

When violence is at the border of the visible: the violence of the smallest gestures

Elisabetta Biffi¹, Chiara Carla Montà^{2,3}

Abstract

The paper aims at exploring the risk of violence underneath some small and silent practices (made by gestures, and words) within educational contexts, which can reasonably be considered as part of the general framework for corporal punishments (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). The attention is, indeed, focused on those daily practices – connected with the main routines, such as lunchtime, playtime, and the practices related to personal hygiene – which have a specific educational value in terms of respect and recognition of the dignity of the child. The essay therefore reconsiders these typologies of smallest gestures from the wider perspective of violence against children (Hamby, Grych, 2013), in order to discuss the connections that exist between violence and education (Biffi, Macinai, 2020), where humiliation and denigration of the child is considered as part of an unacceptable punishment that demonstrates how thin the border between violence and education can be (Schermi, 2016). Finally, the paper will take stock of the path towards the elimination of all corporal punishment, with a specific focus on the role of teachers training in preventing and fighting violence against children, beginning from the sharing of a coherent and respectful educational style, between family and school.

Keywords: corporal punishment, education, Italy, family, school.

Abstract

Il contributo intende esplorare il rischio della violenza sotteso alle *micro*-pratiche educative (fatte di piccoli e silenziosi gesti e parole) dalla prospettiva del *corporal punishment* (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). L'attenzione è rivolta a quelle pratiche quotidiane – connesse con le *routines*, quali il pranzo, il gioco e l'igiene personale – che hanno uno specifico valore educativo nei termini del riconoscimento della dignità e del rispetto delle bambine e dei bambini. L'articolo guarda alle *micro*-pratiche pedagogiche

¹ Associate Professor in General and Social Pedagogy at the “Riccardo Massa” Department of Human Sciences for Education, University of Milano-Bicocca.

² PhD student in Education in the Contemporary Society at the “Riccardo Massa” Department of Human Sciences for Education, University of Milano-Bicocca.

³ The present contribution has been designed by Elisabetta Biffi and agreed upon by both Authors. At the same time, paragraphs 2.2 and 3 can be attributed to Elisabetta Biffi, whereas paragraphs 1, 2 and 2.1 can be attributed to Chiara Carla Montà.

dalla più ampia finestra della violenza all'infanzia (Hamby, Grych, 2013), per discutere le connessioni esistenti tra violenza e educazione (Biffi, Macinai, 2020), dove l'umiliazione e la denigrazione del bambino e della bambina sono viste come componenti di una modalità punitiva inaccettabile, che dimostra quanto possa essere sottile il confine tra violenza e educazione (Schermi, 2016). Infine, il contributo analizza il percorso verso l'abolizione delle punizioni corporali, dedicando specifica attenzione alla formazione degli insegnanti per prevenire e combattere la violenza all'infanzia, che inizia condividendo uno stile educativo coerente e rispettoso tra scuola e famiglia.

Parole chiave: punizioni corporali, educazione, Italia, famiglia, scuola.

1. *Violence against children: the contemporary scenario*

In this paper, the word “violence” is used in a broad sense, in order to cover the different situations in which people are at risk of being physically and psychologically damaged (Hamby, Grych, 2013), in accordance with the definition provided by the World Health Organisation: «The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation» (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, Zwi, 2002, p. 5). This definition is also in line with *General Comment No. 13* of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: «For the purposes of the present general comment, “violence” is understood to mean “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” as listed in article 19, paragraph 1, of the Convention» (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011, par. 4).

