

The Educative Act

« There are no coincidences, just encounters. »

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Overview

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1. The actor in the planned and the unexpected of everyday life

In the daily situation of education, as in daily encounters between people, « meetings » are tucked into the crossroads of “*at least*” two stories. One account is expected and planned, and the other lies in the immediacy of chance events that happen unexpectedly.

★ In the expected account, participants in life events organize time according to a plan that is at the same time protective, stimulating and constraining, from which they expect to have specific effects. When a basic project, like planning family life, establishes bedtime with its own rituals, it is expected that the conditions are set for a restful sleep. The same is true of the time to get up, to wash and to have meals, as it is with play and social activities, each of which targets a particular objective: rest, hygiene, recuperating energy, encountering different others. These moments and their aims offer the occasion to express oneself and make life ‘good to live’ meaningfully if the expression is valorizing. If the present leads to failures, the expression is no longer valorizing, and even leads to the loss of the meaning of life—“meaning of life” both as a direction swept by intermediate objectives and with the meaning that gives “sense to life”, a reason to live and a taste for a life with the sensitivity and emotions felt through the senses.

This anticipated account, foreseen and necessary for giving these three meanings to life can, little by little transform itself and become a routine in which there is no meaning that remains except that of an ineluctable end where everything stops. An end, therefore, that is preferable to make happen rather than let it surprise us after living a life of misery.

★ This history--created and established by educational institutions for children or by life partners for adults—is continually marked by particular events that are unique, that sometimes upset planned objectives and inexorably break the routine. *An argument during a meal interrupts the hope of dialogue and sharing that are expected for this time of reunion.* These interruptions in routine can go unnoticed. As they are not appreciated, they aren't valued. In these circumstances events don't acquire the status of a specific encounter or meeting; the boredom of routine gradually takes over. *A child goes home from school, tells about her day, smiling as she tells it.* If all that is heard are the stories told, the adult cannot seize the particular meanings of another reality left behind or that remains hidden. If the adult stays centered on the expected action repeated each time the child comes home from school, the smile will disappear into the forgotten of the immediate story. The uniqueness will not be noticed, but lost forever--unless a third account, at another moment of the day or the week, appears and sheds light on the particularity of the day. This re-reading of events requires a more difficult technique for elucidation.

The actor from and within the fissure

All untoward events with their uniqueness are part of the second account. This second account-- that cuts across the previous one-- is made up of the immediacy of action. Within this immediacy, the child (like all individuals) makes decisions or reacts in function of the structure of identity that he or she constructed over time, according to a unique (Stinner, 1844) “chemistry” (Levy, 2003).

This identity that structures her or him, organizes itself particularly around psychic forces¹, (Erikson 1963, Guindon, 1976), or life skills (Michit 1998). The child, for example, starts using skills such as accepting the rules of the game. These skills for accepting constraints or accepting defeat develop resistance to expressing disappointment through anger. Once these skills are acquired they allow the child to repeat adjusted attitudes during daily events. However, they are activated according to how available they are. A loss of availability breaks the repetition of the skill. For example fatigue, hypoglycemia and worries that diminish the sharpness of perception, can accidentally cause rifts in this history of life skills adjusting to specific events.

★ In the introduction of his article « le quotidien éducatif », Joseph Rouzel (2006), gave an example of this interruption:

« That morning I got up with my eyes not centered in their sockets². *Since it was raining I walked along close to the hotel wall, too close... Rip! I caught my nice sweater with its mauve and blue stripes against a window espagnolette... I was dumb. But who could I blame? The worker who mounted the handle on the window who should have been more careful when he installed it, or the good Lord who made it rain and who is paying me back :I just should have been careful, etc. I took revenge on bad luck. I started my conference on daily life ...with that little story. Daily life is at the same time repetition that forms the basis of security and yet it poses traps every day, surprises, unexpected things that wake us up. »*

The incident of this daily event comes from an absence of perception by the lecturer that made him not pay attention and thus tear his pullover. Luck has nothing to do with it, we all agree. So what will the one telling this story do with the sequence of action when he tells us he'll "get revenge", when he has said there's no such thing as luck, any more than "the

¹ In psychosocial identity (1998) we have shown that this identity is structured around four dimensions : one's social status, one's value system, one's knowledge and reasoning system and one's potential for action which includes psychological strength and life skills.

