

Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership



Work discussion **A**pproach in primary schools
Teachers observe **C**hildren

BOOKLET FOR APPLYING
THE WORK DISCUSSION METHODOLOGY
GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

edited by



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INTRODUCTION

The school plays a very important role in the lives of young people by providing a reference point that helps or hinders the mental and emotional growth of the pupils.

This is because teachers usually face complex dynamics and need specific tools to hone their interpersonal skills and to deal with the emotional distress that is sometimes connected to their job.

It is then essential to create appropriate spaces in educational contexts and to support operators in their crucial and delicate task of supporting the development of children entrusted to them.

The WATCH project expects to achieve this support by introducing in the involved schools the "Work Discussion" Methodology. Through this methodology, teachers will be helped at increasing their capacity to understand the children, to relate to them, to provide for their inclusion in the class and identify appropriate educational strategies that can procure them a support for their development.

The main innovative aspect of the project is, as a matter of fact, the application to the school context of this methodology fruitfully used in UK where was first developed at Tavistock Clinic and has become one of the central model of teaching and learning within professional development courses.

This methodology is well known also with different names and already applied in other training contexts but unfortunately it is still scarcely tested and adopted in the school framework which is so delicate and so needy, where the relationship between teacher and student needs to be supported.

The work discussion methodology is similar to traditional infant observation, each educator chooses to look at his class group, one or more of the children he works with, and keeps a diary on which observations are reported. Regularly, all educators meet in a discussion group led by an experienced psychotherapist.

This methodology will be then the space where the problems are faced and discussed and will represent the space for dealing with the observations made in turn by the participant teachers. The work discussion groups will then become an important support to teachers in their difficulties and labours that daily work requires, and will give them the opportunity to share their experiences not only with psychological experts but also with their colleagues.

For what concerns the children, the project aims to try to understand how the narrative produces changes, "how" stories can also heal and in which circumstances a type of narrative can be effective. The tale represents, in a symbolic language, the development of the individual and of the culture as a historical and dynamic process, presenting the evolutionary development of the individual in an interactive manner. Moreover, the fairy tale has the undoubted advantage over other literary genres of the indisputable centrality of symbolic language respect to the contents.

The application of the work discussion methodology will be linked to a fairy tale action and the results will be published and hopefully disseminated as best practice.

REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF THE INFANT OBSERVATION IN THE TRAINING OF NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS TEACHERS

[ABSTRACT from Gabriele Terziani Psychologist, Psicoterapista,
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The teaching-learning process is based not only on the transmission of contents, concepts, but it also implies a relational dynamic of fundamental importance. This important relationship between teacher-pupil has been described by psychoanalysis thanks to the concepts of Transference and Counter-Transference. These dynamics are present in any significant relationships: those between patient and therapist, teacher-student, doctor and patient, husband-wife, etc.

In the context of teaching-learning relationships, we can consider transfer as a way of getting into relationships through patterns of behavior and emotional systems (of the student), and counter-transfer a personal response (of the teacher) to such patterns. Through this definition, the processes are not to be considered as a mere repetition of past patterns (which occur in psychotherapeutic treatment), but as a new construction that is created in the new encounter between the inner world both of the student and the teacher. Such an encounter, beyond the transmission of knowledge, could bring enormous potential of personal growth if teachers took these unconscious processes into account, thinking and using them to refine their educational mandate.

Working with teachers often highlights the need and the enormous interest of these operators in reflecting on their relationship with their pupils.

In particular, educators complain that they feel emotionally overlooked by difficult situations that they do not know how to handle, and respond positively if they are stimulated to reflect on the relational dynamics that arise between them and their children. I believe that the use of the direct observation method of "Infant observation" can be profitably used in teachers training, helping them to develop a reflexive capacity during their educational practice.

The Infant Observation: the Direct Observation Method

The Direct Observation implies the observer's presence within the observed situation, which he/she seeks to seize and study in its entirety, starting from the assumption of the existence of an inner world whose "expressive potential is greater than that is usually manifested and seen in interpersonal relationships". An important feature of direct observation lies precisely in the emotional impact that the observed situation generates in the observer him/herself. This emotional impact, if analyzed and studied, is an effective cognitive tool for direct observation.

To do this, it is necessary for the observer to keep his mind open to transposing everything that is happening in order to reconstruct the relational processes within the observed situation.

The infant observation method is a type of direct observation introduced since 1948 during the training of infant therapists in the Tavistock Clinic in London (Bick 1964), adopted in 1960 by the Institute of Psychoanalysis in London, and subsequently disseminated all over the world. This observational methodology was born, therefore, for the training of psychotherapists; however, due to its great ductility and its characteristics, it is also suitable for other areas of applications.

The original method consists of going and observing, once a week for an hour, the development of a newborn within his family from birth to two years of age.

It seems useful to focus on two specific orders of consideration: the attitudes and mental qualities developed through this kind of observation, and the work group methodology characteristic of the Infant Observation.

Bick states that the observer must take on a role that allows him/her to participate in the emotional state of the mother-child relationship, but without actively intervening in any way. The rule of abstention from action allows the observer to assume an analytical attitude characterized by a state of "floating attention", through which the collection of data can be as much complete as possible.