It has to be noticed that, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the interest and efforts in facing the violence against children phenomenon is considerably increasing. International conventions, national laws and several child protection strategies have been developed all around the world, with the definition of global strategies and movements which are hardly working in terms of prevention, sensibilization and coping⁴. Despite all these actions, in 2015, 1,7 billion children in the

⁴ Amongst the initiatives, relevant are the partnerships: Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (<https://endcorporalpunishment.org/>) and End Violence Against Children (<https://www.end-violence.org/>). Amongst strategies we signal the framework offered by: INSPIRE: Seven strategies for Ending Violence Against Children (https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire/en/; last

world have experienced forms of interpersonal violence during the past year (Know Violence in Childhood, 2017). These numbers include: 1,3 billion children that experienced corporal punishment at home; 261 million children in schooling age who experienced peer violence; 100.000 children victims of homicide; 18 million adolescents, aged 15-19 years, sexually abused; 55 million girls aged 15-19 who experimented physical violence. Despite these horrifying numbers, behind which faces, names, stories are hidden, these forms of violence struggle to emerge, they remain in the shade because often not perceived as violence; because data is missing; or data is difficult to collect and often is outdated so does not reflect the real situation.

The report *Know Violence in Childhood* (2017) reveals that children could experience violence during their whole growth span. During the pre-natal phase children pay the consequences of violence against their mothers; during early childhood they are exposed to the violence inflicted to their primary caregivers and other members of the family and can also be unawarely hurt during episodes of domestic violence. Between five and nine years of age, besides corporal punishment, children are exposed to peer violence and punishment in school. With pre-adolescence, the gender difference begins to become relevant: girls are often victims of sexual abuse, and boys are often involved in violence concerning the communities they are part of. There is no safe place either. Homes, institutions, school, online spaces, communities, public spaces, criminal organizations, are all spaces where several forms of violence can be experienced.

One of the reasons that remains at the back of this scenario is that violence does not only referred to the worst practices, which are mostly directed to the bodies of children: as the UN definition of corporal punishment underlined (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006), any behavior that causes physical or emotional or psychological suffering to the child is considered as violent. This definition, which is going to be analyzed in the next paragraph, gives reason to the need of considering as violent even those smallest practices which are based on humiliation and denigration of the child as a form of intervention which

access: 5.3.20), and the CoE Policy Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence (<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168046d3a0>; last access: 2.3.20).

can help the child him/herself in 'being educated'. For this reason, the connection between families and educational services/schools will be considered as fundamental, because it is in the connection between educational styles that the possibility to protect children from the invisible violence is underpinned.

2. Violence is not only visible. An extended vision of corporal punishment

With the global panorama on violence against children in mind, it is crucial to introduce a reflection on a form of violence that children all over the world, with no distinction, experience and have experienced: namely, corporal punishment. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors the Convention on the Rights of the Child, defines corporal punishment as follows:

The Committee defines "corporal" or "physical" punishment as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting ("smacking", "slapping", "spanking") children, with the hand or with an implement – a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices). In the view of the Committee, corporal punishment is invariably degrading. In addition, there are other non-physical forms of punishment that are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child (2006, par. 11).

The Committee continues, stating that:

In the light of the traditional acceptance of violent and humiliating forms of punishment of children, a growing number of States have recognized that simply repealing authorization of corporal punishment and any existing defenses is not enough. In addition, explicit prohibition of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, in their civil or criminal legislation, is required in order to make it absolutely clear that it is as unlawful to hit or "smack" or "spank" a child as to do so to an adult, and that the criminal law on assault does apply equally to such violence, regardless of whether it is termed "discipline" or "reasonable correction" (ivi, par. 19).

The present scenario concerning corporal punishment sees: 58 States that have achieved prohibition in all settings, including home; 54 more States are committed to achieving a complete legal ban (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2019). For what concerns Europe: 32 of 47 Council of Europe Member States have now achieved full prohibition in all (Council of Europe, 2009). The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, to this end, adopted a Recommendation calling Europe to become a *corporal punishment-free zone*. With regard to corporal punishment in schools, recent studies attested that it is lawful in some or all schools in 67 States, including 34 States with a policy against its use (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2019).