² Underlined by the author of the communication.

good Lord that gives us rain”? In contrast, with the elements he tells about it is sure that he uses the “torn pullover” for his lecture. Thus he actualizes a life skill that he suddenly “aroused”. At the same time he resisted letting himself get depressed by the event for which he is mainly responsible.

This example teaches us the lesson that in the event there is an unexpected encounter, the author makes decisions in function of his life skills that permit him to adapt. He gives himself the chance to express his identity with enough pride to perceive himself afterwards (during the third account, the one when the story is told) so that he was able to make his life beautiful through the rip in his sweater, and because he included this rip in the chain of his decisions as actor, avoiding blaming it on God or on bad luck.

★ Another example, adaptation during the time of the action, in this case needing help to get over a failure:

« Following the meal, one of the children—wanting to help those in the group who were responsible for cleaning up—took a first glass, then a second, that he put into the first...and—surprise! The first glass broke, then the child turned in astonishment towards the adult who was watching with an expression of surprise and a slightly amused smile without any reproach. Nevertheless, immediately afterwards, the child put it all on the table and ran to his room in tears... ».

As the rest of the story will show, it’s through a lack of perception of the characteristics of the first glass that the child is doing something he habitually does, but that isn’t appropriate. This habitual action led to the fracture in his daily life, when he had just done a good deed voluntarily, and it plunged him into the guilt of having broken something that he deems important and makes him feel there is some kind of injustice. As we will see, it’s in the third account, through getting back ownership of his decision-making process when

he was piling up the glasses, that an educator freed him from anxiety and put him into his place as actor.

This example teaches us that when the child doesn't have enough skills to adapt he downgrades himself, becomes anxious during the second account. Alone, he cannot escape the vicious cycle of despair. One must absolutely help him to gain back his sense that it was bad luck (because in this case, for the child only bad luck can explain his feelings of injustice), so that in the third account he can regain his place as actor. We will see more precisely how and which educational act can help him do so.

These rifts, necessarily more or less well-mended, will leave scars, either as reinforcements of life skills through encouraging someone's pride at overcoming obstacles and failures, or in the form of a creation of defense mechanisms that can define certain disabling pathologies that can to a lesser or greater extent reduce the availability of skills. The effects of reinforcing skills, as with consolidating defense mechanisms, depends largely on the educative act that accompanies the *specific character* of daily events.

2. The educative act at the crossroads of four stories

The educative act is found at the crossroads between these two sets of events: the expected, planned//immediate, impromptu—and will create the history of the child through the immediacy of what happens. The teacher (educator), within the educational action, takes part at the very heart of this history. During daily events he meets up with the history of the child's identity through his own educative skills created during his lifetime and within the frame of institutional history, and within the child's individual history already present and the one which will come. His only goal within the presence of events is to reinforce the life skills of the child by teaching him to approach routine events as if they are a set of moments from which—through his responsibility as actor—he assumes the duty of making them meaningful for himself, adjusting them to his situation.

From that viewpoint the duty assigned to the child from birth³ isn't the only relationship between the educator and the child (recorded in the expected history of the educational plan), it's not the relation of transfer (recorded in the crossroads of repeated defense mechanisms and unconscious habits of the educator and the child) that make up education, but instead it's this history of educative skills that clearly exposes the significant spontaneity present when the four histories meet

- what is established, organized and defined by a life plan. It is the same thing for the child and for the educator:
- The already-constructed identification ;
- The educational skills of the teacher ;
- The all-new story that floods in following on with the continuity or the rupture of the overall history. This rupture appears when an accident shatters a child's physical, psychological and/or social wholeness and that of his/her environment.

The educative act will have humanizing effects through the fact that the child and the adult engage clearly in the network of institutional history according to the logic of a systematic quest for signs permitting them to leave the vitality of the senseless present in its routine. With the inescapable and efficient impact that comes from repetition, which builds skills through repeated experience, the child will be continually aroused to the specific character of ordinary events by the educative act, in order to make them unforeseen by building a sudden reality encountered, due to his actions as decision-maker, and not only because of an unexpected irruption of chance.

³ This duty is assigned through its human status in that he is a future being of humanity on one hand, a pre-defined essence by 'nature' (according to metaphysical criteria), and on the other hand is a creator of a new humanity, the essence of which is always new and being developed (according to the criteria of wisdom). (Blondel, 1893).