Abstention from action is not determined by the attempt of not to bring modifications within the observed situation, which are inevitably present in such an observation, but by the fact that in this way the observer can keep open the channels through which he receives information, avoiding the temptation, in the presence of very strong feelings, of getting rid of it by acting.

As for the second point of interest, the methodology of the Infant Observation, it is important to talk about the function of the group meetings of the observers to discuss the observation of the protocols.

The group, consisting of no more than ten observers and a conductor, offers participants a spatial, physical and mental dimension in which operate in continuous reflection on what is happening in the observatory setting, in order to decrease in the observer the anxiety impulse to make premature actions.

The group also proposes itself a reconstructive momentum that follows what was collected during the observational experience, restoring an interpretive function, temporarily suspended during the observation, in order to rebuild and give meaning to what has been observed.

The Infant Observation and the Teachers' Training

After outlining some features of the Infant Observation Methodology, it's important now to emphasize the usefulness of its application in the work and continuous training of nursery and primary schools teachers.

Nursery and primary schools educators find themselves working with very large groups of small children who even if have different physical and emotional needs, they all need to be responded in an individual way. In this sense, they are called to fulfill a delicate function: in addition to responding to the task of facilitating the development and of creating learning conditions for children, they must be particularly attentive to the relational dimension by getting in touch with every child and recognizing their individual needs and desires.

According to Noziglia:

"Anyone who cares about small children should be able to carry out the emotional functions essential to their growth [...].Keep the child's emotions and modularize them so that he/she can integrate them into the process of structuring his/her personality, without having to resort prematurely and massively to mechanisms of defense or escape from suffering it is [...] one of the most important tasks of the educator".

The method that can be used in these institutions is similar to traditional infant observation, each educator chooses to look at his class group, one or more of the children he works with, and keeps a diary on which observations are reported. Weekly, all educators meet in a discussion group led by an psychotherapist experienced in the Infant Observation methodology.

The choice of observing and reporting a moment in favour of another, of course, is highly significant with respect to the reflection of the emotional dynamics at stake.

Each educator can choose to observe a particular child or more children in various situations that he/she thinks are significant or problematic with respect to his/her experience.

The subject of the observation can be, for example, the moment of separation from their parents, especially at the nursery but also at the primary school, because they are particularly delicate moments, or the lunch and the play time, the moments when they work in group... in short " each particular situation where we feel that certain children communicate feelings and emotions incomprehensible to their educators, even when they are very experienced".

In particular, adult-child relationship moments should be privileged, so that the observer with the help of the whole group can reflect on his/her experience with the observed child.

On the one hand, it seems to be very important for professionals to have the opportunity to think in group about their educational practice starting from the data of direct experience, on the other hand fostering an observational position allows the educator to dwell on his ways of relating with children, and stimulates the ability to contain the emotional experience which is very important in dealing with them.

According to Noziglia, through the observation we learn to contain and modulate the emotions of the child, for promoting their further integration in the process of personality structuring.

The observation, by exercising a particular kind of attention to each other, is one of the most favourable tools in producing this type of training.

The discussion group allows us to work and reflect on multiple situations which are compared, and give us the possibility to learn from each of them.

The group helps the educator to reflect on the interaction with the child observed, also through the comparison with other similar situations.

The group and the conductor help the operator to codify the children's behaviours and messages, supporting him/her to penetrate their inner world, in order to give meaning to what at first glance seems incongruous and insignificant.

In conclusion, learning to pay attention to transference and counter-transference processes in relation to children through the help of group thinking, the educators may be able to better respond to the specific needs that each child carries with him/her.

The observation allows to think children beyond teaching and learning aspects, and each teacher can refine his/her relational skills to promote not only the cognitive development, but also the affective and emotional ones.

THE WORK DISCUSSION METHODOLOGY

The Work Discussion Approach originates from the Infant Observation methodology and aims at increasing a culture of understanding, acceptance and enhancement of differences in the involved Primary Schools.

Considering the complexity of the work that teachers carry out, and considering the high potential risk of occurrence of the phenomenon of burn out, supervision meetings, coordinated and managed by the a leading psychotherapist and a psychologist, could serve to deal with and understand the emotional states of the teachers that may overlap and merge with those of the children in charge.

Unfortunately, teachers rarely use an external supervision for the analysis and the elaboration of the experiences (sometimes painful and frustrating) their pupils live and that may, if not understood, fall heavily in their daily practice.

With reference to the application of the Work Discussions approach, the key instrument of which we make use is that of "group discussions" about "work" situations inside the classrooms, observed and reported by the teachers.

The organisation of supervision meetings/work discussion groups, can become then an indispensable tool of their educational activity, as it is an important moment of reflection and analysis of the situations, the difficulties and the problems of the relational context in which they operate.

As a matter of fact, the Methodology foresees the involvement of a psychotherapist and a psychologist who play respectively two roles: the "conductor" and the "observer".

