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INVITED PAPER

Can education counter a culture of hate?

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We have words for selling
words for buying
words for making words
but we need words for thinking.

We have words for killing
words for sleeping
words for tickling
but we need words for loving.

We have machines
for writing words
dictators, tape recorders
microphones telephones.

We have words
for making noise,
[but] words for speaking,
there now are none.

1. Introduction

We wanted to introduce our contribution with "The Words", a poem by Gianni Rodari, who, in the 1970s, emphasised how we needed new words, denouncing the lack on a social level of the words for living together, for a civil co-existence based on thought, solidarity, and dialogue.

Like all languages, the "language of hate", an expression used in Italian for "hate speech", is not constructed solely through listening to words, but on attitudes, looks, and ways of relating that have shaped and continue to shape the contexts of our experience, from birth, and that orient the construction of our idea of ourselves, of others, of relationships, and of the world. Words, however, are important, and proposing new languages to describe old and new realities is a necessary cultural undertaking in every society.

For this reason, in our contribution, which starts with experiences with children aged 0 to 6, built up over more than sixty years of work in Reggio Emilia's municipal infant-toddler centres and preschools, and which we propose as a case study, we will address the theme of education in a general sense in order to offer tools and approaches that are useful to schools in developing antibodies in children and young people that counter, at least in part, the culture of incitement to hatred, and how this experience of education has

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proposed new languages to give shape to a new educational reality.

The Reggio Emilia Approach, known and appreciated in many parts of the world, shares both the cultural context in which it developed, and theories and practices, with other experiences in education in Italian municipalities, but has the distinctive feature of being an organic and systemic elaboration in which each part is conceived in coherence and relation to the others. It is an experience of a holographic nature, so that each aspect examined will always yield the same values and meanings.

It is not our task, in this piece, to analyse where the "languages of hate" and hate speech are generated, but a very brief examination of some issues is necessary to provide the reader with elements to understand how an experience of education developed more than sixty years ago still responds to questions asked today.

The current spread of hate speech has systemic and social roots linked to phenomena such as competition forced upon us by the market, disappointment among younger generations in their expectations of improved social status, migratory flows, the need for belonging to a group and cohesion, the sense of community that if it is experienced as a closed group leads to creating enemies, the increase in economic and educational poverty, and more.

Over the past eighty years, concepts of freedom, authority, identity, belonging, difference, security, and rights – seemingly immutable products of centuries of development and traditions that – have been challenged in an attempt to interpret a rapidly and constantly changing social, cultural, technological and natural context. The acceleration in the development and diffusion of technologies, the pace of life and social change (see Rosa, 2013) have made meaningful, comprehensive and shared elaborations the dynamics of civil coexistence more difficult, a coexistence that without new references within new ecosystems such as the digital, feeds back into unstoppable vortices of action generating disorientation and conflicting positions.

Schools cannot chase after current events, but they must seek to be part of the contemporary world, taking responsibility for working with an eye to the future and seeking, whenever possible, to anticipate the times to come. In the debate on schools, which is relatively sparse in Italy, there has been talk of adding a new subject, sometimes referred to as education in respect, in relations, or on feelings, and of prohibiting children and young people from using electronic devices and accessing social media because – it is argued – expressions of hatred, at their maximum in these environments, reverberate in acts of in-person violence, intolerance, bullying, and vandalism both inside and outside school.

We believe it is important that the widespread concern about these phenomena be prevented from leading to interventions based on emergency, improvised, and with a restrictive, and punitive nature. Educating for languages other than those of hate has always been a fundamental and primary task of the family, educational services, schools and, more generally, society. Hate speech is not a separate phenomenon but generated within a culture that we, as educators, have to interrogate in order to find strategies and tools to generate change. School, as an institution that, at least from six to sixteen years, welcomes all children and young people without distinction of gender, social status or nationality, could be an incredibly powerful driving force in building a different culture.