3. Decision-making forms of the educative act

While analyzing practice, after a period when we described events precisely, we often had the occasion to show the structure of educative acts through looking at the acts of the educators. The work of classifying these acts according to their basic decisional form and in a limited number (less than 20), has permitted us to show the probability of their impact according to four classes of impacts (defensive, cooperative, calling for a change of being, or asking for protection)⁴. Also, during the analysis of the ensemble of the educative acts during a sequence of life history, this classification permitted us to illustrate educative strategies according to three large categories: those which build a protective and indicative framework; those which stimulate dialogue by addressing an intelligent subject; and those which stimulate the subject as actor that taking into account the availability of her/his potential for action. (Michit, H et R 1998).

3.1. Evaluation, reminding about rules, and violence.

That morning the child came into the kitchen. I said “good morning”. I said it with good will. He sat down at the table and started rocking. I asked him to stop rocking and to sit right. I felt like I said it nicely, as I knew he was sensitive and sometimes violent. Then he started rocking even harder looking at me mockingly. A bit out of patience, I told him more firmly: «Stop rocking and sit right!». The child got up, went into the kitchen and threw all the glasses and plates out of the cupboard.

⁴ These effects correspond to the only four objectives of relationships that communicating people can have. This discovery (Michit H et R 1998) questions the notion of the complexity of human relations. According to that theory, relationships occur with such an uncertainty that only by reducing them can a person extricate himself. (Rouzel, 2007, p.203). However, with only the four objectives of relationships, we define a principle of indetermination, limiting the possibilities for the uncertainty of reactions. Thus, for one act, only four ‘forms’ of relationship are conceivable. Thus, predicting how to activate them is possible, and anticipating how to manage them according to rules of communication is also possible.

At first, the practice analysis shows that the first act was the decisional form of the welcome ; the second : « stop rocking», whatever the good intentions, is the decisional form of appraisal in the form of evaluating a breach of a social norm or to the norm of resistance of the materials associated with the category of the suggestions : from advice to order ; at the same time « sit right » repeats the same sequence: evaluation, reference to a norm (found in the adverb ‘right’) and order “sit”. The only possible effects from this form are submission, acceptance asking for pardon, or justification--which can include rebellion.

Since the logic of the action : *evaluation/reminding about rule, /advice-order is repeated four times without the educator realizing it*, the impact of this sequence is easily recognized by the laws of the effects that come from these decisional forms. Thus it is easy to ascertain that the structure of the educative act is made up of:

- A time of greeting and putting someone at ease in the surroundings where the meal is served and where an educator is welcoming according to the recommendations planned by the institutional history.
- A request to stop doing something.
 - *This request necessarily implies an implicit reasoning that refers to a knowledge of the rules established in the group : « if you rock back and forth on your chair and it isn’t allowed, then you have to stop”.*
 - This logic has no effect because it addresses reason. He knows the rule, but that day another force is motivating him; he cannot conform to the rule and to his own reasoning.
 - To remind him of a norm that he already knows, asking him to submit to it inevitably puts him into a double bind: « Do what you can’t do ».
 - In addition to this, at the same time--like with any order-- however nicely one gives the order, it inevitably causes an intelligent reasoning person to express

an answer in the form of a defensive justification or an aggressive attack. Thus, any order always means—for the person who receives it—that the person who gives it doesn't understand what's happening and can even cause a feeling of unfairness. In the present case, the youth isn't an exception to the rule. He reacts by attacking. Indeed, from reasoning and a lack of understanding a feeling of unfairness is created that is easily associated with aggressive reactions towards oneself or others.

- Thus during the third stage of the sequence, the educator doesn't perceive the logic of her educative acts that stimulate a defensive reaction, thus doesn't see her responsibility or involvement in the situation and keeps on with the same strategy. She tries to convince or make the « reasoning child » submit “who isn't behaving like he should”. With the same decisional forms, using the same verbal forms but much more performing (Austin, 1962)⁵, the educative action, as well as accentuated actions become a frank *evaluation*, a firm *order* provokes a *loss of reason* and opens the possibility for the actor to use his reactions and characterial defense mechanisms.