The so called "work discussion" groups will then represent the achieved spaces for dealing with the observations made by the teachers and become a mean to strengthen the bonds, of emotional nature too, between people who do the same work, offering them the possibility to face the problems with a greater individual maturity and therefore with a greater professionalism.

Teachers can train themselves to practice different ways of relating, to be in and out of the relationship, they can learn to accept, without judging, 'negative' feelings, sorrow, anger, aggressiveness of the children, as well as to understand and manage their affective requests directing them to who can really satisfy them, without the fear of getting too much involved.

Teachers can learn how to manage the anxiety of the verification and evaluation of their educational intervention, as the times of emotional and cognitive growth of children in load are long and uncertain, dependent on the individual stories of each one.

The enhancement of psychological tools puts teachers in the position to experience their role in an ever-changing, it helps them to eliminate rigidity and prejudices, making them flexible and able to put themselves continuously on the line, using keys of interpretation and intervention methods appropriate to the time and the situation.

In the framework of the WATCH project, teachers will be asked to observe children during a work around fairy tales to be done in identified classrooms of the involved schools.

This so called "fairy tale action" will be organised in three phases in each school. After the observation, teachers will describe in specific reports what happened during the activities. These reports will be then analysed in the framework of the periodical local

supervision/work discussion groups with the two experts: the conductor psychologist and the observer psychologist.

Also the observer psychologist will produce then a report of what discussed and achieved - a kind of working memory that contains the observations made during the previous group discussion meeting.

In the framework of the Fairy Tale Action, the teachers each month will meet the psychologists: in turn, the teachers will produce a report about their observations of the activities carried out in the classrooms and will practice the work discussion methodology.

Each work discussion group usually starts with the presentation of the two reports: first the memory report made by the observer psychologist, then the new one made by the teacher. The discussion of the protocols/reports is aimed at taking into account and broadening the understanding:

- of the emotions inevitably raised in the operators by the strong involvement with pupils to whom they deal;
- of the unconscious dynamics that underlie the behaviour of the children within the class and in the context of teaching and learning;
- but also of those (often unconscious emotional dynamics) that govern the relationships between colleagues and the organizations of the contexts in which they operate.

The peculiarity of these discussion groups during the project life is that of gradually "training" teachers to maintain an observational and reflective function during the phases of the work in which they are usually involved when they need to perform complex tasks or are facing complicated relationships.

The act of writing down a report is the first step for developing this reflective function. The time spent for reflecting and writing is an important stage: the teacher rethink a situation and start his/her understanding of it.

First Example:

Teacher's Report - 1

14th October 2014

As every morning, I welcome my students in the school yard. This morning the children are quite euphoric. We go to the classroom and Bruno starts the day with a "good" shot on the cheek of his companion, who wears a teeth brace. I go in the classroom. I calmly approach Bruno and look at him in the eyes to try to figure out what he is feeling, but as usual, his eyes do not show any expression.

I ask him for an explanation and he calmly answers me: "I was just kidding". I explain that it was not a good joke and that his school-friend could get hurt; he apologizes, but with great indifference.

While the rest of the class is seating, Bruno with great ease, drops on the floor the books and notebooks of another companion who starts to complain.

Again with extreme patience I invite Bruno to collect the fallen things and to apologize, but he looks at me with a furrowed brow and tells me: "I have not done it on purpose". Finally, everyone is sitting and we begin our day with a prayer.

First two hours: Mathematics lesson. Children are excited to come to the board. Our cooperative method has enabled everyone to learn from others' mistakes. We are doing exercises and everyone is trying to propose solutions that are valid to my questions. At one point a voice, which I would not have expected to hear, asks me: "Can I answer it?". It's Claudio, who has joined the group since this year (he has a learning disorder). He found the courage to propose his solution: total silence. Claudio gives me two correct answers; I am so happy. Also his companions are happy and they approve it with a great applause of solidarity.

We continue the lesson. Suddenly another complaint: this time Bruno is kicking the rucksack of the companion sitting in front of him. What can I do? If I reproach him it's worse, he begins to avenge himself. I tell him to come to the chair, I kindly tell him not to behave like that and ask him if he is worried about something. He tells me: "I argued with my Mom."

Bruno is a very lively child and often his liveliness comes into dangerous attitudes. He lives an inner conflict (I suppose it comes from a conflict with his mother), but the thing that worries me the most is that there is no emotion on his face, never.

Recreation Time, 10:30

Claudio starts to tease his companions, to use an improper language and then with his mole he starts to push all his friends into the desks. Bruno takes advantage of the confusion: to impose his strength, he starts to pick on his classmate who is slimmer than him. Once again he tells me: "But I'm joking." And I exclaim: "OK kids, let's go back to sit. Recreation is over". Then I hear Dario's voice (a Russian kid with an anguished past, adopted four months before his first school year) saying: "Uffa!" Books and desks "fly" in the air. Then, finally, all the children come back to their sits. Today is a special day.

Dario begins to annoy a companion by making him laughing and, as a consequence, he infects the group of pupils around them. At this point I get up, I approach him and invite

him to move his desk next to mine. In response, he throws all his belongings on the air, looks at me defiantly and tells me to get lost. I invite him to collect his stuff and to give me his diary. He replies: "If you put me a note I do not care about it." On the diary I simply write that he has to repeat a phrase on his notebook about what he has done; I think that writing will help him to reflect!