For this to happen a paradigm shift is necessary, from schools based only on transmission or only on socialization, to schools capable of connecting children and young people with themselves, with others and with the world, through transmission, socialization, and active participation in the construction of co-living and knowledge. This first "posture" for countering a culture of hate replaces the disjoining conjunctions and mindset of "either/or", with that of "and…and", a conjunction and mindset that connects, and places different elements on the same level of logic.

2. The importance of the first six years of life

Our case study concerns infant-toddler centres and preschools that welcome children from birth to six years old. The first six years of a person's life are crucial for anchoring the development of cognitive, social and relational skills that individuals continue to form during their whole life, to values, attitudes and ethical orientation. This affirmation was present in certain late eighteenth century authors, but very fortunately twentieth century research and the cognitive neurosciences have provided scientific evidence that continues to give us further elements. This has produced a shift in language, which educators in Reggio Emilia have worked on long and tenaciously, contributing to its wider diffusion. Certain terms, expressions and images have turned on its head the idea that children are "plants to keep straight" or "empty vases to fill". Thus we have children who are "competent", "interlocutors" from birth with the people with whom they come into contact, curious, interested in gathering information on objects of the world and spaces around them, through acts of knowledge, gathering "vocabularies of acts" that are necessary for them to construct ever more complex activities, predisposed to associating exploratory acts of different nature (the visual, kinaesthetic and tactile), equipped with all the tools necessary for constructing their own knowledge, producers of theories and capable of communicating through a multiplicity of "languages" of expression (Malaguzzi et al., 1996): These new

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words have slowly but surely modified ways of educating and instructing, though on this latter aspect in particular, much work remains to be done. It is a further demonstration, if any were needed, of the urgency of creating new alphabets and new words to give shape to the world.

In the first six years of life, the brain's plasticity and neuronal endowment are at their maximum, but it is the quality and quantity of encounters that provides favourable conditions for the maintenance and opening of new pathways, of synapses.

To borrow from Jeff Hawkins, authoritative neuroscientist and computer engineer, we can say children begin life with a neuro-cortex already equipped with hypotheses about the world, meaning it is already structured to be able to see, listen, and learn the languages of expression but lacking in specific knowledge (Hawkins & Dawkins, 2021).

It is this specific knowledge that poses a crucial question for adults: what contents are essential and through what channels to offer them, starting in the first months of life, so that children can organise their knowledge and their identity within a vision of planetary citizenship?

The gestures of care towards babies and children, the tone of voice with which we talk to them, the consideration and promptness towards needs they express, our openness to physical contact, the responsiveness of our gaze, and the ways and tones of relationships that form the context of a child's life, constitute one part of that first *specific knowledge* which offers a sense of trust and security, and reinforcing the desire to explore and know the world. In fact, in these early stages of each of our existences we begin to construct either a self that trusts the goodness of the world and openness towards others, or a self that is diffident.

This importance of the first six years of life should push governments to allocate significant investments to facilitate the fulfilment of a desire for parenthood and create conditions to safeguard and support this crucial role. Among these, the presence of quality infant-toddler centres and preschools is certainly the most urgent and necessary policy, as stated in numerous European Union Recommendations [Recommendations of the European Council, 22 May 2019 (2019/C 189/02) regarding high-quality early childhood education and care, and Recommendations of the European Council, 8 December 2022 (2022/C 484/01) on early childhood education and care, Barcelona Objectives for 2030].

3. Infant-toddler centres and preschools: social outposts against a culture of hate

In the Pedagogical Guidelines for Italy's integrated system of education and instruction for children aged birth to six, we can read the following definition:

> *Educational services and preschools are places of life in which children meet other children with whom to play, dialogue, share experience, develop friendships, and build relationships of reciprocal help. In these social contexts, they learn to learn with and from others, they sense they belong to a group, and they gradually internalize community rules (in routines, in play, in conversation) comprehending their meaning and managing conflicts.*
>
> *In educational institutions, relationships between children have the possibility of developing, with continuity and stability, making it possible for "cultures" to form, meanings shared between children in the form of rituals, games, and linguistic exchanges, which express and reinforce young children's initiative, understood as the capacity for expressing our own point of view. (Decree of the Italian Ministry of Education 22 November 2021, no. 334: Adoption of "Pedagogical Guidelines for the Integrated 0-6 System")*

This challenging affirmation, interpreted in relation to cognitive, emotional, and social differences in children and young people of different ages, could be useful as a reference for the entire school system.