What is astonishing is that, in many educative situations, the actors keep repeating the same inefficient strategies without learning any lesson from their failure. «I don't understand what's wrong with him—that makes 'x' times that I've told him, and he always does the same thing!” This shows the natural inefficiency of such exchanges to initiate and engage in a change in such situations; the actors blame their failure on something else: This can be the child, luck, God or the unconscious. That reaction isn't incomprehensible since we know that attaining procedural logic (Eustache, Desgranges, 2003) is extremely difficult without any knowledge of how to use techniques allowing

⁵Performative utterances, beyond knowing whether they are true or false, *do* something and not only say something. (Austin, 1962, p181)

access: today this means either the precise description of events (Vermersch, 1996), or else the explicit specification of the decisional process (Michit, 1998).

The educator doesn't realize what she is doing when she is carrying out her act; according to the decisional format it isn't the fact that she is in the middle of doing something. It's more about a lack of knowledge of the classification of her acts or the capacity to see herself involved in the action.

Revealing decisional forms of action through clarification shows a "realness" of the sequence of actions presented.⁶ In this realness, the actions experienced in the implicit—those that remained hidden from the author's conscious—become accessible. Thus the actions come out of the anonymity of the unconscious or from implicit repetition.

Consequently, with the help of this clarification process, in addition to a *reappropriation of the responsibility* of her educative acts, through becoming conscious she also increases her competency. Indeed, re-reading the process also causes—through its boomerang effect:

- *an immediate image of oneself in the heat of the action* making it possible to perceive and take into consideration a large amount of information on one hand
- and on the other hand *an increased knowledge of the structuring of one's educative competencies* which permits one to use *different decisional forms that are more appropriate* (whether of personal histories, constructed unconscious transfers or unconscious presence).

That day, the effect of re-reading didn't only stop for the recognition points. At the same moment the educator is carrying out the work of re-creating her actions, from her memory something surged that she learned about the child, that she had not taken into account the morning of the incident. Everyone knew that "*for this child, rocking meant he was filled with anxiety.* »

⁶This « realness » can be seen in the text, with the « certainties » of facts and gestures, « gaps » (of memory) and « uncertainties or imprecisions » making up the vague picture.

Everyone knew this; it had been observed many times. It had been shared during team meetings. However, in spite of this being very well-known, the teacher discovered she had, in fact, put the priority on the chair that could have broken⁷, and the social norms of good behavior. Within the immediacy of the action, the prioritization which was important put the child in second place. This rejection remained unconscious, in forgotten obscurity until the moment of analyzing practice. The anxiety of the child had become unavailable to the treatment of the information because putting him third in the hierarchy of importance of the decision, centered on institutional history, had disappeared from the description of the event. It was thus by meticulously going over the action that revealed what had been hidden, or forgotten, about the child in his immediate history. So it isn't an imaginary or symbolic reconstruction, but a more precise description of the elements that had been considered and then forgotten.

Finally, to conclude this moment of analysis, the study of the “universe of relationships” (Comon, Michit 2005) that the educator and the child live respectively, shows that the educator wants to create a ‘universe of friendliness’, but that the child—as soon as he arrived in the dining room—finds himself in another universe, perhaps even without any desire for a relationship with her. By speaking to him, she asks him to change universes, without asking permission. She thinks he's into the relationship because social rules say he must have a relationship by greeting each other when he comes in to the room. Not knowing the notion or the reality of ‘relational universes’ or their laws, by speaking to him she pushes the child into a universe of « find your maximum interest » by refusing the relationship.

Since she hadn't kept in mind the possibility of having four universes of relationships, she couldn't address the signal of a request for protection, and she remained in her universe of

⁷The teacher said that she paid attention to the kind remark because she knew the stormy character of the child.

teaching the respect for social rules or the laws of physics of materials, creating a tension that resulted in conflict.

These moments of becoming aware helped the team modify their decisions-actions in real time, calculating the importance of the educative micro-acts for the larger history of the individualized plan for this child. The child no longer posed a problem for the team. He could enter into the institutional history accepting the team's challenge to do it in his own way so that he could manage his past, and start anew by leaving aside self-destructive behaviors and anxieties.

To be sure this isn't about accessing a phantasm of omnipotence through mastering the daily and opening up to the infinite possibilities of the expressions of decisional forms, it is important to understand here that being open to uncertainty can be summarized as remaining awake every professional instant to the four categories of objectives for relationships as well as the categorization of decisional forms that can be linked to their effects. Thus, for example: a child who reacts aggressively towards himself, towards others or towards their environment finds himself in a defensive universe—one into which one must tiptoe in by projecting oneself into a universe of protection in order to give the child the conditions he needs to again become the actor of his own life.

