, who painted neither lines nor shapes but inert things in nature as if they were having convulsions" (Artaud, 1956/1965, p. 140).

To further explore the link between war, pedagogy, and educational interventions during emergencies, I approached a volunteer worker from an emergency/humanitarian organization who is currently studying in the Primary Education Sciences program with the goal of becoming a primary teacher[3]. During a discussion about specific situations

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[2] Given the complexity and vastness of the literature in this field, it is possible to provide an initial overview limited to the Italian pedagogical debate: Broccoli, 1974; Massa, 1975; Granese, 1976; Papi, 1978.

[3] The student, Greta Frascari, has agreed to delve deeper into the connection between emergencies, educational settings, and pedagogical supervision in her thesis on the topic of "Emergency

characterized by time constraints and emergencies, the first issue that arose was the lack of reflection on action, debriefing, and close collaboration among professionals (Parkinson, 1997; Schön, 1983). This problem had an impact on her understanding of professionalism and motivation in her work. However, it also motivated her to delve deeper into the connection between these complex dynamics, education, and pedagogical discourse.

The practical organization of pedagogical supervision followed the steps outlined in my recent work on the subject, to which I would like to refer (D'Antone, 2023). It is based on the concept of a *pedagogical setting* as proposed by Liliana Dozza's work (2000), which elaborates an intersection between pedagogical and group-analytic perspectives.

It is important to note that while the model emphasizes the entire team as the centre of the group work, in this case I have chosen to adapt it to a dual task between educator and supervisor. This allows for a discussion of the procedure and provides the student with an opportunity to experience it firsthand during her research.

Briefly, this supervision model follows the following steps, which I proposed to call "plural lines" (D'Antone, 2023, pp. 140-152):
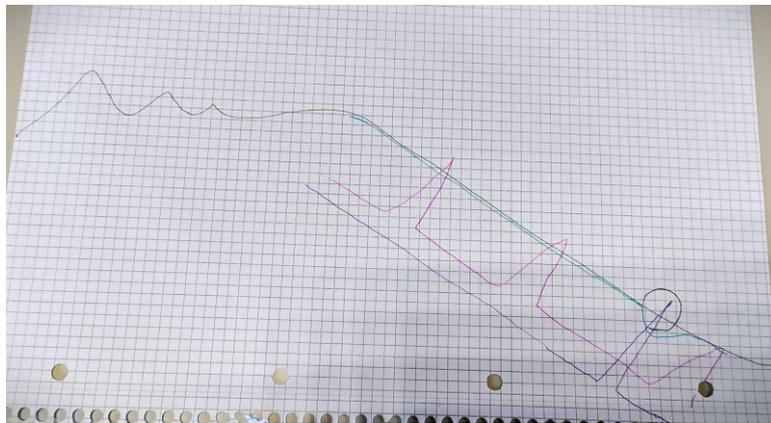

Figure 1. Draft of the supervision work.

- the educator chooses a specific episode characterized by challenges, difficulties, and emotional significance. It is important for the educator to discuss it in detail, using their preferred terms and taking the necessary time. The supervisor facilitates the description without providing interpretation;
- the only guidance given by the supervisor is to focus on the spaces, times, and rules of the intervention;
- after the initial description of the event, the supervisor invites the educator to select different colours that are already prepared on the table. Then he is given a blank page, which represents the spatial and temporal structure of the event. Each colour represents different subjects or institutions that, from the educator's perspective, participated in the event;

Pedagogy" at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. She is taking a course, in the organization she volunteers for, to work in war, refugees, and emergency contexts. The case refers to an initial study on emergency interventions that the student has agreed to share and will further explore in her thesis work.

- the educator can continue the discussion by drawing different coloured lines on the blank page. Each line represents the different temporal aspects of each practice. This allows the narration to intertwine with reflection on the various actions, visualizing the intersection between subjects, rhythms, and practices in a specific context;

- additionally, the supervisor proposes a presentation of the work done, highlighting the different conjunctions between the lines. Each conjunction represents a crucial event in the structure of the intervention, providing a better understanding of the nature of decisions, conflicts, and network cooperation during the intervention. This also helps to outline the emotions expressed at specific moments, which are then connected to thoughts and practices in the present.

As seen in Figure 1, the educator/volunteer has illustrated a primary relationship between a subject in an emergency context (black line) and the assistance/educational support provided, originating from a specific point in time (blue line). The relationship is portrayed as close, with the subject being a patient in an emergency situation, and the event being the specific instance of transporting the patient to a health unit. Metaphorically, the end of the page symbolizes the arrival at the unit. In close proximity, the educator represents her colleague from the organization (light purple line), while a more distant figure (dark purple line) represents a health professional from the health unit. The following are excerpts from the supervision work, accompanied by a discussion of the process.