Let us begin by exploring this initial interpretation of educational services and preschools to argue how a "pedagogy of relationships" (see Malaguzzi, 2012 in Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012, pp. 44-45) such as that present in Reggio Emilia's 0-6 educational services, can offer conceptual and strategic frameworks we believe could also be useful for later levels of schooling in building antidotes to a culture of hate together with children and young people. We repeat: we do not believe that teaching, prohibitions and hours dedicated to education on relationships are effective and coherent strategies for the problem of the spread of hate speech. Neither do we believe that simply inviting each teacher to introduce elements of the issue into their subject to be a decisive solution. We believe what is necessary is a change of paradigm that modifies schools and education, taking the many good experiences already being enacted as our starting point.

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4. Infant-toddler centres and preschools are places of life

In our opinion, thinking of schools as a place of life, rather than primarily as places of education, is a good starting point. In the infant-toddler centre and preschool, the openness to the outside world, the social context and its institutions, the permeability between in school and out, is achieved through several daily acts: children bringing objects from home to school, parents, welcomed at the beginning and end of the day, speaking with teachers and listening to other children whom they know by name, the fluid structure of the day without interruptions or grading the importance between times of care, of play and educational activity, a coherent educational attitude in the adults and over the course of the day, spaces and environments which are not anonymous containers of an educational relationship, but which offer themselves to children for their research, transforming together with it and bearing the visible traces of their thinking and products. Spaces in which, together with the materials and tools available to all, personal objects can find a place and be protected. The day spent in infant-toddler centres and preschools, which includes the afternoon and was most likely conceived as a response to family needs has been an important driving force in shaping the identity of these institutions as places of life. The day and the time which, though constrained by an overall organization, is offered as a designable space in which everyone, at least in part, finds that their rhythms are welcome and that they can share in many different experiences of learning, play, and participation in activities of caring for oneself and for others. This participation and sharing pieces of life with others, in an educational environment that orients and supports, fosters feelings of understanding, tolerance, friendliness and a knowledge that others are similar to me even though they are different. When experience is made up of multiple situations (play, self-care and caring for spaces and environments, sports, hobbies, reading, lunch and more, all proposed with a character of education and learning) and not just of time spent on so-called didactic activities or, in schools for older children the hours of a specific subject, it is easier to structure relationships of reciprocity, empathy and knowledge of our classmates above and beyond the classifications that imprison us and others in a fixed identity. Indian economist Amartya Sen invites us to recognize the plurality of our identities:

> *In our normal lives, we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups– we belong to all of them. A person's citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc., make us members of a variety of groups. Each of these collectivities, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person's only identity, or single membership category (Sen, 2006, pp.4-5).*

Becoming curious about the multiple identities each of us bears, marvelling at the fact we can come together and learn from each other with our differences and discovering what we have in common, are fundamental discoveries and attitudes for countering feelings of exclusion, intolerance, aggression and hate. It is important therefore, to create the conditions for schools to be able to offer what we have defined as a multiplicity for experiences, because at least until middle school [in Italy] class groups are pluralist, taking in all the children and young people in the area in which the school is located. This experience of plurality is then interrupted in secondary school, which too soon reproduces the class divisions we experience in our societies.

5. Infant-toddler centres and schools as social contexts where children learn to learn with others and from others

A fundamental element for countering a culture of hate is the discovery that others, all others, possess knowledge, abilities and strategies that I can learn from, and that together we can achieve things that a child alone would not be able to do. Children discover this as part of daily life when adults are attentive to reinforcing this aspect. That is why a productive strategy, which is central to experience in Reggio Emilia's infant-toddler centres and preschools, is that of offering opportunities for working together in small groups of three, four, five, or six children, who either choose each other or are proposed by teachers and who, faced with a shared objective, seek out and negotiate ways of achieving it.