3.2. Questioning action

Example of accompanying the teacher with questioned action.

A very violent youth is sent by a social institution that can no longer keep him because of his behavior. Not only does he de-stabilize the group of children but he exhausts the educators, service staff and administration who fail to work with him. For example he waited until the cleaning woman was half-way down the stairs when he turned out the light. He burst out laughing when she sprained her ankle as she fell down the rest of the stairs.

When the event was gone over again with the educators and director, he'd been particularly insulting towards different ones, asking, "And now what are you going to do to me?" The answer was "We're going to throw you out, » and the youth answered, « That's what they always say. My parents don't want me, no one wants me, that's how it is, you see very well you can't stand me! » Given this impasse the administration decided to admit him to another establishment.

He arrives in the place he'll live with his aggressive acts and violence still intact, but in the little group in the countryside, he manages to calm down somewhat. In this context it was agreed with the local school that he would start classes again.

Fifteen days went by, and the first significant event happened during the recreation when a girl says, « Your mother...!» He couldn't take the insult, jumped on the girl and beat her seriously. He was stopped by the school guardians and expelled for three days, as it was agreed in a contract that he had accepted..

That evening the educator takes him aside and asks

- *"Can you describe to me what happened?"*

There was silence and a sign of refusing to speak.

- *"You know I only want to hear your side of it, that's all?"*

Silence.

- *"If you don't tell me, what can I do?"*

-Silence, then « Since it won't change anything as you already know ».

- *"What I know is what they told me at the school, but for you, what happened?"*

The youth tells in detail how the action happened until being stopped by the adults. He finished his story:

- *"You see I'm a good-for-nothing loser. You'll see you won't be able to stand me either and you'll throw me out."*

- “*Maybe, but what makes you say that?*”

- “*Anyway, even when I try--since I’m tired of being thrown out-- I can’t do it! I disappoint the adults and then I become unsupportable. I understand them, I’m just a shit, they throw me out; that’s my life!*”

- “*Ah !*”

The educator means to transmit a certain surprise through the exclamation, then leaves a brief moment of silence. Then he tells him:

- “*What are you telling me when you say «... even when I make an effort because I’m tired of being thrown out»? ” (Questioning the spoken act)*

- “*I told you I’ve had it.*”

- “*So, you’ve had it!*” (*echolalia that means a gap in the understanding between the answer and question asked*)

- “*Yes, I’ve had it!!*”

- “*What are you saying when you tell me that?*” (*Questioning the spoken act*)

- “*You’re deaf or you’re doing it on purpose!*”

- “*No, I heard very well, but what are you telling me?*” (*Answer to his question and renewal of the « questioning of the spoken act »*)

- “*I don’t know. I can’t stand myself and I’d like to get out of this shit, but no one can help me.*”

- “*« No one can help you”; if you want we can look at that point later. But tell me, do I understand right if I hear in what you just told me that you really want to break out of this?*”

- “*Yes, I’m telling you I’ve had enough of this fucking shit.*” (*Working on agreeing about the objective of the relationship and its vital essential objective*)

- “*Right, OK,OK...*”.

The educator leaves a moment of silence and seems to be thinking, then asks him:

- *“Tell me when you jumped on the girl to beat her up, what did you do?” (Questioning the action)*

- *“What did I do—I beat her up, she insulted my mother, you can’t do that, you understand?”*

...Thoughtful silence, then:

- *“And by doing that what else are you doing at the same time?” (Questioning the action)*

- *“Nothing else !!!”*

- *“You are doing something to the girl: you’re beating her up.” (Identification of the action)*

- *“Yes.”*

- *“You’re doing something about your mother: you’re defending her?” (Identification of the action)*

- *“If you want. Nobody touches her.”*

- *“What are you doing to yourself?” (Help to discover another action linked to one of the actors at the scene)*

- *“I don’t know—you mean I’m messing up my life?”*

- *“Your opinion?” (Request to identify the action according to the youth’s own categories)*

- *“I know that with that (sort of thing) I have no future, but I can’t do otherwise!”*

- *“Have I asked you to do differently?” (Precisions on the educator’s objectives in order to avoid mistrust of an educative act that would give advice or a behavioral norm)*

- *“I don’t know, with all your questions I don’t know what you are trying to get at!”*

- *“I’m doing what with my questions?” (Request that tries to make the youth identify the educator’s act in order to avoid a justification for moving into a rational mode)*

- *“I don’t know?”*

- *“What am I doing?” (Insistence to make the youth identify the educator’s action and get him out of his evaluations to avoid the justification of moving into rationality.)*

- *“You’re asking me questions.”*

- “Yes, and what for?” (**Help the youth identify the link between the means (asking questions) and the objective on the moment**)

- “I don’t know--to learn what happened.”