We start to read a very nice text, then I assemble pairs of reading and Bruno ends up with one of his classmates who has not acquired a correct reading technique yet. Bruno begins to read his part and, when it's his companion's turn, it starts a controversial tragedy: "But when does Paolo learn to read? Mom says that if you are good, you are good, otherwise not". I look at him shocked. His purpose was to ridicule the companion and let me lose the brackets, but I invite him to continue the reading with the same friend. He begins to curse, then finally he starts to read again. I take his diary and he complains saying I could not write a note to his parents because his father would have punished him. I pretend not to hear and we continue the lesson.

We finally arrive at the end of the school day and we begin to prepare ourselves to get out. Everyone is seated and, to entertain them for a few minutes, I propose to play to tick-tack-toe game on the blackboard, but Bruno today decided to test my patience. While a companion is walking among the desks, he trips him up. I notice it, I launch myself towards the little pupil who falls "save" in my arms. Bruno is hidden under his desk.

The thing that worries me about this pupil is that he gets angry with the companions with whom he has more affinity and with the weakest ones. I tried to use many strategies, but without great success. The problem is that he lives an inner discomfort but he doesn't manage to take it out. He is an intelligent child, with a great memory and a good potentiality, which are got lost because of his inability to handle emotions.

Teacher Ms Daniela

Second Example:

Teacher's Report - 2

Saturday, 11th October 2014 - about 11:00

Today, pupils are engaged in an activity of Arts. They all work quietly.

Suddenly, a pupil tells me that another child is crying. I turn my gaze to the pupil and I find Genny crying and sobbing. I ask him what's going on, why he's crying... and he answers that Daniela has ripped up his sheet. At this point, I invite the two students to come to my desk for clarifying the thing.

I ask Daniela why she ripped the sheet and she says that the sheet was hers. Then, turning to Genny, I ask him what he was doing with Daniela's sheet and he answers that it is Daniela that has given it to him.

I ask her the reason and Daniela explains by saying she thought of doing a favour, as he (Genny) had already finished the activity of Arts.

At this point I insist and ask the reason of the tears, because it seemed me that Daniela had had a gesture of attention towards her school friend.

It's Genny who answers telling that Daniela, after finishing her task, had asked for the restitution of the sheet. Obviously Genny refused to do it, because he was making a drawing, and Daniela replied to his refusal by snatching the responsible sheet from his hands for drawing on it.

Saturday, 11th October 2014 - about 13:00

Pupils are preparing their rucksacks to get out. We had just finished a creative laboratory. My classroom was smeared with different material so I was busy putting order when I heard laughing out loud: the child sitting at the first desk is squatted down on the ground with an eye stained of green... and laughing. I ask for clarification. It seems that a few minutes earlier, Michele (this is his name) was bent to put the pencil-case in his rucksack and Giulio, his deskmate, couldn't pass. For this "violation", Giulio felt entitled to "give a ticket" to his friend and consequently painted his eyelid and part of his nose with the green marker.

Obviously I summoned the parents of both children at the exit of the school. Conclusion of the school day: 4 children injured and OK (0 Killed).

Thursday, 16th October 2014 - about 11:30

I was correcting the homework in the classroom when I saw a big red object flying... and a pupil (Diletta) crying. Once again, Giulio (the same child as the other day) had done justice on his own. While she was coming back to her desk, Diletta accidentally dropped Giulio's pencil-case on the ground, she collected it and gave it to him. Instead Giulio argued that Diletta had done it on purpose.

Observer's Report¹

Friday, 17th October 2014. Second meeting.

The meeting starts at about 16 o'clock. We sit in the classroom that hosts us. In the meantime, the teachers from Benevento also arrive.

On the desk, as a welcome sign, there is a small buffet prepared for a short break. We start by reading my observation of the first meeting. Soon after we begin to read Maria's report.

Maria tells us about three short episodes that sparked her attention: the first episode happens on Saturday around 11:00, after recreation.

During the lesson of Art, little Daniela "gives" her white sheet to her school-friend Genny, as a sign of courtesy and attention to her companion. Genny, after completing his work, is going to make a nice drawing on Daniela's "gift".

However, at a certain point Daniela asks for the return of the sheet. Evidently, Genny refuses and Daniela pulls the sheet out of his hands and tears it by letting Genny sobbing with shiny eyes.

Facing the event, the teacher feels confused, asks explanations to Daniela who justifies herself saying she only wanted to draw on it ...

After the reading of the text, Maria expresses her confusion also in the group ... she feels the need to understand, to learn how to handle such dynamics ... she asks the group what they think about the incident ... she needs to have a confrontation. There are a few seconds of silence ... then Dr. Ciannella takes the floor by giving his first hypothesis: he thought of the "cotton spool" game with which Freud explained the management of the separation experience. Freud noticed that his 18-month-old grandson used to play for a long time with a particular game: he took a spool and tossed it away making it disappear under the bed and then he recovered it.

