Education, Person, Suffering. Reflections of Pain Pedagogy

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Abstract

Talking about suffering is not easy. It is a delicate and complex topic which involves, personally and deeply, each human being's life through his/her personal distress, despair and, sometimes, even through annihilation: all the afore said places this topic in a sort of cultural form of exile. Suffering has almost become a taboo, even if it is more and more the object of show business nowadays and it is manifestly exhibited in public contexts. If, on the one hand, suffering plays a leading role in TV shows and it is the object of curiosity, on the other hand, far from the public eyes, it is put aside, even though it does not appear to be less thunderous. In the private sphere suffering is unsaid, denied, removed. Its exhibition has taken the place of its interpretation. Anyway, some worrying signals come from the new generations. The young people, in fact, seem to be incapable of going through and reacting to suffering, sometimes also to that suffering being the result of a little frustration, which is vented through exaggerated and unimaginable attitudes and behaviours. News in the mass media, meanwhile, already reports them almost on a daily basis. In this respect, what can pedagogy, and so education, do? Is it possible to hypothesize a pedagogy of the suffering as a specific ambit for reflection? And through what ways can education help the person to manage his/her suffering? This contribution aims to try to answer these questions.

Keywords: education, pain, suffering, person, control

Pain and suffering in current society

One of the most urgent issue but at the same time a marginalized one, if not even absent, of the contemporary pedagogical debate, continues to be the one relating to pain. A topic that, although has already been investigated by other human sciences, has not yet gained the attention and speculative commitment of pedagogy. The pain is present in our time in a confused and contradictory way. If on the one hand it has become a television host, an object of attraction and curiosity, on the other hand, in the private and away from the cameras, it is silent, denied, and removed (Boltanski, 2000). Spectacle and silence, exhibition and lack of interpretation are its main features, an antinomy connotation that makes it possible to talk about it in public, television and social media, but it is kept silent in private, right there where the listening, participation, sharing, support, would instead be necessary (laquinta, 2015). In our time, therefore, pain is a two-faced creature; a public one, television and ostentatious, and a private one, invisible because it is hidden. While the spectacle of pain does not arouse feelings of modesty, of defending one's inner self, it often invites the exaltation of the smallest details, mostly linked to macabre or morbid aspects, the pain far from the spotlight lives the season of exile. Mortified, if not even unnamed, not so much in the interiority of the subject that in any case lives it and suffers it, as in the possibility of being told, participated and shared with others. The experience of pain, writes Salvo, "has been placed in a sort of exile, yet never as in recent years it is shown, exposed. Shiny eyes, more or less spontaneous tears, badly restrained sobs accompany the asphyxiating hours of television programs built right on this axis "(2011, p.197).

Except, therefore, the contradiction that currently marks the pain, which is that of being admitted to the general public and being denied to the small one: family, relatives and friends. Today, either one does not talk or talks too much of pain and of the suffering that it causes in the human soul, where the adverb "too much" refers only to the growing media interest therefore of pure spectacle. It is precisely this ambivalence, this antithetic between private pain and public pain, between emptiness and fullness that highlights the lack of a genuine interest in the person touched by a painful event on a cultural level, which calls into question pedagogical knowledge and, therefore education.

The lack derives from not talking about pain and suffering (states of mind, feelings, experiences, etc.) with the other, it is this silence, due to incapacity or modesty, to make the suffering invisible. On the other hand, when one talks about it in an excessive way, like in the media, silence becomes the natural epilogue that characterizes the end of a show to which we have witnessed and which needs, at the end of the credits, a feedback on the quality of acting. Having exhausted the entertainment function assigned today to pain and suffering, the silence falls, inexorably, on the real life of those who brought it to the stage and who, however, continues to suffer (laquinta, 2014). If suffering is denied in private pain, in public pain it is numbed by the limelight and made unlikely.

On the other hand, living in a time excessively focused on the aesthetic dimension (corporeality exasperated by fitness and sublimated by the filters of "digital surgery") that enhances everything that is opposed to suffering (success, well-being, fun, material happiness) produces more and more frequently a clouding of thought, pushing human action towards horizons of unattainable invulnerability, while it is well known that painful events are not eradicable from human history marked, by nature, by fragility, precariousness, vulnerability. The negative attitude of the pain that derives from this approach of removal-negation therefore pushes us to look at the Other who suffers, the *patiens*, with an inevitably clouded, deformed if not even myopic gaze (Galeazzi, 2004).