- “That’s all.” (**Sign of agreement**)

- “And now?”

- “If you want, we can stop there tonight, sleep, and get together tomorrow to see how to organize the three days when you won’t be going to school.” (**avoiding getting into explanations in order to leave the work on the action to take effect. To give that moment an objective can give meaning or a justification through its significance that would destroy the integration of what just happened in the action.**)

During the three days, the educator helped the youth carry out manual activities, repairing the house and his school work, by asking the school for the homework. Each evening they reviewed the day’s events precisely and looked closely at one of them to make a more precise description of the youth’s actions and ordinary decisions, especially those taken by the youth, simply clarifying the factors that caused them, to be more clear for each other. For example, one day they had planned to change a water tap. The youth tried to take out a screw that wouldn’t come out. He could not get the tap off. He got angry and came to ask for help. That evening the educator asked him:

- “When you came to ask me for help, what did you observe?” (**Identifying perceptions: 1st factor of the decisional process**)

- “I got angry at the tap, couldn’t get it off, you’re there, I call you.”

- “When you get angry, what is important?” (**Looking for the main things noticed: 2nd factor in the decisional process**)

- “I feel it coming and I don’t want to disappoint you; I don’t want to get angry, and since you are there it’s important that I don’t break everything up ».

The educator doesn't go any further. He achieved his goal: the youth could see himself acting; he distinguished the elements of his decision within a context of obstacle and management of his anger. Life is peaceful during those days.

The three days pass. The youth goes back to school; everything goes quite normally, by signing up again to his contract of non-aggression. Every evening the same way of re-reading significant events was carried out in a peaceful moment. Until one day just before noon, another insult was thrown at him. The same type of insult as the first, unsupportable to hear, the new "your mother" produced the same effect. He beat up the author of the insult. Same scenario, he's expelled. That evening the educator came to him; the youth is exhausted. The educator said,

- *"Can you tell me what happened?" (request for a description)*

- *"No, you see very well I'm not going to make it!"*

- *"That is not an answer to my question. My question is "what"?" (Evaluation of the gap between the answer and the question. The evaluation is possible that day since the history of these moments is now established in confidence through all the re-views)*

- *"Uh...you're asking me to tell you what happened!"*

- *"So, tell me, please, because if not I can't help you and I might make some completely wrong interpretations." (Request for description)*

Mumbling, the youth started the story and at one point he stopped. He seemed surprised:

- *"You know, it didn't happen like the last time!"*

- *"Which means...?" (Support for going further)*

- *"It wasn't the guardians who stopped me, it was me!"*

- *"How did that happen?"*

- *"It's clear! Just when I was hitting him, our last discussion came to me in a flash, and then, I remembered the « we'll see later » you said to me, and I stopped immediately."*

The educator was silent, with just a gesture of astonishment in order to leave the gain that had just been made to take effect. He stopped the re-reading of the event at that key moment. No one had seen any change in behavior except the educator and the child, who could perceive a micro-change that was the beginning of a new story, which would end by his mastering his reactive and aggressive, emotive compulsiveness. After some years within this milieu he entered the university. He completed his studies and found work without any difficulty.

From this example we can retain first of all that the educative questions with this strategy, centered uniquely on the actor as subject during each moment of the encounter, are made up of three ordered decisional forms, chronologically :

- 1) the first decisional form is the description of events.*
- 2) When the entire story is described, then attention is given to the decisional forms of questioning around action from the viewpoint of the decision.*
- 3) When it is possible, then comes the help to discover the factors of the process of making these decisions.*

3.3. The law of the strongest: Might makes right

A facilitator is responsible for a table tennis activity with children 8 to 12 years old. During the time reserved for that age group a young person 15 years old comes in, takes a racquet from a child and wants to play. The facilitator comes over, asking,

“What are you doing here? Don’t you know this time isn’t reserved for you?” (***Decisional form*** : request to describe the act, which is only a way of speaking, because it immediately introduces an evaluation concerning a rule, reminding him firmly, by the authority that reflects the environment. (*Strategy of the intelligent subject associated with the strategy of putting the surroundings in place*).