For what concerns Italy, it has to be specified that this Country is in an ambiguous position. On one side, the Italian Constitution prohibits any form of violence against all citizens:

Tutti i cittadini hanno pari dignità sociale e sono eguali davanti alla legge, senza distinzione di sesso, di razza, di lingua, di religione, di opinioni politiche, di condizioni personali e sociali. È compito della Repubblica rimuovere gli ostacoli di ordine economico e sociale, che, limitando di fatto la libertà e l'eguaglianza dei cittadini, impediscono il pieno sviluppo della persona umana e l'effettiva partecipazione di tutti i lavoratori all'organizzazione politica, economica e sociale del Paese⁵.

Furthermore, in 1996, the Supreme Court judgment outlawed all violence in childrearing (Sezione VI Cassazione penale, 1996).

On the other side, Italy does not have a specific definition of violence against children and seems to lack specific and explicit legislation. For what concerns schools, violence has been unlawful since 1928 but prohibiting explicit legislation still has to be defined. In secondary school, the situation is quite ambiguous: the Decree of the President of the Republic of 29 May 1998 states that no student shall be subject to disciplinary sanctions without having first been invited to explain their reasons, though

⁵All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the Law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal, and social, conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic or social nature, which constrain the freedom, and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic, and social, organization of the Country (Senato della Repubblica Italiana, art. 3, Author's own translation).

without explicitly prohibiting corporal punishment. For what concerns home, there is no explicit ban, so the declaration of the Supreme Court has not been enacted into legislation yet (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2019).

Homes and schools should be safe spaces; spaces devoted to education and caring: anyway, as shown in the *Introduction*, data unfortunately disconfirms this idea. In Italy, the *Indagine nazionale sul maltrattamento sui bambini e degli adolescenti in Italia* (Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, Cismai, Fondazione Terre des Hommes Italia, 2015) estimated that 47,7 minors on 1000 are being followed by social services. Of these, 91.272 are victims of maltreatment. Furthermore, there are profound differences amongst the regions, where the regions of the north and most of the ones of the centre are above national average in terms of prevention and protection, whereas the southern ones are below the average (Cesvi, 2019). Moreover, according to *La condizione delle bambine e delle ragazze nel mondo* (Terre des Hommes, 2017) there has been a preoccupying increase (+23%) of children victims of violent discipline. This, as it will be argued, because there is a profound connection between education and violence against children.

To summarize, corporal punishment, as the definitions above mentioned state, does not only include physical punishment, that leaves traces on the skin (and not only), but also includes punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child, so a form of punishment that is not visible. Furthermore, a central point in this definition, that will be depend in the contribution, is the concept of dignity. All violent methods of discipline, including corporal punishment, but also other cruel, inhumane, or degrading, treatment, are not coherent with the respect of the dignity of the child, contrary to what is stated in Article 28.2 of the UNCRC (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001, p. 679 (b)).

2.1. If violence means education: the shadow of the "black pedagogy"

The relation between violence and education has deep roots but has 'curiously' been addressed comprehensively only recently, thanks to the work of Katharina Rutschky (1977) reclaimed by Alice Miller (1980, It. transl. 1987), who coined the term «black pedagogy», fundamental to conceptualize the ensemble of practices where violence and education melt and are "*con-fused*". Rutschky deals with the pedagogy of two

centuries, reporting typical examples of violent education drawn from books on child-rearing. The forms, instruments, modalities in which 'educational violence' was experienced changed with the progression of years but even when the so-called «*sentiment de l'enfance*» (Ariès, 1960, *passim*) becomes more beneficial, 'enlightened' when thinking of how pedagogy in the seventeen and eighteen hundreds began to permeate the quotidian of society, children's concrete lived experiences continued being violent. With the passing of centuries, in fact, violence from tentatively being physical moved to forms of deprivation such as from a toy or food, to being sent into one's own bedroom, going to bed without supper till forms of emotional blackmailing became prevalent (Borruso, 2013). Nelson Mandela describes our days in the *Foreword* to the report on violence promoted by the World Health Organisation:

The twentieth century will be remembered as a century marked by violence. [...] Less visible, but even more widespread, is the legacy of day-to-day, individual suffering. [...] This suffering is a legacy that reproduces itself, as new generations learn from the violence of generations past, as victims learn from victimizers, and as the social conditions that nurture violence are allowed to continue (2002, p. ix).