According to Freud, the child performed the difficult experience of separation from his mother to try to "digest" it.

In our case the question of the "disputed" sheet between Daniela and Genny could be related to the imminent separation of the children for the weekend: (the sheet, like the spool, represents at the same time being together and the separation).

There is silence after this interpretation. Then the confrontation among the teachers begins. It is mainly discussed about the way of Daniela to prevail which has particularly impressed the teacher Maria. There are different interpretations: the group seems to be divided, on one side the teachers from Benevento argue that this attitude is not particularly "aggressive" and it can be considered a normal behaviour of children of this age; on the other side the teachers from Portici claim that Daniela's attitude is still "strong", too "decisive" for a child.

We go on and Maria reads the second episode.

On the same Saturday at the time of school leaving, while the teacher Maria and the pupils are intent on re-ordering, they hear somebody laughing soundly. Maria realizes that Michele, a student in the front row, is squatting on the ground with a dyed green eye. She tries to figure out what had happened. It seems that Michele, in putting his belongings in his backpack, blocked the passage to Julius, his companion. The latter "felt righteous to

¹ This report contains synthesis or explanations due to the fact that it is read to people who were present at the previous work discussion (Teacher's Report - 1)

tease" Michele after this infraction, coloring his eyelid and part of his nose with the marker. Once again Maria remains "confused" ... There are discussions about what happened: it comes out that Michele is a muddling child, who used to stain the walls... a child who can not control himself, who always gets dirty when eating, who can not manage his impulsivity. Michele, in fact, seemed very amused of the incident (complicit), not bothered by Giulio's behavior. Giulio's act is, indeed, seen as a "vengeful" act, of a person who does justice by himself. Once again there is a tacit group split: there are those who argue that aggression is more physiologic and those who believe that these attitudes with the passing of time can become dangerous.

We continue by reading the third case. The "protagonist" is still Giulio. Diletta, returning to her place, drops a pencil-case from Giulio's desk who collects it and throws it against Diletta by letting her crying. Once again Giulio does justice by himself. He answers the teacher's questions, claiming that Diletta had dropped his case with intention. Mary then documents what happened: she takes a photo of Giulio's desk covered by the cases. "It was impossible for anyone to pass by without dropping anything," she says. Also after this reading there is discussion in the group: after several interpretations of Giulio's rigid and sanctioning behavior, (it emerges a description of his family situation and the conclusion that "he is a child in need of affection") there is also a comparison among the teachers on the great difficulty due to having to deal with very large class groups.

The need for a brief pause is felt, the work becomes intense. So we get to the desk to eat the buffet ... then we talk for a few minutes.

Dr. XXX

THE FAIRYTALES

Telling children stories that can engage them in "travels with their imagination" has always been a pleasing tradition that in the generational transmission allows the construction of an affective bond between adult and child.

The act of storytelling is a characteristic that allows people to be fully human, that helps not to give up to the distinctive characteristics and to those that are the product of the education and the work of the man made on himself to improve himself. Narration is a reminder, but also the interpretation of the story that makes possible to turn a tale into an opportunity for the emotional growth.

The fairytale originates in the popular tradition and is characterized by short stories focused on fantastic events and characters such as fairies, ogres, giants, and so on; an adventurous journey in which individuals act, making attractive the experience of change. As a matter of fact, fairytales are fantastic stories that tend to reveal what a person could ideally do. The magical-imaginative thought determines the structure of fairy tale narrative that differs from the fable - in which there are didactic moral intentions - and the myth - from which a legend evolves for the interpretation of natural laws.

Fairytales allow the emotional decentralization that makes reconsider and retrace moments of life that become history and not just past time. The fairy tale can be transformed into a "therapeutic" game tool through the development of imaginative and understanding skills, by supporting the development of important aspects of the personality and helping to master the new emotional states that, in some moments of life, can create fears, closures, regressions, tensions, internal illnesses and even less adaptive behaviors that hide attempts to face more difficult experiences.

The stories that pass through the light and the dark allow us to confront the "bad and good parts" present in each one. The fairy tale is the most suitable way for the child to receive indirect messages that he can listen to and process more easily.

Fairy tales are filled with promise. That is their strength. The weak can become strong... Evil can be turned to good... The ugly can become beautiful... Each and every human being can rise to his or her true potential and stature. Even the smallest child can realize this and rejoice for future victories.

In this context, the use of fairytales is not intended to educate the children on the basis of a social model to which they must adapt but to promote inner, affective and emotional growth. Starting from this concept, the fairy tale acquires an educational value and responds to the real and fundamental need of children to feel followed and understood in their path of growth.

Each person needs a field of activity for his inner life, for his willing, feeling, and finally for his thinking soul. The child needs this field of activity for the strength of his soul as does each adult. If I do not present the child with the images of the language of the fairy tales, then the contents of his soul will be supplied by the idle talk of the alley.

"It could be said that while the instructive function responds to an external social need of children that demands them to get adapted and has the characteristic to be more or less imposed, the educational function responds more to the inner needs of the children, starting from a careful and respectful observation of their emotional world and following them step by step during their growth" (Volpi, 1971).