The youth answers :

-«*The social center is my place too, so I want to play--I'm playing.* »

-«*This isn't the time for you, come later!* » (***Same decisional forms: evaluation, pronouncing the rules, order; and the same strategic logic: intelligent subject combined with a given framework***)

According to the inescapable logic of these strategies, the relationship cannot become anything but aggressive.

«*No ! I want to play—I'm playing !*»

Since the facilitator doesn't win, she takes him by force and puts him out.

When the forms of action were reviewed, the facilitator realized that by her reminding the youth of rules and using reasonable explanations, he was able to make her use the 'law of the strongest'. The weakness of these strategies caused her to get into difficulty: the youth pushed her to make the mistake and won. It's only when analyzing practice that she becomes conscious that she was trapped by her actions and that she found herself having to use some kind of universal methods where "the law of the strongest" reigns. The youth managed to drag her into his territory, while the whole idea of the social center tries to reduce that space to a sociable place, to reduce violence. A bit desperate for having acted with a law against which she is fighting, she then asked the following question:

- «But, how else could I have done? »

The study of the logical sequencing of decisional forms "request for description/evaluation/reminder of rule/explanation/justification/aggressivity" shows that she didn't let the youth answer the first question she asked. The only thing to change would be to work on that existing link, and to take into consideration the answer about the description of events and the actions, so as to avoid the evaluation later and enter into the questioning of the action, which leads to a search for key elements of the action, under the heading "What's it to you?"

4. The two sets of educative acts within the immediacy of the action

4.1. The broken glass, continued

To finish the story of the broken glass, when the educative act enters upon the daily life of the child, the story can take two directions.

If we remember, when it was time to clear the table, the child offered to take the glasses off. He took the first, then the second, putting it into the first, which broke. He stood flabbergasted with a broken glass in his hands and a piece on the floor. Daily life rushed in. The adult who kindly smiled at the situation to calm his crying comes up to him and says, « It's nothing (*evaluation associated with a contradiction of the evaluation that in fact the child wasn't taken into account within the importance of the situation*), it's just a glass (*evaluation combined with a contradiction of the child's evaluation*), you didn't do it on purpose (*attributing and evaluating the child's intention*), it happens sometimes (*statement*), come on, don't cry anymore (*suggestion, advice*), we'll get another one (*stating that the repairs will be made by the institution*); it's good, you wanted to help (*evaluation of the act and attributing intent*), come on, (*suggestion, advice*). Nothing helped, the child remained inconsolable.

During this unexpected moment the first educator spontaneously uses strategic decisional forms addressing an intelligent reasoning subject. Not questioning the child, thus knowing nothing about him, he attributed evaluations contrary to what the manner of the child was showing. This first educative act is almost forgetting the child and instead is concentrating on an object of little importance that he is looking at in that moment. Logically that educator with his spontaneous actions can't have any effect on what is happening for the child.

Seeing what happened, a second educator who was present comes up and delicately takes over. Using his personal spontaneity he asks the child,

« *What's happening?* » (***Trying to find out what the child feels, request for a description***)

No answer.

« *You don't want to tell me a little about what's happening here ?* » (***Acceptance of a refusal by reducing the precision of the request for a description, without dropping the request for a description***)

No!

« *Really not...* » silence (***Acceptance of the refusal and waiting in silence corresponding to creating a situation of expectation***)

« *I broke the glass!* »

« *So why are you upset?* » (***Request for description***)

« *I broke the prettiest glass!* »

« *Yes, and what's happening?"* (***Request for description***) (He put his finger on his chest) (***Setting up a framework of expectation***),

« *It's not fair! I wanted to help and this is what happened to me!* »

« *What's not fair?* » (***Request for details***)

« *That it happens to me !* »

« *What happened to you ?* » (***Request for details***)

« *Um, ...nothing, but I broke the glass !* »

« *And how did it happen ?"* (***Request for description***)

Then followed a precise description of the action with his intentions. The educator goes back to the moment when the child chose to stack up the two glasses.