Black pedagogy did not lose its destructive nature, to this end Maria Grazia Riva speaks of «the failure of the child's century» (2017, *passim*), referring to Ellen Key's work that outlined the specific attentions of the Nineteenth's century towards childhood, which flowed into fundamental conventions and declarations, but that have difficulty to concretely impact on the lives of children, where violence is more subtle (Demozzi, 2017).

Black pedagogy is quite hard to define, but it can be considered as the «systematic torture» (Peticari, 2015, *passim*) of children in the family, school, and society, but «hidden in plain sight» (UNICEF, 2014, *passim*) where education and violence become synonyms.

Certainly, in the first instance it may seem natural to recognize the use of violence as an educational method as unacceptable, but the border between education and violence is always ambiguous and thin (Biffi, 2017; Miller, 1980, It. transl. 1987; Riva, 1993). Violence is the shadow of education because it is perpetrated where care and protection relations should exist and it is the wound of education as the entire history of childhood (DeMause, 1974) is permeated with it (Biffi, Macinai, 2020).

2.2. *Violence and small educational gestures*

Having delineated the concept of black pedagogy, let us deepen how violence is present within quotidian gestures that characterize the educational relationship, taking punishment as an example or a lens to see what is less visible to the eyes of the most.

Alice Miller offers insight into the connection that exists between violence and education showing the centrality of respect and dignity. In *The Drama of Being a Child* (Miller, 1995), she actually underlines how the recognition of the child's dignity is the first step towards the construction of one's own self. A primary need of the child is to be considered and taken seriously right from the beginning for what he/she is, in each moment of growth. Humiliations, betrayal, derision, neglect are all forms of quotidian mistreatment and they injure the integrity and dignity of the child, even though their consequences may not be visible right away. These practices in fact teach the child that they deserved punishment and mistreatment and that it is the fruit of love towards them. Often enough, although not deterministically, these children, once adults, will be violent themselves as they have learnt that violence is part of the daily educational relationship.

Education is characterized by conditioning and micro-conditioning of the child in the quotidian of life to shape the child how the adult would like him/her to be/act, often unwarily. Education of the quotidian, in this sense, is characterized by the absence of thought or by a distorted thought and by the absence of empathy towards the other, towards the child who is unable to rebel and find help. The subtle manipulation of the child, of the 'powerless', provokes a transaction with, what Donald Winnicott called, the «true Self» (2018, [1960], *passim*), which should flourish in order to find an 'equilibrium' with oneself and the others. Violence causes a separation from the self, which makes one unable to empathize with the other.

Educational services and schools are not, in fact, mere places of learning, but 'life contexts', in which children can experiment themselves in a social and collective dimension, being in relationship with adults and peers. When educational practices in the family are marked by violence, or by non-recognition, these contexts are the only other occasions for those children to experiment the recognition of their dignity and of their legitimate pretense of respect by adults. If denigration (considered as violence) characterizes the smallest educational gestures both in the family and in the school, the risk is to reinforce the bond between edu-

cation and violence and the idea of a self not worthy of respect, with a consequent impact on the relationships that will be created.

For what concerns school, Italian policy documents recognize the need to create a respecting culture and nurturing environment (MIUR, 2016), but systematic actions, child protection policies, continuous training both at an information sharing and procedural level and on the emotional competences level are strongly needed. As mentioned elsewhere (Biffi, 2020) in a recent essay on verbal violence, where it is analyzed under the label of corporal punishment, it is mentioned that all too often violence is not even recognized in the school, similarly to what happens in the family. Humiliating and disrespectful words in fact characterize educational practices, nurturing a violent relationship.

