

“Time machine effect”: when grandparents go back to school to tell their grandchildren what life was like when they were children. An intergenerational relationship observed from an historical perspective

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Abstract. The project “The time machine effect” involved a class group of the fourth-class group of primary school located in the southwest suburbs of Florence, and it has set itself the goal of putting children in direct contact with the reality of the past starting from the narration that their grandparents they did by remembering some aspects of when they were their age. The grandparents who made themselves available to participate in the project, told their childhood by comparing it with that of their grandchildren today. The collaborative and interactive learning experience has been designed and implemented in an interdisciplinary perspective, in an attempt to succeed in making interdisciplinary activities and competences interact: history, corporeity and emotions for dramatization, citizenship competences. In a time characterized by the many historical changes also favored by technology, it seems necessary to create the conditions to put in touch the generation of grandparents with that of their grandchildren in an educational perspective: the transmission of knowledge of the past through the generations is a priceless heritage because it is a passage that has emotional implications. Involving older people in school life by strengthening intra-community ties, in our day, is a hypothesis to reduce the generational gap by improving the understanding of experiences in different periods, emphasizing the equality and differences of the daily life.

1. Introduction

The grandparents are in a phase of life that makes them able to resonate with the generation of their grandchildren, to feel their emotions vibrate, to understand their deep needs, to marvel at their discoveries. Grandparents, especially in today's complex reality and especially in Italian contest, are the only ones able to give their grandchildren the most precious gift for their growth: a time "without haste". Time is the cornerstone on which the development of relationality and affectivity revolves. Nowadays, Children need time dedicated to them; hurry, inattention, stress neurotize them and create difficulties in their process of psycho-affective maturation. Before considering the different familiar intra dynamics of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, it is worthwhile briefly to mention the consideration that the current age reserves to the figure of grandparents in the systemic-family environment. If in the patriarchal family the elderly being gave

automatically the respect and the right to transmit in a unidirectional way knowledge, behavioral practices and value orientations to the younger generations (Pati, 2010) [1], since the seventies the situation has completely reversed and today the importance of the transmission gives way to an exaltation of the novelty that ends up overwhelming the image of the elderly, less and less holders of knowledge useful to younger people and, consequently, increasingly subject to the risk of social and cultural marginalization (Galimberti, 2009; Frabboni, Pinto Minerva, 2013) [2]; [3]. Currently, the complex reality in which we live proposes to the children a plurality of families and social subjects to which was also added that of educational models, which ended up being considered more and more relative and contingent. In this sense, the educational role of grandparents is now fundamental, as it represents in the eyes of the grandchildren a stability and a continuity of values. All the activities shared between grandparents and grandchildren represent an important educational moment for both (Lumby, 2010; Stramaglia, 2012) [4]; [5]. For grandparents, sharing through the narration of one's life memories reinforces the links between past and present. For grandchildren, carrying out activities with grandparents means implicitly experimenting alternative models of life with respect to parental ones (Boffo, 2012) [6], but also acquiring the awareness of having roots and being anchored to the past through continuity with the generations that have them preceded. In fact, grandparents provide a fundamental contribution not only to for the genetic heritage but also to the cultural heritage: a sense of life historically interpreted and witnessed for their grandchildren in the age group considered (9-10 years) become a heroic model to be proud of them (Di Sandro, 2013) [7] and an important stimulus to grow up empathetic skills. Although grandparents can play a crucial role in the lives of their grandchildren in terms of education, only recently has grandparenthood been a topic in international literature (Smorti et al. 2012) [8], indeed, in the grandparent-grandchild relationship (in the form of emotional closeness, shared family identity and perceived, availability of social support) often influence grandchildren's perceptions of their family (Mansson et al. 2017) [9]. Recent trends such as increased life expectancy, decreases in family size, and the rise of both single-parent families and maternal employment increase the potential for grandparents to play important roles in the lives of their grandchildren (Dunifon, 2012) [10]. Grandparents show their grandchildren a kind of life that is profoundly different from the one that is usual for them, other habits and ways of acting; all this helps the boys to relate positively with everyone. It is therefore not surprising that grandchildren who spend some time with their grandparents, then move in society with more confidence and, during adolescence, are less confrontational (Zanniello, 2013) [11]. Follow the hypothesis about idea of adaptation as well as self-reproduction of systems, it is assumed that family history is stored in a shared "family memory" holding both implicit and explicit knowledge and exerting an influence on the behavior of each family member, because family identity reflecting shared significant experiences within a family system originating a set of signs used in social communication within and between families (Ferring, 2017) [12]. In fact, from studies of intergenerational relationships, it emerges that:

- grandchildren who consider the relationship with their grandparents significant since childhood maintain a level of satisfaction over time for this relationship despite the fact that there is a reduction in contact between grandparents and grandchildren because of a physical distance (Taylor et al., 2005) [13];
- in family conditions where parenting figures are supported by grandparents for the education of children, particularly in single-parent families, grandchildren benefit from having close and supportive relationships with their grandparents, to the point of diminishing possible depressive symptoms (Ruiz et al, 2007) [14];
- the grandparents' narratives give a fundamental contribution to the construction of identity: a personal story of his life narrated by a grandfather to a nephew, in fact, is a story of paradox, of a simultaneous experience of pain/pleasure, myth/reality, inclusion/exclusion, being deserving/undeserving, visible/invisible and voiced/silenced (Backhouse et al., 2011) [15].