The fairytale adopts fantasy-based narrative methods in which human characters or animals, objects, and even plants are endowed with a "life" and a story from the narrator. It therefore uses the symbolic language of stories traditionally addressed to children and adopts listening and reflections on narratives for facilitating a correct and profound assimilation of what has been read or for creating customizations in relation to the context and to the specific needs of the participants.

For pupils the use of fairy tales becomes an opportunity to learn to express not only their own emotions but both to verify from time to time, in group collaboration, their empathic abilities in the recognition of the others states and to learn a more functional interaction for a better friendship relationship dissemination.

According to Lafforgue (1985), when the fairytale becomes a container of projections it contributes to make sense, to give a form to the sensations-emotions that are not yet thoughts but which can be named later, contrasting the children's tendency to deny them, to evacuate or to act them.

Narration can be considered the form through which to make circulate a "different rational" thought, at least as valid as the scientific schemes and rules (Bettelheim B., 1975). Working with children is a source of constant discovery and surprise of what they can develop through creativity and imagination. The fairytale is not "all" what the children need but it is definitely a means to stimulate their "creativity", as synonymous with "divergent thinking".

THE FAIRYTALE ACTION

The fairytale-action is then a mean for the application of the Work Discussions approach and it consists of three phases, each lasting about four months. Although there is a "general" purpose, each phase is pursuing a number of sub-goals. One of the objectives is developed through the idea of introducing children to some topics, treated in a symbolic manner, without "forcing them" to talk about them, but dipping the children in these issues with imagination and creativity. For pupils the use of fairy tales becomes an opportunity to learn to express not only their own emotions but both to verify from time to time, in group collaboration, their empathic abilities in the recognition of the others states and to learn a more functional interaction for a better friendship relationship.

In a school context, where children have to learn, some of the anxieties that they encounter relate to those generated by the confusion, by the fear of not being able to understand subjects they don't know and by the fear of not being able to classify experiences not yet experienced. Children feel powerless in the face of not knowing, they live feelings of inadequacy and fear of being judged stupid by the group.

As a matter of fact, these anxieties and painful feelings rather than being controlled and tolerated are often handed over teachers who could feel confused, powerless in face of the demands of the classroom and could think they have anything good to pass to their students.

Clarify these emotional mechanisms is very useful because it allows to try to understand the dynamics of relationships in which teachers are involved and it allows to reflect on how they can deal with certain situations very engaging from the emotional point of view.

The teachers have, in effect, a task which in many ways reflects that of the parents, as they can serve as a container of an excessive anguish of their students related to the study and to other aspects of their lives (family, friends, ...).

For children, perceiving that there are adults capable of "taking upon themselves" a part of their painful feelings and of assisting them in dealing with, can be very important.

For this reason, the possibility to refine the understanding of what they experience internally in their relationship with the class and with the individual, it may help teachers to become points of reference for students even with regard to much more complex phenomena.

So the impact of the project activities is related to the emotional factors involved in the learning experience. The ability to contain anxiety and "mental pain" is connected to the future ability to learn and think in a creative way.

In addition to this the work around fairy tales will have a important impact on the children because fairy tales have an enormous and irreplaceable value in the life of a child. They educate, support and liberate the emotions of children. Fairy tales provide a unique way for children to come to terms with the dilemmas of their inner lives.

Parents frequently express concern about violent, even bloody incidents that occur in Grimm's fairy tales. Today, we often see these tales edited to remove or soften these aspects. This results in a kind of deprivation of our children's sense of life that is similar to the effects of painkillers and can dull that sense. At a Waldorf School, these unedited fairy tales are an important part of the curriculum of early childhood and first grade.

In a true fairy tale, such as those collected by the Brothers Grimm, human beings undergo trials and suffering and accept that deeds are a part of proving oneself worthy of the reward at the end of the path, whether the reward is the hand of the princess or a kingdom. They confront evil and overcome it.

Children experience the greed of the wolf and the evil of the witch quite differently than we adults do. They experience these qualities more as archetypal pictures about life, but do not yet identify themselves personally with the suffering. They trust that there will be a happy ending or that good will triumph over evil.

Such stories strengthen the moral lives of children, so that later, after these pictures have lived in them for many years as seeds, this strength and guidance will help them to deal with the challenges life brings to them.

The fairytale-action consists of three phases, each lasting for about four months. The teachers involved in the project will propose to their students the fairytale-action once each 14 days, for about two hours and during the school time.

First Phase.

"Known" fairy tales, chosen following specific issues, will be presented to the children. The children have the opportunity to modify them to their liking, playing with the characters, the events, the conclusions. This process gives children the opportunity to regain a fundamental power for each of us: the perception of acting on reality and of changing it. Stimulating this intrinsic ability is important because without it the person turns into a passive spectator of his own story. Reading a fairy tale, children can give a face and a voice to those deep inner processes of their life that could remain hidden to consciousness. In the end, the identification with the characters of the story allows them to improve the awareness of their personal history and the most vulnerable part of it.

Second Phase.

