

Communicating and sharing through stories

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The very ways of communicating and the rules that govern them are not a merely instrumental factor with respect to contents, because they convey a view of the world and of social relationships. Therefore, a real change in teachers-parents relationships, from which we can expect the construction of a shared universe of meanings, implies a real exchange, beginning from a common experience that does not involve a single interpretation or solution, a discourse that re-elaborates this experience through confrontation and negotiation between different meanings, and a turn- and role-taking not rigidly and formally fixed.

Teachers are not asked to assume a neutral attitude: this would imply an insincerity that would undermine any potential for communication. They must, however, face the difficulty of not knowing much, in the beginning, about parents, especially when they are immigrant people, about their desires and plans, what they are and what they want to become; it is therefore essential that teacher manage to establish an atmosphere in which parents feel they are allowed

to tell "their" stories rather than passively repeat those required by the institution. The teacher, moreover, must be willing to listen to them without renouncing his role as the holder of a tradition in which he believes, with which he identifies, and for which he presents himself as a model. This is undoubtedly not an easy task, especially not at a time when a widespread principle of respect for differences and for pluralism of values, while certainly a step forward on the road to civilization and democracy, introduces a further element of complexity in education.

Therefore intercultural education, like moral education, cannot simply be another item of curricular content, but a shared process which leads all the participants to certain ways of thinking and feeling about, and concretely acting in, relationships between people despite their differences.

Finally, as world visions and values are all "storied" – that is described, explained and legitimated in myths, legends, traditions, religious and political philosophies – the best way to understand and respect others and their differences without annihilating them (through attacking, segregating, assimilating, removing them by any sort of theory or schema or pre-judged knowledge), is narrating one's own stories to one another, and explore the possibility to carry on a common story, for some time if not forever. Good dialogue, both at the interpersonal and the intercultural level, is possible only when it produces a "friendship between minds" (Greene, 1991), This means that every educational intervention, like every encounter between human beings, develops on the two levels of exchange of information (the story

narrated) and of participation in a common experience (the story lived), which are not the same but are not independent of each other. The understanding of people, of their difference and their problems, especially difference and problems of values, can be better reached by. "starting with a story", that is starting a process in which everyone puts his or her own story next to some other's, getting closer to one another both at the level of emotion and imagination and at the level of reflection and judgement.