

# The Helping Relationship As Educational Care: Structure, Approaches, Evaluation

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**Abstract:** In the school of inclusion, the helping relationship becomes a way of structuring a significant and reciprocal relationship. Putting yourself in the perspective of the other allows for complex learning and the development of new skills and cognitive styles. Within a similar perspective, the educator and the teacher present themselves as promoting and facilitating agents of scholastic and social inclusion processes, subsuming the individual conception within a vision of an educating community. The educational value of helping relationship practices emerges, aimed at developing a sense of empowerment in the individual in need. The essay then proceeds to analyze the structure of the helping relationship understood as educational care, identifying approaches and methods of evaluating the helping processes.

**Keywords:** Help relationship; evaluation; educational consultancy; quality of the process.

## 1. Introduction

The focus on the conditions that can structure inclusive school environments points to the need to investigate the nature of educational action (Comenio, 1996). In the inclusive school, this conceptual framework needs to be translated into a concrete pedagogical perspective that provides: equal opportunities and social rights of the person with disabilities, whatever the level of schooling and training, for the entire lifetime; guarantee of equal quality teaching and accessibility for all; person-centeredness (Baldacci, 2006) and recognition of the person's potential and specific needs; parental collaboration, the first educators of their children; early intervention in order to reinforce the re-education, autonomy, social and school inclusion of the child who manifests specific needs from a very young age; use of new technologies at all school levels; training programs capable of contributing to the promotion of an autonomous and independent life of the person in the social and professional field, throughout the course of the person's autonomous and independent life, in the social and professional field (European Commission, 2020).

It is, on closer examination, a matter of designing specific elements, proper to an inclusive relationship (Cottini, 2018), capable of building didactic conditions for the personalization of learning. Enhancing the specificities of the human person and, at the same time, considering the natural, social and cultural constraints that determine



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the status of each human being, means designing articulated dynamics that provide inclusive strategies, where suffering is contained (Aiello, 2015).

## 2. The helping relationship as educational care

There can be no helping relationship without empathy; an indispensable element in understanding the other person's emotions and state of mind (Lazarus, 1991), it is the main way to establish authentic interpersonal communication that can make the observer/listener identify with what the other person is feeling (van Ryn et al., 1997). Empathy is a process where one sets aside one's own way of experiencing and perceiving reality in order to grasp and respond to the other person's experiences (Mearns & Thorne, 1988).

The highest expression of empathy is in accepting and not judging: to be empathic is to see the world through the eyes of the other and not to see our world reflected in his or her eyes (Di Fabio, 2000). A fundamental concept for the helping relationship, empathy is considered one of the basic attitudes for "building an educational relationship, involving the structuring of a meaningful and reciprocal relationship" (Corona & De Giuseppe, 2015, p. 82).

Putting oneself in the other's perspective, avoiding any form of prejudice; enacting active listening, paying attention to nonverbal language as well; knowing how to manage the emotional load, differentiating the other's states of mind without merging them with one's own, become traits of an educational care (Simeone, 2011), understood as competent accompaniment (Cottini & Rosati, 2008) toward inclusion. In fact, it is necessary to note how learning is a complex process, the outcome of the continuous intertwining and exchange between numerous processes, such as perception, memory, attention, language, thinking and executive functions, all under the influence of emotions, motivation, individual characteristics, as well as the knowledge, skills and cognitive style of the learner (Cipollone, 2021).

Emotion becomes the center of the individual, itself an expression of life, while for good emotional literacy, the need to develop specific training emerges.

be aware of your emotions	recognize emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and knowledge	learn to manage and regulate our emotions	listen with empathy and validate the feelings of others	listen with empathy and validate the feelings of others
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**Fig. 1.** emotional training (Ricci & Maggi, 2022, p. 10)