In the second phase the children have to develop a new fairy tale in group considering the "5 golden rules to write a fairy tale" according to the "Gianni Rodari Grammar rules": to choose a long time ago, to describe the good and evil characters, challenges to overcome and events that are repeated, presence of a magical element, a positive ending. In addition, creative writing exercises are proposed to prepare the group for the construction of a "final fairy tale". Fairy tales built according to this technique does not offer magic solutions to problems, and therefore inapplicable to the reality of everyday life, but on the contrary they incline them towards the sometimes problematic reality, fostering a real process of empowerment and increment problem solving strategies.

Third Phase.

In the third phase of the project the group of children will complete the writing of a fairy tale thanks to the use of the "Cards of Propp", in order to "perform" it with the use of puppets. The performance of the fairy tale provides the background of all the activities linked to this part of the project, as it constitutes a symbolic space within which children have the opportunity to rework the emotions experienced in the previous phases. In fact, at the end of the performance it is possible to develop a possible reflection on the fairy tale created starting right from the experiences of each child.

The puppet theatre helps children to move easily and to give life to their inner voice through the game and becoming familiar with their character. This method allows each child to participate in the representation without necessarily having to deal with the direct

visual exposure to an external audience. The performances will be recorded and the video will be part of the material shared by all partners on the project website. Moreover, the story becomes the final product of the group to which each one has contributed and in which each one can recognize himself; it is a common concrete object that strengthens and makes cohesive the group itself, reinforcing the sense of belonging and of "being able to".

The Grammar of Fantasy by Gianni Rodari

Among the techniques described and suggested by Rodari in *The Grammar of Fantasy*, the "fantastic dual concept" is considered a basic notion "to move words and images".

We can find this concept in the previous and famous *Book of Fantasy* where he uses the expression "duel of words", a technique learned from the French Surrealists.

According to Rodari, a story can come into the world only from a fantastic dual concept (Rodari, 1973, 2001) which must be made up of two very different words. As Rodari himself explains, "there must be a certain distance between the two words, it is necessary that one is sufficiently extraneous to the other, and their combination must be discreetly unusual so that imagination is forced to set in motion for establishing a kinship between them, for building a (fantastic) set in which the two extraneous elements can coexist".

The two words, therefore, are not chosen for their usual meaning but they are unrelated, a little "confused", they are thrown to one another: in this way they will be in the best conditions to generate a story.

The first "finished" product that Rodari left us was born from this technique:

"Take two words, the first two that come to your mind. Example: Plant and Slipper. Mix them with the title: "The Slipper Plant "...

As mentioned earlier, in the second phase of the project, starting from the choice of the words, it will be proposed to the children to develop new stories by considering the five "golden rules" to write a fairy tale:

- 1) to choose a long time ago
- 2) to describe the good and evil characters
- 3) challenges to overcome and events that are repeated
- 4) presence of a magical element
- 5) a positive ending

"... it's time to let fantasy out, to believe in all the amazing things that it will tell us"

Suggestions for the ending... which may be:

- circular (restoring the initial equilibrium);
- into effect (inserting an element that turns the story upside down);
- positive (but not necessarily ...);
- open (the story might even ... do not end!)

Like all the experiences of life, fairy tales have a beginning, a development and an end. They state that the time of life is rhythmized by fundamental events that mark a before and an after. They designate the existence of an external and internal aspect of reality and that we mustn't stop to the appearance because it does not always correspond to the substance of things.

Fairytales help us find the hidden truth: meanings vary according to people and moments of life and each one can use them in its own way.

The Cards of Propp

1. The Propp Scheme is the result of the study on the fairytales of the Russian linguist and anthropologist Vladimir Propp. He studied the historical origins of the fairy tale in tribal societies and the initiation ritual, and took up a structure that he proposed also as a model of all narratives.

In his essay "Morphology of Fairy Tale", he proposed this scheme, identifying 31 sequences (also known as Propp Sequences) that make up the story. Each sequence represents a typical situation in the plot of a fairy tale, referring in particular to the characters and their precise roles (eg the hero or the antagonist).

2. Propp identified 7 characteristic fairy tale characters:

- Hero: the protagonist who will triumph after accomplished a feat;
- Villain/Antagonist: the hero's opponent;
- False Hero: he replaces the hero with deception;
- Dispatcher: who encourages the hero to embark on his mission;
- Donor: the hero's guide, the one who gives him a magical gift;
- Helper: who helps the hero to complete the mission assigned to him;
- Princess or sought-after person: love prize; the end for the hero.

The possible character types for Propp are briefly described, as the characters to him are mainly the mechanisms for distributing the functions around the story. To this end, he notes that the thirty-one functions seem to group naturally into 'spheres' (for example, pursuit, capture, and punishment have natural groupings). Hence, it makes more sense to see the seven 'spheres of action; as roles, rather than characters, as this reflects the subordination of character to action.

3. According to Propp, the general scheme of a fairy tale is as follows:

- Initial equilibrium (beginning);
- Breakdown of initial equilibrium (motive or complication);
- Hero's vicissitudes;
- Restoring equilibrium (Conclusion).