In this kind of a relationship, the child will have difficulty to find her/himself in the words of the adult, mining the construction of the child's self. The child will in fact learn he/she is not worthy of respect and caring words. So, it is all these small gestures which mirror the way adults look so consider children that risk to be violent. We mean explicit verbal expressions that convey an image of incapacity or inadequacy ("you are not able to", "you don't get anything right", and so on), and gestures that are not caring ones. To this end, for example, we can think of the routine of going to the bathroom in kindergarten, a moment of great intimacy, of taking care of the body of the child. Hurried and distracted gestures that accompany this moment, helping or not the child to get dressed again, dedicating or not the necessary time and privacy, risk to transmit – or reinforce – the idea that the body of the child is not that important and that it can be dealt without much care, that its needs have to fit with the time of the other ("you'll go to the bathroom when its time"). The Author is conscious of the complexity of school life and of the difficulty connected to managing time and resources, that all too often are inadequate, but at the same time it is in those small gestures that education takes form, it is in these small gestures that respect towards the self and the other and the idea that one has value are built. There is a fundamental pedagogical meaning in the adult who patiently waits outside the bathroom for the child to finish, in the thoughtfulness of a teacher who asks: "Would you like me to help you?" May I?" and that waits for the answer before touching the body of the child. It is the meaning of the recognition of the limit of the body of the other, that must always be respected.

All this is particularly visible in the punishment practices. History of education (Ariès, 1968; Cambi, 2000; DeMause, 1974) underlines how

punishment has always been considered as an educational means. The history of pedagogy outlines, according to Mario Schermi (2016), two main ways of conceptualizing punishment:

1. Punishment as a means to generate thought in who is being punished in order to restore the broken relation;
2. Punishment as detrimental to the meaning of education itself: punishment, in fact, forces itself into the educational relationship where it limits freedom, the will, the possibilities of the other, puts the other in a condition of sufferance and of extreme vulnerability, especially when the other is a child.

The adult, parent or teacher, is called to promote and orient the growth of the subject, to exercise the educational functions of control and regulation, limiting liberty of the child, although these functions appear to be in crises now a days (Recalcati, 2013, 2014). The adult, with his/her authority (Miller, 1980, It. transl. 1987), and power (Rosini, 2015), forces him/her self into the educational relationship through punishment. In fact, studies on black pedagogy have underlined the ambiguity in the use of power that risks to become a form of educational abuse (Riva, 1993). Punishment, in this sense, appears to be on the border between education and violence and this border becomes more visible proportionally to the force of the entry into the relationship the adult exerts (Schermi, 2016).

In school and in educational services the issue of punishment sees a gap between what is theoretically assumed as valid (as far as establishing the non-usefulness of punishment itself) and the daily practice, which sees punishment not only as necessary but also as necessary.

Punishment can be conveyed thorough augmenting the workload and/or removing pleasurable moments (such as break time and, often, physical education). In addition, in these choices there are many implicit messages that are transmitted: work is a punishment, break is not a right or necessity but a privilege, skipping physical education is not a big deal. The *how* of the punishment is another critical element: how much of the meaning has been understood by the children? What value do they give to this choice?

School and educational services become contexts in which children should always experience respectful with adults. Relations that are careful to not be violent. This is always important, but especially for those children that, instead, are used to other educational stiles within the home. And punishment, even when explicitly corporal, are still widespread in our country. In order to get a deeper comprehension of the

use of corporal punishment as an educational method on the border between violence and education, it is of interest to recall the results of a national research called *I metodi educativi e il ricorso a punizioni fisiche. Vissuto e opinioni di genitori e figli*, by Save the Children Italy, within the European Project “Educate, do not punish” of the European Commission within the community action “Daphne III”. The study was commissioned to Ipsos in 2012 and concerns the relation between parents and children, educational methods and the use of corporal punishment such as slapping.

For what concerns slapping, it resulted that less than 5% of parents use slapping as a daily practice. Despite this, over 50% uses slapping in particular cases, and parents who use slapping more frequently can be added to this percentage. This implies that it is the majority of parents that slaps for educational reasons, so slapping isn't considered as a form of violence but as an educational method. Only one quarter of the total number of parents and only one fifth of parents with children aged between six and ten declare they refuse to use this kind of punishment. These numbers need to be read keeping in mind the difficulty the parents in the study express in pursuing their role and their need for professional help and advice on parenting.