Within such a perspective, where specific stages of emotional training are definable (fig. 1), the educator and the teacher are positioned as agents promoters and facilitators of processes of school and social inclusion, of building community services, where the other is not seen as an object of intervention but recognized as a person, with whom to elaborate a planning to deal with situations-problems, making use of the resources available to her, trying to make her achieve the expected results: "the tu of confirmation is all the more necessary the more the other person is in a situation of disadvantage in which his or her being a person is exposed more than ever to annihilation," Buber recalls (Buber, 2011, p. 59), helping to highlight some specific

elements of the helping relationship (Buber, 1991), which can be declined in the educational field. Caring (educational perspective) concerns in fact the educational process, with objectives related to the elaboration of decision-making modalities; curing (health perspective) indicates the therapeutic process, curative objectives and immediate needs to be treated through diagnosis and treatment (Amenta, 1999).

Educational consultancy	Clinical consultancy
Educational logic of caring	Health logic of treatment
Psycho-social crisis situations.	Pathological situations
Non-health context	Health context
Educational depth of the process	Therapeutic depth of the process
Aimed at people momentarily disoriented or blocked by a contingent problem, which creates uncertainty and inability to act (crisis counselling) and/or troubled by natural evolutionary dynamics (developmental counselling)	Aimed at people experiencing significant emotional suffering
With educational objectives linked to decision-making processes	With curative objectives

It does not aim at restructuring the personality	It aims at restructuring the personality
Generally unstructured setting	Very structured setting
Limited number of meetings	Larger number of meetings (depending on the disorder)
Emphasis is placed on prevention and promotion of well-being	Emphasis is placed on diagnosis and treatment

**Fig. 2** Educational counseling and clinical counseling (Varriale, 2000)

The individual conception of help is subsumed, therefore, within a vision intended to build a whole educating community, a welcoming and synergistic and above all inclusive social context, part of a scenario characterized by an articulated range of aids, tools and resources (Musaio, 2020). Inclusion takes on the features no longer of the protected (measured) emancipation of special educational needs and the restorative and re-educational response of the social and cultural system, but becomes a path capable of affecting the quality of lives and coexistences (Sibilio, 2017).

In the helping relationship, the other is removed from the stalemate that discomfort opposes it, in the proposal to identify the individual, and not the problem, as the focal point (De Giuseppe, 2016).

### 3. Framework and approaches

The concept of the helping relationship in its formative value is closely related to competence: the process of accompaniment and mutual growth is activated, in fact, within a competent relationship, in which role difference promotes interchange and bidirectional in attention and care (Gaspari, p. 2021). Caring for the student, his growth, self-actualization and self-determination characterizes an effective helping relationship. Carkhuff (Carkhuff, 1993) articulates the structure of the helping relationship into individual steps: the first two derived from Carl Rogers' non-directive approach (Rogers & Kinget, 1979), the others from a behaviorist approach:

Phases	Definition	Execution
1st phase	LISTENING	According to the Rogerian model, listening is aimed at both the content and the non-verbal aspects (emotions, feelings) expressed by the subject (Rogers & Kinget, 1970). In this regard, the ability to listen carefully, put yourself in the other's shoes, concentrate on what is expressed with verbal language as well as with mimicry, gestures and movement is of particular importance (Rogers, 1977). It becomes essential to recognize the other, his experiences, his emotions, his moods; listen without judging, investigate, without diagnosing.
2nd phase	THE ANSWER	At the same time, it is necessary to provide answers to the interlocutors' requests; a welcoming environment, a help network well calibrated to the needs presented and which supports the path linked to change.
3rd phase	THE FIRST STEP	According to the behaviorist approach, the individual is an active organism that defines behaviors in relation to environmental stimuli. In this phase it is therefore necessary to concretely foresee a first step to change,

		trusting the present resources, promoting affective, metacognitive and self-reflective competence (Eisenberg, 1982).
4th phase	ACTION	The relationship, in this phase, takes on collaborative, authentic traits;  all this allows us to recover resources, develop a sense of empowerment and make decisions that effectively guide action (Bacharach, 1993), organizing a welcoming environment, a help network well calibrated to the needs presented and which supports the path linked to change.

