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ESTRATTO

# THE ALTERNANCE PEDAGOGY AND THE INTEGRAL EDUCATION OF THE PERSON

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*Alternance pedagogy is an educational model founded in a rural context, in order to guarantee the farmers' children a proper education whilst, at the same time, preserving their local ties, where they keep working along with their families. As a consequence of this educational model, the youngster's experience is the starting point for developing a formation plan ad hoc, shaped through cooperation and collaboration with their family and community. The alternance pedagogy offers an integral education which considers the entirety of the person, taking care of their past experiences, life projects, desires and ambitions. The dialogic dimension is essential in this process as it allows the teachers (monitors) to engage in an authentic relationship with their students and their life context. Their multifunctional professional profile permits them to fulfill the different peculiar tasks which range from the simple teaching to a more complete educational profile. As a matter of fact, the teacher is considered the essential individual in this educational process.*

**Keywords:** alternance pedagogy, integral education, knowledge-building

# LA PEDAGOGIA DELL'ALTERNANZA E L'EDUCAZIONE INTEGRALE DELLA PERSONA

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La pedagogia dell'alternanza è un modello educativo che nasce in ambito rurale, per garantire una formazione ai figli degli agricoltori e, allo stesso tempo, per mantenerli legati alla terra. Sviluppa un modello educativo che parte dall'esperienza del giovane per strutturare un piano di formazione *ad hoc*, avvalendosi della cooperazione e collaborazione con la famiglia e la comunità di provenienza del ragazzo. Offre una formazione integrale che tiene conto della persona nella sua globalità, avendo cura del suo vissuto, i suoi progetti di vita, i suoi desideri e le sue aspirazioni. Fondamentale in questo processo è la dimensione dialogica che consente al monitore di entrare in una relazione autentica con i suoi studenti e il loro contesto di vita, adempiendo alle diverse mansioni peculiari del suo profilo professionale multifunzionale in quanto soggetto imprescindibile in questo processo educativo.

**Parole chiave:** pedagogia dell'alternanza, formazione integrale, costruzione del sapere

## INTRODUCTION

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The alternance pedagogy was founded in France in the 1930s. In this period the State and the Church were not interested in farmers' life conditions: their children were often obliged to renounce to attend school in order to work in the fields with their families. They could not afford their studies in the city. This educational methodology was developed to guarantee an education to young people from the rural areas, whilst preserving their bond to the land and without depriving their families of fundamental manpower (Nosella 2012: 46-48).

In the first part of this paper the story of the alternance pedagogy is briefly outlined: a journey started in France, continued in Italy, and completed in Brazil (due to the limited length of this text, the other experiences are not considered). Some theoretical and pedagogical aspects of this methodology are hereinafter analyzed: the focus will be specifically on the educational techniques of young students, based on their life experiences and on the cooperation with their families and community. To conclude, the concept of integral education of the person is further explored: every student is considered in their entirety; their education contemplates their personal history, past experiences, life projects, future plans, interests, life goals, etc. Education is indeed a continuous construction of knowledge based on pupils' life experiences, with the contribute of their teachers (monitors), family and community.

## 1. THE ALTERNANCE PEDAGOGY

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A general overview of alternance pedagogy is important before examining in depth the theoretical nucleus of the integral education of the individual and the concept of knowledge-building in learning processes. Alternance pedagogy was born in 1935 in France, when a group of four young people knocked at the rectory's door, at the parish church of Sérignac-Péboudou. The *Abbé* Granereau received them forthwith and started with these pupils an educational path. Thus, the first *Maison Familiale rural* or Agricultural Family School was established (*ibi*: 47). Father Granereau's desire was to give an education to the young people of the parish who were working with their families in the fields and could not attend school in the city. He organized the *Maison Familiale*, in agreement with some farmers, so as to host groups of students allowing them to attend school for a few days every month with board and lodging; hence they could spend the remaining days at home working the land with the family. To harbour even more students and offer an educational experience to the largest possible number of people, he ultimately decided to divide them in groups which were taking turns – in fact alternating.

This formula satisfied both the priest, who could realize his desire; the pupils, who

could receive a qualifying formation, bringing innovation and technology to their families' agricultural techniques; and thus, the families who could not renounce to labor force for long periods of time. This alternance formula has been defined the "formula of Lauzun" for a long time (*ibi*: 47), since the first school which implemented such strategy was established in Lauzun, immediately after the initial experience of Sérignac-Péboudou.