2. Methodology and goals

The title of the project " Time machine effect" proposes itself as a good practice that translates the close relationship between cognition and emotion (Blair, 2002; Smith et al., 1993) [16]; [17] and I go to describe it in the following lines exactly as and was planned and realized in the sequence of its phases:

A. Teaching procedures and methods

The project was implemented in a cooperative learning mode (Kagan, 2000) [18]: the main objective was to encourage the inclusion of children with more difficulties and the cohesion of the class group, in line with the most recent specialized scientific literature that assigns a decisive role to emotions for learning successes, for an internalization of knowledge and meaning and for an improvement of students' personal experience (LeDoux, 2003) [19]. Also in the educational field, therefore, many of the educational activities proposed to obtain an adequate motivational involvement with the ultimate goal of generating effective learning, cannot but take into account that the human being is a totality of rationality and emotionality, and that in this light must be educated and must learn to learn (Trisciuzzi, 1999) [20]. Emotion acts as a guide in decision making and in the formulation of ideas and thus becomes decisive in the learning process.

B. General learning objectives

The general objective about this project was involve the older figures of the family in the learning process at school with an intergenerational collaboration.

C. Specific learning objectives

Specific learning objectives about this project were:

- the contents presented by family members increases emotional transport and improves learning;
- to anchor the contents to lived examples and to emphasize their meaning and importance;
- approach and involve older people in school life by strengthening intra family bonds;
- decrease the generational gap by improving the understanding of experiences in different periods, emphasizing the equality and differences of the daily life.

This exercise improves the dialogue between two generations by focusing on the emotional experience, a universal component of living in childhood. This project was realized with a fourth-class group of primary school located in the southwest suburbs of Florence. The grandparents of these children were invited to school by teachers to talk to their grandchildren about some aspects of their personal history. Small groups of grandparents joined the project and participated in a turn-over manner; each of the meetings provided each of them has deepened aspects of their childhood by focusing on different themes: the memories of the school (their teachers and classmates), the rules at school, report cards and contents of the curricular disciplines, the games that were used in his free time, the lifestyle and consumption of the material goods that it was customary to have within their family of origin, the means that were used to move from one side of the city to the other, etc. Children, starting from listening to the narratives by their grandparents or grandparents of their schoolmates, have been involved emotionally within a historical reconstruction that involves people and environments for which there is inevitably a form of attachment, even an identity. The children were able to connect historical personal events and critically reflect on historical aspects concerning humanity in recent times. The project was then developed with screenplay activities in small groups and related theatrical representation about the stories told by their grandparents.

2.1 Project planning

The collaborative and interactive learning experience has been designed and implemented in an interdisciplinary perspective, in an attempt to succeed in making interdisciplinary activities and competences interact: history, corporeity and emotions for dramatization, citizenship competences. In a time characterized by the many historical changes also favored by technology, it seems

necessary to create the conditions to put in touch the generation of grandparents with that of their grandchildren in an educational perspective: the transmission of knowledge of the past through the generations is a priceless heritage because it is a passage that has emotional implications. This aspect binds and facilitates the growth of every other aspect of the person: cognitive, aesthetic, spiritual, ethical and political. After listening to their grandparents' stories about what life was like when they were children, the class group was divided into small groups to write a screenplay and to represent the stories with short dramatizations. The final product of this work in collaborative and interactive mode it was collected on a DVD with all the stories represented.

2.2 Human resources and costs spent

Two teachers for a class group were the human resources employed and no cost was spent on the realization of this project except for DVDs containing the theatrical performances of the children who represented the stories heard by their grandparents, the final products of the project (each participant received a DVD copy; DVD copies were duly purchased from the cash fund by the parents representative of the class group).

2.3 Valuation about goals achieved

In reliving with the dramatization some anecdotes told by their grandparents, the grandchildren have also become more aware of some historical issues. The realization of a DVD with the representations of the stories told by their grandparents and interpreted by the children (screenplay in small groups and theatrical representation) have left to all the members of the class group involved in the project a great satisfaction of the fruit of their work, delivering the perception of playing a leading role in the various phases of lived experience.

3. Conclusion

The narration of the times when their parents were children, tales, stories, stories of all kinds, are a very effective incipit to develop the moral sense in children; with their narratives, grandparents contribute to the moral education of grandchildren, that is to say the development of natural virtues, also laying the foundations for their social education in the community to which they belong. This project, therefore, was an opportunity to direct attention and promote the relationship between the grandfather and the nephew, to encourage grandparents in the fundamental social, psychological and spiritual role they play. Supporting the growth of grandparents in many socio-cultural contexts has nowadays a function in which the whole society benefits every day, the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren has in fact consolidated as a social fact and an educational practice that enriches meaning the whole community, as opposed to contexts in which even within the most significant relationships, children first and then adolescents, also find in the educational aspects a continuous feeding of individualistic and competitive spirit. Involving the older figures of the family in the learning process at school with an intergenerational collaboration, therefore, specific learning objectives were pursued because through collaborative and interactive activities the contents of personal stories were able to provide the most important historical skills and a greater awareness of issues such as equality and differences in everyday life. In addition, they have strengthened intra-community ties, reducing the generation gap and improving understanding of experiences in different historical periods. Furthermore, intra-community ties have been strengthened by reducing the generational gap and improving the understanding of experiences in different historical periods.

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