This research shows how violence is part of Italian daily educational practices in the family, also highlighting how corporal punishment is not recognized as a form of violence: it is basically invisible. Anyway, on the other side, the study intercepts the loneliness of parents in exercising their role.

3. The child protection path: tacking stock of the situation

Hence, the reflection conducted so far leads to the need for an educational pact between schools and families, also in the following terms. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) represents a milestone in the child protection system. It brought a real cultural change: children, like adults, are considered as active subjects of their own rights and entitled to specific protection in the name of their best interest (art. 3). This legally binding document establishes that violence against children is not acceptable and legitimate. The Committee on the Rights of the Child called for the 23rd session of the Days of General Discussion in 2001. Here it was underlined that all violent methods of discipline, such as corporal punishment or other degrading, humiliating

and cruel practices are not coherent with the respect of the dignity of the child (CRC, art. 28.2). The new vision of the status and dignity of children represented by the concept of child rights provided the context in which to define violence. In that context even the argument that corporal punishment could have a «beneficial effect» (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001, p. 6) became questionable. The discussion resulted into the individuation of the Independent Expert for the Secretary-General Study on Violence against Children, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro who presented his final report to the UN General Assembly in 2016 (A/61/299). Here he claims that: «If we really want to build a world free from fear and violence, it is high time to accept that clearly prohibiting violent punishment of children, by their parents and other carers and teachers, and by the State – is an essential foundation stone» (Pinheiro, 2016, p. 7). In this document, it is also underlined how: «violence against children takes a variety of forms and is influenced by a wide range of factors, from the personal characteristics of the victim and perpetrator to their cultural and physical environments» (UN General Assembly, Rights of the Child: note/by the Secretary-General, 29 August 2006, A/61/299). Being free from any form of violence is a legitimate right of the child: this is what the recent General Comment No. 8 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006) stated as well.

The strategy promoted by the United Nations is carried out with the networks OHCHR, UNICEF and WHO, and with the collaboration of ONGs that work on protecting childhood and promoting its rights. *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children* (World Health Organisation, 2016) is one of the main outputs of this partnership. The strategy aims at helping States and communities intensify their work in facing violence against children. It is a strategy that needs to be understood globally and multisectoral in order to benefit from the synergies between one sector and another. Here education is considered as a pillar. To be able to access schooling, to develop social and emotional competences, to be able to be in safe and educational context are at the base of protection. Within the battle to combat violence against children, the recent document, published in November 2016 by The International NGO Council on Violence Against Children, *10 Years on: Global Progress & Delay in Ending Violence Against Children – the Rhetoric & the Reality*, can be read and understood. The report underlines the measures that have been taken within the mentioned battle and the important achieved results: for example the number of States that have adopted the full ban against corporal punishment, in terms of an explicit

normative ban of violence in all contexts, including the home and the school, have tripled since the first publication of the first study of the United Nations, yet an estimated one billion children still experience physical violence in the home on a regular basis (International NGO Council on Violence Against Children, 2016, p. 4).

A further milestone in the path of eliminating violence against children is offered by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where we can find, amongst its 17 sustainable development goals, the goal 16.2, which states: «End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children, that remarks the international efforts in facing violence against children» (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Once again, education and protection are strictly connected, and they are fundamental for humanity to be able to flourish in a manner that respects the human dignity of all.

As already said, violence is a pedagogical issue, so protection is too. Violence is enacted within educational relationships, educational contexts and caring ones, namely the school and the family. Moreover, the use of violence is considered as a legitimate educational practice. Approaches to preventing violence should be guided by the human dignity of the child rather than merely focusing on violence (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001, par. 697). Moreover, the Committee on the Rights of the Child suggests an alternative vision of the school and the family that respects the rights and dignity of all members, including children, parents and teachers. In this way mutually respectful and safe relations are promoted, rather than punitive actions. (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001, par. 702).