Pain and suffering, therefore, although they are present in the ordinariness of life, seem to have disappeared, just as the images of apparent happiness posted on social networks, Instagram among all, would have us believe. And if the disappearance is an impossible process to be implemented because suffering is an inherent aspect of human existence, the attempt made by society is to trivialize and marginalize the issue of the pain and suffering of existence through operations that lead to silencing the interiority of the subject preventing the awareness of self from opening up to the Other, to the request for help, favouring the birth of an "empathic conscience". Consequence of this "farsification of reality" is the impediment of a subjective, collective and disciplinary reflection that hinders the possibility of a trend reversal that brings the issue of the pain and suffering of the person back into the right place and consideration (laquinta, 2019).

It is important to point out that from the point of view of logical-conceptual analysis the words pain and suffering, even if commonly used with synonymic value, are actually different in meaning. While the pain is *accidens*, an event, sudden and shattering occurrence that breaks into human existence; suffering is what derives from pain and is in some way, precisely because of its consequence, expectation. While pain is objective, suffering is subjective. Suffering, in fact, has roots in the painful event and is closely linked to the subjective interpretative process (Natoli, 1996).

If the pain, therefore, is identifiable with what undermines or compromises the integrity of the person or affects its psychophysical and spiritual balance, suffering must be understood as an expression of the personal way of living that problematic situation. Suffering is to be conceived as a subjective manifestation of pain, as its existential reflection. It is a manifestation of the ontological structure of the person, who is at once universal and singular. In summary, suffering is the subjectivity of the human condition called into question by the universality of pain. Pain as damage is universal and objective: suffering as a sense is subjective.

Pain, Natoli states, refines the sense of solitude, forcing the individual to have a privileged relationship with his pain. The suffering man withdraws into himself and moves away from the others. The impression that no one understands him, that such suffering is inaccessible to his or her compassion or his/her mere understanding, further accentuates this trend.

Pain, adds Le Breton, is a forced and violent experience of the limits of the human condition (2007).

Pain can therefore be described as a strong alteration of the subject's sense of identity, a laceration of the conscience, an immediate deprivation of meaning and perspective, an alienation from oneself and from one's own physicality. It has the ability to remove the word rather than give it, argues Salvo, its intrinsic characteristic is that of closing the subject in a chilling mutism in the same way as children who cannot yet speak (2011). Stuttering or repeating, almost in an overwhelming dirge, the same thing is always the exercise, which forces pain, and so the perception of carrying within oneself a wound that does not heal is so powerful as to make one stumble in words.

The silence of the subject in in front of the pain is perhaps part and reason of the objective silence that pedagogically surrounds him and that can be read as a real cultural silence (Mantegazza, 2018). In fact, pain seems to exist in an indefinite place and far from the subject even when the subject unfortunately personally experiences it. Pain remains unnamed, without attributions and characteristics linked to a specific individuality, to a specific suffering, to a specific event from which it originated. Almost like a stigma, a guilt, one hides it badly to oneself and with more diligence to others, who do not disdain

the profuse commitment in this operation as if the contiguity with the suffering of the other made it immediately transferable by infection.

However, pain affects the behaviour of man and his values, on the social and cultural background. Pain is a consequence of his social and cultural conditions as well as creator of the meanings he lives with (Le Breton, 2014). Suffering is the indispensable passage that allows the subject an inner growth that produces new looks and new awareness. Because if imagination and thought, Proust argues, can be wonderful machines, but inert, suffering has the ability to set them in motion (1993). Giving voice and name to pain is the first, indispensable activity for the man and his humanity, which precisely through externalization, sharing and participation takes on a more defined form of humanity, as well as being useful to society for becoming aware of any emergency, that of the incapacity to suffer and to communicate pain, which is nourished precisely by this silence. Incapacity that seems to pervade today more than yesterday the life of everyone and young people in a particular way.

Young people and pain

Young people today seem not only more exposed to pain but also unable to live it, to suffer it. They manifest an emotional vulnerability that makes it difficult to accept the painful event that affects them and, consequently, its elaboration. "Young people, writes Galimberti, although they are not always aware of it, they are ill. Moreover, not for the usual existential crises that dot youth. When questioned they do not know how to describe their malaise because they have now reached that emotional illiteracy that does not allow them to recognize their feelings and above all to call them by name "(Galimberti, 2011, p.11).

Our life, writes Fadda, "is pointed out by events that affect us, which leave their mark, which form us. Already at the level of cosmological and cosmogenic theories, event, chance, disorder and entropy are the generators of forms. The same happens in the life of people: our educational history begins with and thanks to an event par excellence, which is the birth. It is and event because we have not chosen anything: not the space (where) not the time (when), not the parents, not the genetic characteristics and above all we have not chosen to be born. We are thrown into the world.