«At that very moment, what did you see?» (**Request for observation, the first factor of the decisional process**)

«I wanted to just make one trip. »

«That's what you wanted to do, but what did you think about?» (**Identification of the objective and taking the question again on the description**)

«Um... I don't know...I didn't see that the glass could break?...

«And it could break because of what?» (**Continuing access to perception by avoiding the passage to the reasoning subject who is taking a politically correct and rational position to keep the child as actor.**)

«I see now, it was more delicate than the others, which I'd already seen, but I thought it was strong and I wanted to just make one trip. »

«So what happened to you?» (**Coming back to the responsibility within the act**)

«Stop!.... »

The child smiles and the adult invites him,

« Come on, let's go» (**Request for an objective and a decision.**)

The child takes off again.

Within this moment we see two juxtaposed forms of educative action according to the institutional history, centered on the glass and the surroundings, and according to the personal history of the acting subject. It should be pointed out that both are spontaneous. However, this spontaneity depends on two integrated skills used in the intervention strategies.

4.2. The decisional components of the two sets

Educative strategies that stimulate reasoning subjects

From the preceding examples we can characterize the decisional forms that address the intelligent reasoning subject:

★ During the plans for anticipated history the educative decisions consist of : Establishing an objective, stating the directions, preparing an activity, giving a framework, explaining, advising and defining consequences.

★ During the immediate action, decisions that are the most often taken by educators by an evaluation (present in every praise or criticism), are carried out in an aleatory way by an explanation, a reminder of the rules or law, advice/order, or a justification—with an interpretation and the attribution of intention, or threatening punishment.

★ *Just after the action has happened*, often silence is chosen to leave time to work, and thus the responsibility to act. But it can happen the search for elements of the situation experienced is realized with the goal of understanding and explaining the cause, or to explain the reasons for orders or objectives. The evaluation of the effects or the means used often contribute to the interpretation of intentions. A piece of advice or the order linked to a reminder of the law or rules, by announcing an objective for the future or a threat concludes reflecting on the events.

Educative strategies that stimulate acting subjects

For educative strategies that stimulate acting subjects, whatever the moment (before, during or after the action), the very first decisional form consists of deciding to help one's self-image by using the following decisional forms:

- Request for a description of the experienced events according to chronological order, to increase the image of self as differentiated from others in the surroundings.
- Request for actions and their decisional forms associated with the request for coherence between the objectives sought and the means used, and terminating with

a search for the actor's strategy and for its effectiveness regarding the intentions and the desired impact.

- Finally, studying the structure of the decisional process in order to reinforce procedural memory; to reinforce adaptation to emotional expression; and discovering the immediate cause of the action, in order to either modify the acquisition of information (whatever the historical causes) or to reinforce a positive image of oneself.

In conclusion

According to this study, not only can the educative act no longer be invented on the spot, but its logical process can be shown. Thanks to clarification, every action sequence can be clearly described and their processes and impacts (for developing the skills or the defenses of the actor) can be evaluated in relationship to how they reinforce a child's life skills. These skills are identifiable beyond visible behaviors, and according to very precise activation factors for the decisional process of the child in everyday life events.

One can, at this point of reflection, develop at least one principle of educative action, which can be stated as follows:

All decisional forms that address the reason of the subject are ineffective for the initial building of decisional forces. Indeed, "repeating several times, even harping on the same instructions, the same explanations to children (or adults) who don't have the skills to carry them out (either because they can't remember the information or else because they can't use them in the heat of the action) creates a double bind that is generically an order to "do what you can't do".

These forms of action not only have an impact on reinforcing capacities to adapt in the case where the child's decisional forces are already present, having been developed through the history due to the two large sets of stimulations of the subject as actor :

-participation in the activities and

-clarification of the actions experienced.

Putting the force of explanatory language and dialogue in second place compared to the representation of self as actor and of one's conscience, this observation can help understand the discouragement and exhaustion sometimes observed in some educators who don't understand the lack of effect their actions have. Indeed, presenting children a double bind in their daily life, without realizing it, through dialogues that they set up, means they activate depressive effects or self-destructive behavior caused by the law evoked by Paul de Tarse : "There is one law within myself that I don't understand: I hurt what I don't want to and I don't do the good that I want. Who will free me from this body that has dedicated me to Death?"

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