In this sense, it is crucial to create “educational alliances” between families and the school, in order to prevent and fight the risk of reiterating violent practices in these contexts, which end up reinforcing each other. Whereas alliances who put dignity at the center can promote a culture of respect amongst generations. First of all, the premises of the alliance are fundamental: relationships need to be constant and not only present during crises or difficult periods. Then, values such as respect are crucial to nurturing the alliance of co-responsibility. In order to really understand points of views and provide reciprocal sustain schools and families need to physically meet and work together. For instance, schools can offer educational support to families on issues concerning the growth of their children; families and school can exchange information on family issues and on the progress of children; have parents participate in classes and activities and have parents be part of the decisions concerning their

children. In this way, schools and families will get to know each other, count on each other and learn from each other. Schools, where professionals of education work, specifically, can be a role model for parents in the daily activities they carry out, in the words they use with the students.

In order to do so, training both for parents and teachers is crucial. Not only in terms of information and knowledge sharing but in terms of developing emotional competences that allow teachers to recognize the meanings of their actions. Violence, as Riva discussed clearly, is such when it becomes educational abuse, so when the adult uses her/his own power to deny the possibility to be of the other, to bend the other's will. Clearly, as already mentioned, we are far from wanting to deny the authority of the adult, nor to fail to recognize the power imbalance in the relation between adult and child. On the contrary, it is only by recognizing this, and by being capable of give meaning to that disparity, that it will be possible for the adult to use her/his authority, with respect of the dignity of the other, and that will help the child to learn the responsibility that is behind that power.

References

- Ariès P. (1960): *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Regime*. Paris: Plon.
- Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, Cismai, Fondazione Terre des Hommes Italia (2015): *Indagine nazionale sul maltrattamento dei bambini e degli adolescenti in Italia* (retrieved from <https://terredeshommes.it/download/Indagine-Maltrattamento-bambini-TDH-Cismai-Garante.pdf>; last access: 6.3.20).
- Biffi E. (2017): Protecting minors against violence: From strategy to practice – Tutelare i minori contro la violenza: dalle strategie alle pratiche. *Education Sciences & Society*, 1, pp. 47-64.
- Biffi E., Macinai E. (2020): *Ombre e ferite dell'educazione. Violenza e maltrattamento ai minorenni* (retrieved from http://ojs.francoangeli.it/_omp/index.php/oa/catalog/book/454; last access: 6.3.20).
- Borruso F. (2013): "Ti do io una buona lezione che ricorderai a lungo". Metodi educativi e violenza sull'infanzia nella storia dell'educazione fra Sette e Novecento. *Pedagogia Oggi*, 2, pp. 80-99.
- Cambi F. (2000): *Storia della pedagogia*. Roma: Laterza.
- Cesvi (2019): *Indice regionale sul maltrattamento all'infanzia in Italia* (retrieved from <https://www.cesvi.org/approfondimenti/indice-regionale-sul-maltrattamento-allinfanzia-italia/>; last access: 2.3.20).
- Council of Europe (2009): Council of Europe Portal (retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/it/web/portal>; last access: 2.3.2020).