Birth is therefore an event, an occurrence that generates form, structure and order. Even death, an event par excellence (with the exception of the voluntary one) that awaits us as a destiny is a formator. Of course, to mark us, to affect our existence and our life, to form us, is the death of others, given the obvious impossibility of drawing formative elements from our death, extreme experience of our life "(Fadda, 1998, p. 70).

The event, therefore, is of great importance in the existence of man because it affects his formation through the attribution of meaning and in the way in which the event (birth, death, and destiny) is lived. In addition, it is precisely the attribution of meaning to give shape to man, it is this attribution of meaning that confers governability to a fact that by nature is ungovernable and unpredictable.

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Scholars designate with the expression *peak experiences* (markers events) those crucial moments of the existence in which a reorganization of the personality takes place, and that mark the most important occasions of change in adult development. In fact, these are the apical moments that force the subject to rethink his identity, his cognitive and affective modalities (Demetrio, 1988); "These are the experiences related to pain, writes Mapelli, those that put us in contact with the most radical dimension of existence" (Mapelli, 2013, p.30).

The test bench of the fragility of human existence is, therefore, the event, the existential stumbling, and the emotional impact, which breaks the balance of life and tests the subject's "road holding", his abilities, beliefs, possibilities, resources. In short, the event breaks into the already fragile human condition by tearing up suspension wires, guaranteeing balance and safety, and delivering the young to the pain and complexity of the other feelings that often accompany them, for a time and with an outcome impossible to predict.

The pain, therefore, overwhelms the existence of man almost always without warning, but what is more serious breaks into the lives of young people, without even a minimum knowledge of it as a possibility in their own existence, without the

subjective awareness of this eventuality, without a 'preparation', without an education that had as its object, without circumstances and contingencies being the occasion for discussion and familiarization (laguinta, 2014).

The subject of pain, and in general all that concerns feelings, is almost totally missing from everyday life, family and school. Adults such as parents, educators and teachers, are not able to create, if not rarely, occasions of reflection and discussion on the subject, leaving young people to explore their own feelings and emotions. Living them without any aid or a compass.

The knowledge of the 'cardinal points' and the instrument that indicates them, the *compass-education* precisely, would instead be a non-negligible endowment for the young man who ventures into the journey of self-knowledge and of the world that is steeped in facts, events that the subject inevitably encounters. In addition, even in cases where, at school or in the family, we talk about pain, communication is usually confined to a saying with no prospect of growth, without a wider horizon in which to situate the events and the feelings that accompany them.

Skipping 'the obstacle' in a short time, finding a way out of the impasse, neglecting to make it a useful training for the next 'jump', perhaps more challenging and more difficult, is the not so efficient solution for the upbringing of young people, but much practiced by adults, who forbids making that occasion or that event a wider object of reflection. 'To objectify matter' and to raise it from an exclusively subjective and unspoken level, to a general and universal level, would instead be useful to the young person to draw from him a wider and less subjective knowledge, a real teaching, to draw on, over time, to give roots to future experiences (laquinta, 2014). Moreover, this is a process that education for suffering can make possible.

The silence of pedagogy and the need to educate to suffering

There is a gap, a distance still not filled between the practice of education and the theory of education, a disconnection between the places where education takes form and the places where education is thought, discussed and theorized. There is a colourless area, which, although becoming part of it, constitutes educational practices, remains outside reflection and pedagogical theorizing. Within this colourless area, that includes everything that belongs to the subject's affective dimension: desires, emotions, impulses, passions, feelings, pain is, among the latter, the one most excluded by the studies of scholars. Sadly, no one speaks or writes about pain, in pedagogy. In Italy there are essays on specific topics, death for example (Mottana, 1998; Mantegazza, 2004; 2018;), or which deal with aspects of human suffering (Pati, 2012;), but their presence is so little in Italy as well as in the international pedagogical framework. It is still missing within the pedagogical knowledge, and therefore in educational practice, a field of study and specific reflection, a pedagogy of pain, a term already used in the early eighties by Sandro Maggiolini (1981). Contini states that pain, love and death are great signs for the existence of each one who, from them, and from the way of facing them, draws its most significant connotations; but if we ignore them, avoiding them or living them without awareness, if we do not learn to question them and accept the confrontation, which they solicit, with ourselves and with others then life goes by with poor happiness, commitment and meaning. We need to learn to know our feelings: to know who we are, where we come from, where we are going (1998).