**Fig. 3** structure of the helping relationship (Marchetti, 2006)

The main goal results to be helping the person to become more aware of its emotional problems, and to support the adaptation of the subject, in response to the external events that resulted in the request for help (Binetti & Bruni, 2003). In the psychodynamic approach, the articulation of such an intervention is structured in relation to the person's characteristics, focusing on events/aspects specific to the subject's life. It proceeds to the identification of the existing connections between the situation that invests the subject, the present, and the one that determined the status quo, the past, with the aim of highlighting the role of the iterations experienced, also in relation to reference figures; in parallel, the relationship with the subject who offers support/help, the counselor, since it is influenced by the dynamics proper to the subject's internal relational models (Jayasinghe, 2001), becomes one of the key aspects on which it is possible to intervene to promote change. The counselor's action (Nathan & Hill, 2006) addresses, in particular, the analysis of the individual's personal and social history; recognizes the importance of unconscious mechanisms in daily life; uses transference and countertransference as means of understanding interacting subjects; provides for the adaptation of settings, in relation to the work to be done with individuals/groups/organizations.

#### 4. Fields of intervention

Counseling presents itself as an intervention characterized by different theoretical approaches, the techniques of which aim to address and resolve a range of issues

typical of the individual's development. The proposed interventions can present themselves as either preventive, aimed at informing and educating the patient, or supportive and psychosocial, aimed at supporting the patient and family members in the various stages of the process of diagnosis and treatment of the disease (Carr & Higginson, 2001), or through pain and suffering. Counseling as an intervention based on listening, empathic understanding, and nonjudgmental acceptance of the subject's experience can help him or her express and share anxieties, fears, fears, and expectations, and to live with mild anxieties and anxieties in the different moments of suffering.

Counseling goes to involve a wide network of subjects (fig. 2), going to define a formal system of help, which includes teachers, psychologists, doctors, educators and social workers, and an informal system of help, afferent to relatives, friends natural helpers (Vogel Stahl, 2005), volunteers, parish groups who provide support (often without asking anything in return) going to constitute a push for change.

In the social field, counseling finds application in different areas of help: as an informational, preventive, supportive intervention in situations of personal and social distress and in situations of risk (Trincherò, 2004); as an intervention for conflict resolution at the personal, couple and family levels; in all stages of the life cycle, as a psychosocial support and intervention in crisis situations; as an intervention for guidance in the labor field. In its various declensions, and in view of the specific interests of the present discussion, we distinguish:

objective	Intervention
school counseling	the principles of facilitating communication and active listening are used to structure first or second level interventions that support and improve the teaching and learning processes. Among the specialist, second-level interventions, we include the activity carried out in the CIC (Consultancy Information Centres), listening spaces and help desks for students, as well as class counselling, which involves a collective intervention, expressed by a request made via a member of the class (AA. V.V, 2004), and aimed at resolving problems relating to the constitution of the class group, conflict situations between subgroups, conflicts between the group and individual members.
	many Italian universities have established psychological counseling

<p>counseling in the university setting educational</p>	<p>services aimed at university students, these are psychological assistance services that offer free consultations to students, with the aim of addressing and resolving personal and psychological difficulties (Iannaccone, Ghodbane &amp; Rosciano, 2005), reduce school dropouts, guide the student in choosing the correct course of study, increase the skills necessary for learning and training, prevent the onset of risky behavior (Bert, Doglio &amp; Quadrino, 2004).</p>
<p>counseling for parents</p>	<p>It is aimed at valorising positive elements, integrating them with new and more in-depth skills, and developing resources which, even in situations of hardship, can be reactivated and strengthened (Carr, Gibson &amp; Robinson, 2001). This perspective refers to a culture of responsibility on a personal-interpersonal level, such as caring. It is a counseling methodology aimed at developing a greater awareness of one's own educational potential, of interdependence with those of one's partner and with those of teachers.</p> <p>Each individual, in moments of greatest difficulty, has the family as a point of reference, to which he turns as a priority, to benefit from the support he needs in what is a real system of interactions in which each individual has the ability to influence the other.</p> <p>Given the importance of the factors involved in the development of family dynamics, both for the individual and for the system as a whole, we cannot fail to take into consideration the family counseling service above all as an action to prevent distress and develop skills in the field of communication-relational, educational and</p>