While drawing the lines, the educator says: "I represented myself feeling very close, very present for the person; my colleague… who I didn't feel very close to, not very interested in the well-being of the person, only intervened in this relationship for obligatory interventions, just to make a good impression with the doctors. Here I represent the health professional, who was the real problem for me, who made this situation stick with me even today. In short, because she was completely indifferent and, in fact, mistreated the elderly patient who was, let's say, in a pretty bad condition. And she interacted with her only to tell her that she was probably dying. So, I included this ending and the arrival… In the unit, it was all straightforward… and I included my 'downfall' here because I went crazy with this situation and didn't receive any support from my colleague".
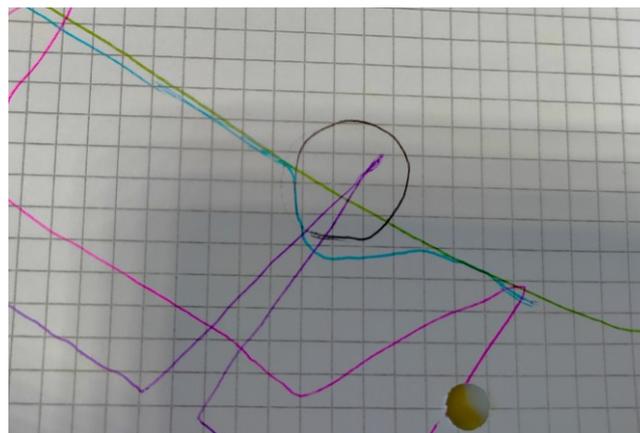

Figure 2. Draft of the supervision work (detail).

In Figure 2, the educator's "downfall" becomes more apparent as a result of the lack of support, network cooperation, and discussion. This leads the educator to distance herself, coinciding with a forceful intervention by the healthcare professional. In that situation, the

'distance' is the result of a specific conflict between the educator/volunteer and the health professional: "I found myself opposing a professional with a determined role. Asserting oneself in front of someone of higher rank is something that is normally not done".

Discussing further the situation from a pedagogical standpoint (*i.e.*, the structural and relational elements of the event), the educator continues as follows:

"In this situation... I hoped to have had a positive impact on this person, but the professional was so full of herself... even though she understood that I disagreed with her way of interacting with the subject, she continued throughout the journey, completely disregarding what I was saying. The educational aspects that I noticed... Sharing my feelings, but not being accepted by my colleague, and providing comfort and support to the patient... When I realized that I couldn't rely on the professional and colleague, I focused on the patient. Then... I didn't have the opportunity, once the shift was over, to discuss with my colleague because it was already finished. We were already off duty... usually, we have a debriefing, but we didn't do it".

In Figure 2, the black circle on the depicted event highlighted the possibility of reconstructing the structural elements of the intervention. The lack of network cooperation had an impact on the ability of all professionals to share information and establish a common practice during the emergency. This was characterized by:

- the space being seen as a mere backdrop for automatic activities;
- the times being defined by short and disruptive rhythms;
- the rules being imposed by the professional as a set of procedures, to which the educator resisted.

Eventually, the educator discusses the role of debriefing within the context of reflection on action. Without that final moment, the analysis of the event and the feelings regarding her own work remained unattended, resulting in unresolved conflicts and a broader sense of frustration, anger, and fear.

3. Conclusions

As stated by Louis Althusser (1965/2005) when discussing the term "overdetermination", "This means that if the 'differences' that constitute each of the instances in play […] merge into a real unity, they are not 'dissipated' as pure phenomena in the internal unity of a simple contradiction" (p. 100). Metaphorically, but with a tight connection to educational practices, the lines drawn during supervision could connect with the complex structure of the educational event only if they are considered as different instances that *merge* into moments of conjuncture. These moments allow for a detailed definition of the nature and tendencies of a particular situation, even if, during the action itself, the subject does not have the time to reflect on all the events, often traumatic, that have occurred.

Indeed, during emergencies, educators and individuals in general often experience a common feeling of fear. According to Alessandro Vaccarelli (2019), "To 'praise' fear does not mean, therefore, indiscriminately accepting all its forms, but working on it, especially in the educational context, and discerning […] between the fears that dissuade us and those

that instead urge us to adopt the perspective of the ethics of responsibility" (p. 76)[4]. Alessandro Ferrante (2020) expresses a similar concept in a post-structuralist manner when he states that *desire* should take priority over *fear*.

Effort, understanding of affectivity, and commitment emerge prominently in such a redefinition of the concept of fear. In this paper, I have briefly tried to show that if this redefinition is possible and necessary in educational experiences and settings, it could be effective as long as the time and space constraints of emergencies find another space and time in order to elaborate on the educational experience. This involves drawing upon the structural elements that, even if placed in the *background* have a significant impact on the educational relationship for teachers, educators, social workers, and pedagogists.

More specifically, identifying a supervision context to *rework* the lived experience highlights, at a more general level, the importance of an education on conflict that is able to thematize the generativity of conflict itself, beyond any ethical demonization. In order to "educate for peace by diseducating for war", it is necessary to define a *gap* (*écart* – Jullien, 2012) between individuals that keeps the different instances of each person in dialectical tension (Banfi, 1967), instead of suppressing them in an imperialistic, prescriptive, or adultist sense (De Giorgi, 2018).

This gap, therefore, represents a metaphorical space for the movement of each individual: as an alternative to education as conformity and conditioning, the educational movement can become a material thematization of the ongoing experience, allowing for the expression of the individual and, at the same time, the critical processing of the experience itself (Massa, 2000).

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[4] "'Elogiare' la paura non significa, dunque, indiscriminatamente accettare tutte le sue forme, ma lavorarci sopra, soprattutto nell'educativo, e discriminare […] le paure che ci dissuadono da quelle che invece ci esortano ad assumere la prospettiva dell'etica della responsabilità".

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