Along the same lines is the thought of Mottana who points out a serious gap in the contemporary experience, that is the prudent attitude, educative speaking, towards feelings. They are always considered destabilizing agents and therefore threatening. Moreover, the he points out the "excommunication of the so-called negative feelings", of which one must always look for a remedy, as soon as possible, a pharmacological cancellation. These are considered experiences increasingly deprived of sense and marginalized, hidden, shameful, unworkable, unutterable and not socially exhibited (1998).

The contemporary pedagogical debate is, therefore, strangely silent on this important aspect of the education and upbringing of the subject, neglecting that idea of education as a life that takes shape with all the possible variations and inclinations. Life that is a biological growth but also a multiplicity of dimensions that are measured not only with historical time and with geographical space, with linguistic horizons and cultural forms, but also with manifestations of human communication, including emotional and affective ones (Fadda, 1998; 2016). The great test for the subject, of every age and condition, is always the moment of pain and suffering, a time of emotional annihilation and inner darkening. Among the feelings is the pain that puts at risk the survival of man, his ability to resist, to build, to continue.

Whether it is the pain due to abandonment, separation, failure or the loss of a loved one, it does not make much difference. It is a matter of constructing a space for reflection within the pedagogical knowledge that has as its object the pain and the suffering of the person in its infinite shades and nuances in order to put into practice educational actions and interventions. A silence, that of pedagogy, which produces a deafening noise, which screams louder than any other voice, because it is the human cry, and at the same time inhuman, of those who feel fearful, helpless, unheard. It is therefore essential for

pedagogy to engage on this issue by encouraging interdisciplinary debate to ensure that through education we can build reception and listening tools that allow the sufferer to pronounce, albeit in a feeble voice, the words of his pain (laquinta, 2019) In order to be supported and helped.

If pedagogy is a discipline that recognizes in the future the privileged dimension of its action, and if the words utopia, project, perspective and change constitute fundamental elements of educational practice, education is the hope given to the subject not only to prepare to face the trials of life but to go through moments of crisis and, therefore, to overcome pain, through the construction of meaningful paths (Mapelli, 2006). Education and hope, in fact, have in common the dimension of the future, the time that will be, in which education can be seen, and that particular aspect of education, as well as evidence of the merits of hope nourished in a precise time and with respect to a specific fact and that today, or in the *hic et nunc* of both education and hope. They have the propulsive centre from which every action and reflection starts, aimed at favoring the growth, development and emotional holding of the subject (Galeazzi, 2004).

Bertolini in his *Dictionary of pedagogy and educational science* (1988) describes education as the process of human formation, understood both as an individual and as a group, in the direction of a slow but authentic discovery and clarification of oneself, or of the peculiar, physical, mental and spiritual characteristics. Education means every intentional and therefore conscious action wanted by the adult (and society) to help the child grow and develop harmoniously, in view of a progressive enrichment and strengthening of his biological, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions; in order to favour his positive and therefore active and critical integration in the environment in which he lives.

Whatever the goal of educational action, it becomes authentic if it produces a modification whose reverberation spreads over the entire existence of the person to whom it is addressed. The ultimate task of education is, in fact, to expand the dimensions of living and, thus, from a certain point of view, every situation or moment in the existence of man, every practice, can be intrinsically educational. Demetrio in this regard states that the greatness and at the same time the poverty of education lies in rooting itself in the immense complexity of life (1988) while Erbetta recognizes the equivalence between education and existence (2005). Certainly, education cannot always coincide with life, because some important aspects of life cannot be understood completely by means of a teaching. An act of the will, as in the case of pain, of a sudden event that falls down on the subject disturbing him in depth, but it is nonetheless irrefutable that education has its *raison d'être* and its ultimate meaning precisely in the existence of man in his living life. The latter arises, at the same time, within and outside the "natural" flow of existence, in fact, education comes from life and returns to it, but after being detached from it as to reduplicate it within an area of experience distinct from immediate life and not for this is less vital, such as to sink its roots into it while at the same time tending to distance itself from it.

The complex relationship between education and life inevitably calls into question the concept of experience, and therefore Dewey's thought, as a valiant concept, *trait d'union*, between the events that constitute the life of the subject and their possible educational meaning. The concept of experience is the main conceptual tool of the American philosopher's thought, in fact, in *Experience and Nature* (1925) he states that two are the dimensions of the experienced things: the first is to have them, the second to know them in order to have them in the most significant and reliable way.

Experience, in Dewey's philosophy, is not separated from knowledge and from reflection, that are indispensable and decisive actions to reach experience itself. An experience that has its own intrinsic historicity, since each individual experience is situated in a continuum in which the formative event of each one is realized.