	<p>decision-making skills. A series of interventions are implemented in which the methods of help materialize through the interpersonal relationship between counselor and client.</p>
<p>business counseling</p>	<p>it is widespread in particular in the United States and Great Britain and is linked to a conception of the world of work and the company in which there is room for the development of services, internal and external to the organization, aimed at improving the quality of life of the employee and its productivity. The company provides a listening space to employees who highlight problems of a professional nature, with the aim of offering them help. By doing so, we intend to promote the personal growth of employees, address their conflicts, provide emotional support and resolve specific problems on a personal and relational level. Through this moment of dialogue with an expert in empowerment processes, the individual learns to know himself better and to identify spaces for the development of personal resources, often confined to the margins of professional training (Piccardo, 1995).</p>

**Fig. 4** counseling and fields of intervention (Maier, 2011)

The interventions present in Fig. 3 let some common elements emerge in counseling, regarding a different way of structuring relationships, capable of giving value to the individual's resources and educational potential, contributing to the definition of his or her identity in terms of skills and competencies.

This is a perspective that promotes what we might call empowerment pedagogy, aimed at increasing the person's sense of self-efficacy as empowerment of resources (Grembowski et al., 1993).

Abandoning the problem-centered view in favor of skill- and competence-focused interventions, it promotes the analysis of difficulties, invites the search for help consistent with the need, and the segmentation of the problem so that each of its component parts can be understood.

All this leads to a new definition of self in terms of capabilities thus developing learned power understood as internalizing a new self-image.

Moreover, the emphasis on the recognition and expansion of capability (Nussbaum, 2012), and the capacitation of the subject takes on fundamental importance in the new educational approach; every subject must be able to acquire valid opportunities thus shifting the focus from the realm of means to that of actual opportunities (Sen, 2011).

The strong relationship that exists between rights, justice, equity, equality and freedom as a guarantee of a democratic and ethically just society (Nussbaum, 2002), invests school and social contexts by promoting policies focused on the quality of inclusive processes in the name of solidarity, understanding, reciprocity and authentic recognition of the existential dimension of each person and his or her singular and peculiar Life Project (Schalock & Verdugo, 2006).

The helping relationship, as a complex process, becomes an asymmetrical relationship of non-unidirectional reciprocity, where the involvement of the actors takes place within a relationship of exchange, which stimulates, at the same time, empowerment, i.e., that process of expanding the potential of the subject, in order to promote the possibilities of controlling one's own life, adaptation to change and growth of the individual.

## 5. Effective counseling

According to Noonan (Noonan, 1983), the counseling relationship, in order to be effective, must be characterized by a therapeutic atmosphere, where the counselor makes available his or her emotional, intellectual, perceptual and intuitive skills in an attempt to identify with the recipient of the relief intervention. The counselor is asked to value the relationship as a tool for change, an aid to facilitate communication, reflection and self-awareness. For this reason, it is essential to understand what personal and relational skills can make the intervention effective, in order to give impetus to change, helping the person in need to express himself and find new solutions.

Rogers, in his works, thoroughly analyzed the essential aspects of the helping relationship (Hough, 1999), coming to believe that the element of greatest interest was the quality of the relationship between the counselor and the individual, and noting that it is "the quality of the interpersonal encounter with the client that is the most significant element in determining the effectiveness and success" of a helping relationship (Bruzzone, 2007).

