«WE CARE!» COULD LIVING WITH THOSE SUFFERING FROM PSYCOLOGICAL DISTRESS BE A FORM OF DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION?
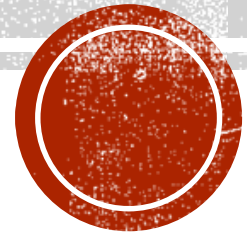
Paper presentation - Cristina Palmieri

EARLI Conference – 27/06/2014

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

Democracy

- «Democracy is… primarily a mode of **associated living**» (Dewey, 1966, p. 87)

- Democracy as «the situation in which *everyone* has the opportunity **to *be* a subject**» (Biesta, 2007, p. 757)

Education

- Building a democratic society today involves education in **all its various forms**: formal, non-formal, informal (Biesta, 2007)

- Education as **a means of experiencing** forms of democratic life (Biesta, 2007)

Living forms of democracy, within an educational context, produces **effect** not only in the individual, but **also within the community** (Dewey, 1966; Biesta, 2007)

BEING A "DEMOCRATIC SUBJECT"

«Democratic subject» characteristics

Opportunity of acting in **different fields of experience** (Arendt 1958)

Awareness of the **fragility** that characterize all the **human interactions** (Biesta, 2007);

Self fulfilment through one's own **cultivation of humanity** and **self empowerment**, accepting and valueing the **individuals' differences** (Nussbaum, Mortari)

DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

Different ways of approaching mental illness reveal the «**democratic capacity**» of <u>different</u> <u>civilizations</u> (Basaglia)

The history of madness in Western society: between social exclusion and inclusion, between psychiatrization and recognition of subjectivity
(Foucault, Binswanger, Basaglia)

Today: between the right to independent living and the persistence of prejudice

Can **caring** for those who suffer from **mental health problems** be considered as **a strategy for democratic education?**
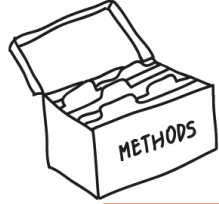
Method

- Theoretical research with exploratory objectives

Approach

- pedagogical, archaeological, and genealogical (Foucault, Massa)

Sources

- existential dimensions into socio-economic and cultural context, social exclusion and inclusion, reflection on modernity, studies on caring, distress in the educational work in mental health

SOURCES:

➤ studies on **existential dimensions** of mental illness in relation to the **socio-economic and cultural context** (Freud, Basaglia, Foucault, Binswanger, Laing, Recalcati, Benasayag & Smith).

➤ Sociological, philosophical and pedagogical studies on **social exclusion and inclusion** (Bauman, Foucault, Gardou, Goffman, Canevaro)

➤ **Philosophical and sociological reflections on modernity** (Baudrillard, Beck, Lyotard, Natoli, Perniola, Zoja, Žižek)

➤ **studies on caring**, healthcare professions and educational work (Mortari, Iori & Rampazi, Palmieri, Tramma)

➤ studies on **distress in the educational work in mental health** (Brambilla & Palmieri; Motto, Canton, Goisis)

1. WE LEARN TO BE «UNDEMOCRATIC SUBJECTS»

- Living the erosion of trust, solidarity and authority
- Experiencing a lack of «educational care» context
- Having difficulties in experiencing both limitations and potential, in identifying our place in the world
- Having poor affective, cognitive and relational instruments required to engage with the dimension of human fragility

2. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN MENTAL HEALTH

In society

An increasingly widespread incidence of psychological distress and changes in its symptomatic manifestations

New forms of relational and cultural poverty

"The ordinary person" seems to have more and more difficulties in coping with the experience of mental distress outside a medicalized framework.

In educational and care services of mental health

Need to redesign the local mental health services interventions to face the changes in daily life

Emergency is a widespread condition of work

3. EDUCATIONAL WORK IN MENTAL HEALTH COULD BECOME AN EXPERIENCE OF A DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

- Aiming at **«recovery»** and **community living**

- Establishing **settings** that generate **intersubjective experiences of trust and solidarity**

- Fostering **true social participation** of people with psychological distress in their local context

- Allowing people who are not affected by mental distress **to experience vulnerability**, to **extend their range of action**, to understand the **meanings of mental health** and **mental illness**, maybe to **change their lifestyle** too

- Giving local community services the opportunity **to redesign their work**

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This research may be significant in two ways:

- In relation to the «thinkability» of educational practices in mental health contexts

- In relation to the educational and social "impact" of such practices

Limitations: the research aims to develop a view of educational work and care in mental health and their potential which should be evaluated and further explored via empirical studies.

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Thank you for your attention!
Cristina Palmieri

cristina.palmieri@unimib.it