- DeMause L. (1974): *The History of Childhood*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Demozzi S. (2017): The “subtle violence”. Adultized children and educational challenges La “violenza sottile”. *Infanzia adultizzata e sfide pedagogiche. Education Sciences & Society*, 1, pp. 65-76.
- Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2019): Countdown to universal prohibition (retrieved from <https://endcorporal-punishment.org/countdown/>; last access: 12.3.20).
- Hamby S., Grych J. (2013): *The Web of Violence: Exploring Connections among Different Forms of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse*. New York, London: Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg.
- International NGO Council on Violence Against Children (2016): *10 Years On: Global Progress & Delay in Ending Violence Against Children – The Rhetoric & The Reality* (retrieved from https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/10258/pdf/int_ngo_council_vac_report2016.pdf; last access: 5.3.20).
- Know Violence in Childhood (2017): *Ending Violence in Childhood. Global Report 2017*. New Delhi: Know Violence in Childhood Publ.
- Krug E.G., Mercy J.A., Dahlberg L.L., Zwi A.B. (2002): *The World Report on Violence and Health* (retrieved from https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42495/9241545615_eng.pdf;jsessionid=2F9F6BB450AF91E897BD80F5AC6B9B20?sequence=1; last access: 6.3.20).
- Mandela N. (2002): *Forward*. In E.G. Krug, J.A. Mercy, L.L. Dahlberg, A.B. Zwi (eds.): *The World Report on Violence and Health*, cit., p. ix (retrieved from https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42495/9241545615_eng.pdf;jsessionid=2F9F6BB450AF91E897BD80F5AC6B9B20?sequence=; last access: 6.3.20).
- Miller A. (1979): *La persecuzione del bambino. Le radici della violenza*. It. Transl. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1987.
- Miller A. (1995): *The Drama of Being a Child*. London: Virago.
- Perticari P. (2015): *Introduzione alla pedagogia nera*. In Id. (a cura di): *Pedagogia nera. Fonti storiche dell'educazione civile*. Milano-Udine: Mimesis, p. 53.
- Pinheiro P.S. (2016): Contributions from Experts. In *10 YEARS ON: GLOBAL PROGRESS & DELAY IN ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN – THE RHETORIC & THE REALITY*, p. 7 (retrieved from https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/10258/pdf/int_ngo_council_vac_report2016.pdf; last access: 6.3.20).
- Recalcati M. (2013): *Cosa resta del padre? La paternità nell'epoca ipermoderna*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Recalcati, M. (2014): *Il complesso di Telemaco: genitori e figli dopo il tramonto del padre*. Feltrinelli Editore.
- Riva M.G. (1993): *L'abuso educativo*. Milano: Unicopli.
- Riva M.G. (2017): What can not be said: The failure of the ‘child’s century’. Ciò che non può essere detto: il fallimento del ‘secolo del bambino’. *Education Sciences & Society*, 1, pp. 23-36.

- Rossini V. (2015): *Educazione e potere: Significati, rapporti, riscontri*. Milano: Guerini Scientifica.
- Rutschky K. (1977): *Schwarze Pädagogik*. Frankfurt/M., Wien, Berlin: Ullstein Verlag.
- Schermi M. (2016): *Educare e punire. L'esperienza educativa nella difficile impresa di liberare e contenere*. Molfetta (BA): Edizioni La Meridiana.
- Sezione VI Cassazione penale (1996): *Sentenza n. 4904 del 18/03/1996 Ud. (dep. 16/05/1996), Cambria (Rv. 205033*; retrieved from file:///Users/chiarra/Downloads/GIURISPRUDENZA_ART_571_CP (2).pdf; last access: 10.3.20).
- Terre des Hommes (2017): *La condizione delle bambine e delle ragazze nel mondo* (retrieved from https://terredeshommes.it/indifesa/InDifesaDossier_2017.pdf; last access: 6.3.20).
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006): *General Comment No.8 – The Right of the child to Protection from Corporal Punishment and Other Cruel or Degrading Forms of Punishment (arts. 19; 28, par. 2; and 37, inter alia)*.
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001): *Recommendations of the Discussion on “Violence against Children, within the Family and in Schools”*. 28th session, CRC/C/111.
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2011): *General comment No. 13 – The Right of the Child to Freedom from all Forms of Violence*.
- UN General Assembly (1989): *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations, Treaty Series, 1577(3) (retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html>; last access: 6.3.20).
- UNICEF (2014): *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical Analysis of Violence against Children*.
- United Nations General Assembly (2015): *Transforming our World: the 2030 – Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/70/1. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199560103.003.0005>; last access: 5.3.20).
- Winnicott D.W. (2018): *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* [1960]. London: Routledge.
- World Health Organisation (2016): *INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children* (retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/inspire-seven-strategies-for-ending-violence-against-children>; last access: 5.3.20).