Henceforth, the experience of the *Maisons Familiales* became even more structured and spread all over France. The greatest growth period was from 1945 to 1960: the school number rose from 30 to 500 and the scientific knowledge concerning this pedagogical model gained notable exposure (*ibi*: 52). In the same period, the need to give a formation to the monitors – qualified teachers groomed *ad hoc* to teach in the alternance schools – grew greatly. For this reason, there were created some Formation Centers – structured in accordance with the alternance model – which offered a complete formation (general, pedagogical and agricultural-technician) to the young people striving for becoming monitors (*ibi*: 53-54).

This experience took hold in Italy in the early Sixties. Two *Scuole della Famiglia Rurale* or, more simply, *scuole-famiglia* were created. The first one was established in Soligo (Treviso) in 1961-62, whereas the second one was founded in Ripes (Ancona) in 1963-64 (*ibi*: 56), but both had little success.

The venture Agricultural Family School, born precisely in France in 1935, extended soon in other Countries. In Europe: Italy (Giorio, 1971), Portugal and Spain. In Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, Guadalupe, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela. In Africa: Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Senegal, R.C. African, Chad and Togo. In Oceania: Tahiti and New Zealand (Tonutti 2010: 67, translation by the author).

This paper will focus specifically on the remarkable Brazilian experience which originated in the State of Espírito Santo at the end of the Sixties thanks to an Italian priest, Father Umberto Pietrogrande. In 1969 the first *Escolas Famílias Agrícolas* (Efas) were created by the Mepes (*Movimento Educacional e Promocional do Espírito Santo*), a non-governmental organisation (ONG) born as homologous of the association Aes-Ccc (*Associazione degli amici dello Stato brasiliano dell'Espírito Santo-Centro di collaborazione comunitaria*) of Padua, also by the initiative of Father Umberto Pietrogrande (*ibi*: 68). Thanks to the financial support of the Italians, the Mepes could open the first Agricultural Family Schools. Nowadays the Efas of Mepes, spread all over the State of Espírito Santo, are eighteen: seventeen *Escolas Famílias Agrícolas* and an *Escola Família Turismo* (Eftur) located in Anchieta. This last school's focus is not the agriculture but the tourism (Mepes 2021: <https://www.mepes.org.br/escolas/>). The Agricultural Family School experience later expanded throughout Brazil. As a matter of fact, there exist more than one hundred and fifty schools based on the alternance pedagogy (Tonutti 2010: 68).



## 1.1. Theoretical and pedagogical aspects

As mentioned above, the Agricultural Family School was conceived as an institution at the service of farmers' families. This school fosters farm work, appraising the land, and combines the technical formation and the humanistic education in order to educate people, who can consequently bring innovations and invest in their family companies, modernizing the agricultural techniques. The two-phase education involves periods of cohabitation of the students at school and periods in which the pupil stays at home: at the beginning of this project the alternance was arranged in two weeks at school and two at home. Now, the duration of the periods has been reduced to a week, hence the alternance is weekly.

The education is carried out by monitors and parents. This pedagogy, indeed, allows a global formation, where there is a compresence and a twine of experience and theoretical reflection: from the personal experience originates new knowledge, the student shares it in the classroom where it is further unfolded with the help of classmates. So burgeon new learning occasions. Thanks to the alternance, the youngster can experience the reality through the activities performed at school: a necessary starting point are the observations, result of their work in the land and of the family background. This very domestic reality together with the socio-professional reality are recognized as educational places for the pupils. All the questions and the queries which emerge during the agricultural work, and the time spent at home with the family and the community, are deepened and analyzed at school or in the place where students complete their internship.

The alternance pedagogy is a methodology organized in this triangulation –action-reflection-action– in a continuous and endless process, since it presumes learning is an innate characteristic of human life and every person always learns (Gerke de Jesus 2011: 68). This pedagogy is a participatory and empowering methodology, which values the community dimension because it involves the whole life context of the students, their social network, their significant ties, and their family dimension. As a matter of fact, the family is the central nucleus which promotes the work in the fields and is included *in toto* in the youngster's educational process (Tonutti 2010: 69).