According to this perspective, in interventions of lesser as well as of longer duration, the quality of the relationship thus turns out to be a decisive element, relevant for the purpose of defining the theoretical orientation of the counselor, the specific techniques used and, even, the degree of experience and professional preparation of the practitioner (Calvo, 2015). The quality of a relationship is configured as the element that determines the extent to which the encounter with the counselor can turn out to be an experience capable of stimulating the individual's personal and psychological growth or, on the contrary, a barrier to the realization of an adequate relationship; it is, on closer inspection, the necessary condition, and, for Rogers, even sufficient (Rogers, 1942), for the individual to reflect constructively on his or her difficulties, conflicting aspects to be resolved, for the structuring of new possibilities for adaptation and solution. Therapeutic tool becomes the ability to create an interpersonal context in which the individual can express himself freely, feeling heard and understood by the interlocutor not being inhibited, but, instead, enhanced and facilitated. The chances of successful help intervention depend, above all, on the con-

ductor's attitude of listening and participation. Rogers, in this regard, identified three personal attitudes of the counselor, three human dispositions, which are the foundation on which to base an effective helping relationship (Rogers, 1978), these personal dimensions or attitudes are defined, as the basic characteristics of an effective counseling intervention which are as we mentioned earlier, authenticity, unconditional acceptance and empathic understanding. The latter is the means by which the counselor enters into a relationship with the individual, approaches his or her subjective world and seeks to understand his or her feelings, moods, and points of view. The empathic listening attitude creates the relational context on which to build help and change (Di Tore, Di Tore, Mangione & Corona, 2014).

## 6. Assessment of the help process

The outcome presents itself as the most significant measure of the degree to which the purpose of an intervention has been achieved; definable as the relationship between the expected results and the results obtained (Di Fabio, 1999), it depends on the appropriateness of the interventions, their quantity and quality, and their mode of execution, but, at the same time, it involves, a series of elements that cannot be predicted according to the norm of objectivity (Blythe, Tripodi, Fasolo & Ongaro, 1993).

Applied to an internal planning of complex systems, such as those under discussion here, it needs adaptations and corrections, as the logics proper to process quality, determined by the productive factors related to what is done and how it is done (Pompei, 2002), will have to be declined within a broader scenario of promoting people and their life project. From this perspective, the evaluation of the helping process (Figure 5) can be defined as the relationship between the degree of protection that is intended to be made enforceable and the protection achieved (Leone & Prezza, 2011).

$$\text{Quality of the help process} = \frac{\text{degree of protection made due}}{\text{degree of protection pursued}}$$

**Fig. 5** - summary formula of the quality of the helping process (Tommasi & Caramia, 2009)

We need to consider how in the design and implementation of the helping process (Pompei, Costanzi & Rizzo, 2000), professional documentation of the helping process (Diomede Canevini, 1993) is therefore essential, in order to be able to account for the protection and promotion of factors such as personalization, taking care of the totality of the person's needs, appropriateness of services, involvement of the person and his or her family, and participation of community stakeholders (Minghelli, D'Anna & Gomez Paloma, 2021).

## 5. Conclusions

In 1899, Dewey (Dewey, 1949) argued that in order to discuss a new movement in education, it was necessary to put oneself from the social point of view; education understood as a process that faces and leans toward the entire social evolution (Cambi, Certini & Nesta, 2010), and that in this dimension acquires value as an interlocutor, both of the subject in formation and of the interacting institutions in

shaping individual life experiences, becomes the way to contribute to the self-formation of the person and teach how to become a citizen (Morin, 2015).

Social acting, that is, educational acting within social groups through communication, becomes an application model with multiple variations within which individuals become points of reference and knowledge for one another (Di Gennaro, Aiello, Zollo & Sibilio, 2018).

Relationship, understood as thoughtfulness, diligence, and accuracy, becomes responsibility to oneself and others. This implies mutual recognition, knowing how to build or re-build an educational relationship, but also the definition of a foundational category of special pedagogy, understood as a science attentive to the constant reinterpretation of educational professionalism engaged in the process of school and social inclusion of people (Ianes & Canevaro, 2016).

It is therefore up to the professionals of educational care and help to promote the re-opening of an existential project that, due to the presence of special educational needs, may present itself prematurely interrupted or already predetermined (Gaspari, 2013), and to education to take care of the process of forming the identity and personality of each person, to reactivate in the other the engine of the desire to live and re-exist.

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