No experience can be considered on its own, independent from the other ones, but all together constitute the history of the subject who builds and becomes himself through them. However, living is not enough to have an experience, because an event becomes an experience when the person makes it his own, intentionally. Moreover, this concept demonstrates all its validity in the subject's painful situations; it is before the tragic events that interrupt the usual linearity of everyday life that the deterioration of experience manifests itself in the most dramatic manner (Mapelli, 2006).

In fact, these events introduce into the biography of the individual a discontinuity that calls for the effort to acquire new meanings. Gadamer (1983) states that when we say we have had some experience, we mean that so far we had not seen things correctly and that now we know better how they are. The negativity of the experience has a particularly constructive sense. In addition, such experiences, states the German philosopher, initiate a process of demodulation, of redefining identity, from which the subject comes out transformed.

However, there is a risk that the work of critical review to which these events lead to remains unanswered due to the difficulty in making the experience one's own. And so, on the one hand education does not automatically coincide with life and experience, it is something in which we are potentially immersed but which, at the same time, we risk of never having. It is in the gap that exists between event and experience that educational action finds its *raison d'être*.

The educational experience is the intentional action through which the subject appropriates back his experience, through which all existential questions acquire meaning. According to this issue, Mapelli states, education comes to coincide with a real elaboration exercise, an intentional practice of existential hermeneutics (2006).

Education has the future as its dimension, which is a temporal segment, a ray of action that, although rooted in today, from which it starts, has the "verification of results" at a later time, as well as the hope. Aristotle conceives it as an act of the will that is born from a virtuous habit, which potentially tends to reach a future good that is difficult but not impossible to achieve. In this behaviour, it is necessary that the good to be obtained is well defined as well as the mean to achieve it. For this reason, hope refers not only to the objective good towards which the will tends, but also to what one trusts to get it. And in this regard Fromm states that if a tree that does not receive light bends its trunk in the direction of the sun, we cannot claim that the tree hopes, because the hope in a man is linked to the feelings and the awareness that the tree does not have (2002).

The expectation of the future that is typical of both hope and education, specifically of an education in suffering, which through a process of awareness of the subject to pain. This awareness of pain, considered as universal and non-singular can help the subject to resist the tests of life through ways of processing pain and containing and managing suffering capable of allowing the subjective appropriation (meaning) of lived experience. Only through education, in its being preparation, accompaniment, care, it is in fact possible for the subject to understand the pain. This can be possible by providing knowledge in a pedagogical-educational sense and in opposition to the prevailing culture of the media. Moreover, helping in the case of a painful event, to start the process of acceptance and elaboration through dialogue, externalization of emotions and feelings, sharing of experience; to situate the event beyond the contingent, and accompanying him, with appropriate educational methods and tools. An educational commitment aimed at encouraging the awareness of the subject and giving perspective to that particular painful event considering it an important part of being and becoming, a peculiar trait of taking shape (laquinta, 2014).

"The experience of pain, says Mapelli, is one of those experiences that, even though it is delicate and difficult to elaborate, it is possible for the subject through education and before, if avoided or postponed, it is expressed in a pathological way. It is by fully assuming its hermeneutical task with regard to the events that point out human existence, that education can help transformation, preparing and accompanying those difficult changes that, happening against the will of the subject, create a state of suffering and disorientation "(M.Mapelli, 2006, p.33).

The commitment of pedagogy, and specifically of a pedagogy of pain, is therefore to recognize and accept the dimension of pain in the educational experience and imagine, hypothesize, build, modalities and practices that allow the subject to give name and voice to the pain to go through it.

It is not possible to pedagogically conceal the present and increasingly widespread social pain, nor to continue to show hesitancy and excessive timidity in dealing with the issue of pain and its problems with the proper tools of education, especially in the face of knowledge and practices that try to claim as their own the exclusivity of the path and the treatment of the subject in moments of crisis of existence.

It is typical of education to "accompany the subject along the vital path by punctuating the critical moments, detecting fractures and hiatuses, highlighting scraps and strident sides. In this sense education as the constitution of the subject has also always been a powerful counterweight to the solitude of the subject; born as a project of social integration, it shows the subject that the community is always present, not so much behind him but inside him "(Mantegazza, 2004, p.50).

Integrating the pain into the subject's life, making him aware of the possibility of crossing it, is a task that belongs to pedagogy since it is evident the educational responsibility in helping the subject to manage the delicate phases and moments of existential crisis, also dialoguing with other knowledge fields.

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