The alternance pedagogy provides not only the individual but the whole farmer's family with an education, which is doubly significant. Firstly, because it meets the need of transformation and development of the agricultural environment. Secondly, because it educates starting from the individual's everyday life, with a project which pushes the boundaries of the conventional classroom, in order to meet the necessity of transformation and development of the agricultural environment, in a more sustainable perspective (Gerke de Jesus 2011: 71). Sustainable development is interpreted as a possibility to guarantee social and political changes which do not compromise the ecological and social systems which are supporting the communities (Tristão 2004). For the purpose of fulfilling this function, the educative project should be structured

through the cooperation with the institutions, the internship coordinators of the different companies, the monitors, the families, the pupils and the people holding public office. Collaboration and cooperation are fundamental for the family schools because they encourage participation and generate integration. The alternance pedagogy is marked by assumptions which define the student as the subject of the educational process, the experience as the starting point of the knowledge-building process and collaboration and cooperation as job opportunity (Gerke de Jesus 2011: 72-73).

Another fundamental aspect of the alternance pedagogy, which Janinha Gerke de Jesus (2011: 74) analyses, is the Formation Plan, constituted as a guide for all the Efas' educative actions. It is thought and built at school, in collaboration with the subjects mentioned above (monitors, families, companies, public authorities), starting from the life reality of young people and their knowledge.

## 2. INTEGRAL EDUCATION OF THE PERSON

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The school makes the pupils protagonists of the change occurring in their life environment throughout alternance pedagogy. When considering the family schools context, it cannot be maintained that this pedagogy represents only as a specific methodology, a teaching medium. On the other hand, it is a pedagogical principle which implicates the development of the life environment (social, political, economic, spiritual) and the personalized integral education (life project) of the student as goals (Conceição Silva Araujo 2019: 243).

As Maubant and Roger (2014: 20) affirm, discussing about the basis and the origins of the alternance means awakening the question of the relationship between school and life and enquiring into the purpose of the school; as well as understanding this permanent oscillation between education-instruction, education-formation, education-socialization, education-qualification. The integral education of the family schools goes beyond the mere teaching of contents. Pistrak's (2005: 127) words mirror this methodology: he writes that it is fundamental to move from teaching to education, from programs to life projects. That is, to link the topics related to the job, the school, the study, the political and cultural activities; to overcome the political pedagogy and prefer a pedagogy of action; to educate the subjects starting from their everyday routine and, in particular, to help younger students to draft their own life project.

When furthering the integral education, family schools do not forgive about the spiritual dimension, for they consider the individuals in their entirety. They educate citizens developing their critical sensibility, that is the means by which they can feel the sorrows and joys of humanity in the other and with the other. This happens commonly in their everyday life, while they share glee and sadness during the cohabitation at school, or when they look for the best solution to resolve their family's problems or their personal conflicts, with the help of the monitors. Sure enough, for the political

and pedagogical project of these schools the person is the central axis of reference (Conceição Silva Araujo 2019: 244).

The school, oriented towards the reality of the student, becomes complicit of their full development, leading them to be autonomous, critical, creative and committed to democracy and social justice» (Caliari, Alencar e Amâncio 2002: 4, translation by the author).

Kools and Stoll (2016) present the characteristics of the school interpreted as “learning organisation”, in seven

*“action-oriented” dimensions: 1) developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students; 2) creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff; 3) promoting team learning and collaboration among staff; 4) establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration; 5) establishing embedded systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning; 6) learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system; and 7) modelling and growing learning leadership.*

The purpose of the paper of Kools and Stoll is to give a practical guide on how the schools could change into learning organizations and enhance their students’ performances.

## 2.1. Promotion of the dialogical dimension of education

Another interesting aspect of the alternance pedagogy is the enhancement of the dialogical dimension in the space-time of the school, into the educational process of the EFA (Gerke de Jesus 2010: 74, translation by the author).

The influence of Paulo Freire’s theories can be noticed when considering this very aspect. The Brazilian Agricultural Family Schools’ theories often referred to his thinking. «There is not practice by practice, or theory by theory! What exists is the dialogical reflection translated into praxis that reflects, proposes and transforms» (*ibi*: 74, translation by the author). «The authentic education, we insist, is not done from A to B or from A over B, but From A with B, through the mediation of the world» (Freire 2018: 104, translation by the author). And later he advocates:

The language of the educator or of the politician [...], as well as the language of



the community, does not exist without thought; both then, language and thought, do not exist outside a reality to which they refer. [...] The content of an education program will be sought in the reality which is our mediator, and in the consciousness we have of it. The moment of this research launches the dialogue of education as practice of freedom. This is the moment in which the investigation of what we call thematic universe of the community or the set of its generating themes, is realized (*ibi*: 107, translation by the author).

In his opinion, education and thematic research become thereby part of the same process.