4. For Propp, the cards that are used to build the fairy tale are 31. According to Gianni Rodari's suggestion in "The Grammar of Fantasy", the 31 functions are reduced to 20+ Beginning. To better work with them we have assembled the cards in five key groups, present in each fairy tale.






The Cards








The preparation of the cards takes several days as the children have to internalize the functions well; at the same time, it is appropriate to exercise for the recognition of the functions in known tales.




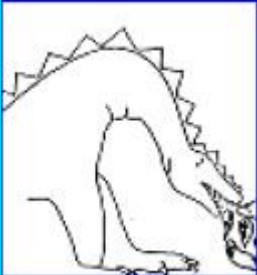


For example, children are asked questions of this kind:




- Who is the hero?
- Who is the enemy?
- Who provides magic gifts?
- What are the magic gifts?

Preparation of the 21 Cards

| | | |
|---|--|----------|
|  | <p>It describes the initial situation of the fairy tale. Once upon a time... (beginning)</p> | <p>1</p> |
|  | <p>One or more members of the family absent him/herself or themselves from the home. Or one parent goes to work leaving their children alone. Or someone dies. (absentation)</p> | <p>2</p> |
|  | <p>An interdiction is addressed to the hero. (interdiction)</p> | <p>3</p> |
|  | <p>The interdiction is violated. (violation)</p> | <p>4</p> |
|  | <p>The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings (trickery). Or the villain causes harm or injury to a member of the family (villainy). Or one member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something (lack). Or the victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy (complicity).</p> | <p>5</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|-----------|
|  | <p>Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched (mediation). The hero leaves home (departure).</p> | <p>6</p> |
|  | <p>The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or a helper. (first function of donor)</p> | <p>7</p> |
|  | <p>The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor (the hero's reaction). The hero acquires the use of a magical agent (provision or receipt of a magical agent)</p> | <p>8</p> |
|  | <p>The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search. (spacial transference, guidance)</p> | <p>9</p> |
|  | <p>The hero and the villain join in direct combat (struggle). The hero is branded (branding, marking). The villain is defeated (victory).</p> | <p>10</p> |
|  | <p>The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated. (restoration)</p> | <p>11</p> |
|  | <p>The hero returns. (return)</p> | <p>12</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|-----------|
|  | <p>The hero is pursued (pursuit, chase). Rescue of the hero from pursuit (rescue).</p> | <p>13</p> |
|  | <p>The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country. (unrecognized arrival)</p> | <p>14</p> |
|  | <p>A false hero presents unfounded claims. (unfounded claims)</p> | <p>15</p> |
|  | <p>A difficult task is proposed to the hero. (difficult task)</p> | <p>16</p> |
|  | <p>The task is resolved. (solution)</p> | <p>17</p> |
|  | <p>The false hero or villain is exposed (exposure). The hero is recognized (recognition).</p> | <p>18</p> |

| | | |
|--|---|-----------|
|  | <p>The hero is given a new appearance. (transfiguration)</p> | <p>19</p> |
|  | <p>The villain is punished. (punishment)</p> | <p>20</p> |
|  | <p>The hero is married and ascends the throne. (wedding)</p> | <p>21</p> |

The functions are the basic building blocks of the collection of tales analysed by Propp. To make the plot of any given individual tale you put together a selection of items from this list in chronological order.

Suggestion for playing with the Cards of Propp

You distribute the 21 cards to the children. The child who has the START card begins his/her narration. Then the companions go on in the order: first who has the card 1, then 2 etc. The story goes on until the cards are exhausted.

It is interesting to record the interventions and correct the chaotic exposures.

Application of the Methodology in the involved schools
Calendar for the Teachers

FIRST YEAR 2017/2018

| M1 Sept. | M2 Oct. | M3 Nov. | M4 Dec. | M5 Jan. | M6 Feb. | M7 Mar. | M8 Apr. | M9 May | M10 Jun. | M11 Jul. | M12 Aug. |
|-----------------------|------------|--|---|---|---|------------------------------------|---|---|---|-------------|-------------|
| Official Start | | Fairy Tale Action 1st Phase 1st Learning Activity in Italy | Fairy Tale Action 1st Phase 1st Work Discussion Group | Fairy Tale Action 1st Phase 2nd Work Discussion Group | Fairy Tale Action 1st Phase 3rd Work Discussion Group | Fairy Tale Action 2nd Phase | Fairy Tale Action 2nd Phase 4th Work Discussion Group | Fairy Tale Action 2nd Phase 5th Work Discussion Group | Fairy Tale Action 2nd Phase 6th Work Discussion Group | | |

SECOND YEAR 2018/2019

| M13 Sept. | M14 Oct. | M15 Nov. | M16 Dec. | M17 Jan. | M18 Feb. | M19 Mar. | M20 Apr. | M21 May | M22 Jun. | M23 Jul. | M24 Aug. |
|--------------|------------------------------------|---|---|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| | Fairy Tale Action 3rd Phase | Fairy Tale Action 3rd Phase 7th Work Discussion Group | Fairy Tale Action 3rd Phase 8th Work Discussion Group | Fairy Tale Action 3rd Phase 9th Work Discussion Group | | | | National Events | | | End of Project |