While in “depository” education, which is essentially closed to the dialogue [...] the educator deposits in the pupil the content of the education programs, which the educators elaborate by themselves or someone has elaborated for them, in problematising education, open to dialogue par excellence, this content, which is never “deposited”, is organised and constituted in the pupils’ world view, in which their “generating themes” are located. [...] Therefore, the research of the theme is the starting point of the educational process and its dialogue ability (*ibi*: 123, translation by the author).

As Aubert, Garcia and Racioneri (2009) affirm, the actual industrial society forgot the dialogic dimension, by emphasizing the student’s intra-psychological dimension. Yet this learning dimension is today important, as it focuses on the intersubjective dimension of the person, which learns much more and better, in a learning context which promotes the interaction between the subjects. As described by Vargas and Flechas (2013) in their paper about dialogic learning, when students understand that the community matters to their education and they feel cared for, a group solidarity is created and it allows, furthermore, to avoid conflicts.

## 2.2. The different dimensions of the monitor's profile in the alternance pedagogy's schools

Emanuele Balduzzi (2018: 93) wrote:

The encounter with culture and knowledge, but also the opening up of this rich and varied emotional world, took place thanks to an interpersonal encounter: this, since then, has always convinced me of the teacher’s unavoidability for the growth and the life of students – and therefore also of the great educational responsibility which the teacher must assume. After all, the teacher was the indispensable means for that meaningful event (translation by the author).

Dario Nicoli (2016: 64) maintains it is necessary to review the actual idea of education and give to the teachers «the original task of doing school: include young people in the real world in a positive way, discover their talents and show them a virtuous perspective of life» (Translation by the author). In the school of alternance, the teacher (monitor) is the paradigm of a new job. Not only a teacher of a discipline, but an “animator of education”, who guides, suggests, helps, teaches when needed, supports during the learning process, and arouses interest and initiative (García-Marirrodri-ga, Gutiérrez-Sierra 2019: 9). In the alternance pedagogy the monitor looks at the student as a person who has a life story, some projects, past experiences, a family, a social, cultural and professional environment (*ibi*: 12). In García-Marirrodri-ga e Gutiérrez-Sierra’s (*ibi*: 14-16) opinion, rather than as a teacher, the monitor figure should be defined as an animator, specifically because of the variety of tasks which they have to perform. The polyvalency of a monitor unfolds not so much in the ability of teaching different disciplines, rather in the ability to associate and combine all the areas of work in an ordered, complete and coherent whole. The multifunctionality re-alizes in the adaptability and the ability of animation of the formation of the students and of the territory, as well as in the membership of an educational équipe.

Jordi González-García and Claudia Gagnon (2019) consider education in alternance as an innovative and relevant response to educational needs for it creates links between the worlds of work and education. They underline the importance of tutoring practices (typical task of the monitors in the schools of alternance) as link between education at school and during the internship. However, the tutoring is not only this. The tutoring practices, indeed, are bound to accompany all the school activities of the student, and they are aimed at meeting pupils outside the classroom, accompanying them in their process of growth, contacting them in case of absence, establishing together the new objectives, etc. Tutoring supports the student in every moment of the scholastic path, also at home. The pupil and the monitor meet in a dialogic dimension thanks to which the teachers can support the student along the educational path, proposing themselves as reference point.

## CONCLUSIONS

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The alternance pedagogy is undoubtedly a methodology born in a rural context and, as such, more adequate to that type of environment. However, the intent of this paper was to linger on the fundamental aspect of the integral education of the person and to bring into sharp focus the theme of pupils’ education through the knowledge-building. In fact, it is from the personal experiences of everyone that knowledge can burgeon.

In the alternance methodology, theory and practice are intimately connected (action-reflection-action). Additionally, the role of the monitors is fundamental: they are not only teachers but also tutors for the students, and guide them throughout their educa-

tion path, both at school and at home.

The family has an important and essential role in the life of the youngsters because it cooperates with the school in the construction of the Formation Plan and, on top of that, is an active part of the school life and contributes equally to pupils' education. The community is not marginal either, since it joins the process of knowledge construction of the students, by being the place where they have formative experiences, which can shape and be useful for their growth.

The person is considered in their entirety, with their life story, past, life projects, etc. and this could represent an incentive to innovate, transform and broaden the pedagogical horizons of the educational models of our late-modern society.

Hence, one of the challenges of the experiences analysed is to build true alternation, that integrates into the educational process the content and experience of the pupils in the school environment and the family environment, in a dynamic that is able to recognise the differences and paradoxes in the school universe, of the family and its movements, aimed at implementing a common project in which the whole is something more substantial than the sum of the parts (Silva 2008: 107-108).

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