Let's look at a short example. In the atelier, children from the four and five-year-old classroom find a paper airplane made by a teacher. Curious, the children get closer, and as they try to get it to fly, they exchange some first information with each other:

Look, a paper airplane! Giulio

Hey, if you bend the tip it won't be able to fly! Mohamed

The tip is for aerodynamics which is something that makes planes fly faster: the more aerodynamics there are, the faster it is! Giulio

The children love paper planes and would love to try and make one each, so that they could have flying contests. One of the children remembers seeing instructions in a book, and the teacher gives it to him.

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We've never tried to make a paper plane in fact we need instructions like these! Giulio

Lego has instructions too, and to build a house you need instructions: everything has instructions! Edward

Everything except books, and instructions, which you don't make with other instructions. Giulio

Instructions can be a form of teaching by transmission, but trying to understand together how to read the instructions is an interesting experience. The rush some children might have to reach the objective is tempered by the slower time of the group, the time which is needed to listen to each other and make space for all.

Giulio opens out the plane that the adult has made and places it on top of the instructions, seemingly looking for confirmation of the procedure. By doing this the group discovers what the original shape of the sheet was, but the correct name emerges through their exchange:

To make a paper plane you need a square sheet of paper… Edward

A tall square… suggests Mohamed who feels the definition of square is not satisfactory

A rectangle… Giulio

Here, I've found a yellow one… Edward

At this point they begin to make their first folds, commenting:

Let's start with the tip, but it's difficult… Mohamed

You have to make another fold. Giulio

Mine won't fly… Edward

…because it's a bit too creased. Giulio

Each child is making their own little plane, but the enterprise is shared.

I've got to here, where do I go? Giulio

The drawings tell you where you have to go. Edward

How do you make this fold here? Mohamed

You have to fold it like this, turn it around! [showing him] Giulio

You do it for me then! Mohamed

No, I can't do it for you, I'm having problems too! Giulio

Following the conversation, we understand how easy loans of knowledge are, the recognition that other people can offer us solutions and help, the solidarity as all three challenge their own capabilities. The attitude is not judgmental or competitive, but the discovery of what we do not know and others do.

When the planes are ready the group prepares to take up a test flight. There is a sense of solidarity among the waiting children.

Wow! Ricki flew really low! Massimo

The wings are very high, that's why it doesn't fly high! Mohamed

Riccardo's plane is losing altitude, the wings don't go up. My wings are narrower, more aerodynamic, it's going faster, perhaps it loses less fuel! Giulio

I'll going to make another fold! Mohamed

Their tests are a reflection on choices made and the identification new strategies so that their common enterprise can be successful for everyone, regardless of the contribution each one has been able to give the group. They are an evaluation and simultaneously a self-evaluation constituting a space of possibility and a push towards new knowledge in a relational and affective context of reciprocity and constructive help.

The competition we are all driven into today, by a society in which every success and especially every failure, is the sole merit or fault of one individual, is a dynamic that schools can and must dismantle by creating conditions favourable to these processes of collaboration and reciprocal recognition. When they are in groups, together seeking to rise to the challenge of the new, children, and later teenagers, learn to tolerate the frustration that arises from not managing to do something as we would like and at the same time to be understanding when faced with less competence in others. Discovering that each of us has resources and shortcomings, strengths and weaknesses, learning to recognize them and accept them, first and foremost in ourselves, is learning we begin to construct in the earliest years of our life. It takes time to learn, but we do not go to school to be the first and fastest, but to be shaped through our relationship with others and with knowledge. We are all different and precious with our differences. Errors are necessary in learning processes.

To turn all this into educational strategy is a difficult task, but necessary at all school levels.

6. Expressing one's point of view

Democracy is that form of society in which everyone is free to express their opinion. This is a fact of extraordinary importance to which schools should give the utmost attention. But is freedom of expression an absolute value, or are there constraints beyond which it could become a negative value? How are opinions formed? Do all opinions carry the same weight? How can a well-founded opinion be distinguished from one that is unfounded?

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If freedom of expression is at the heart of democratic co-living, the ways in which ideas are expressed, the tones, language, argumentation, respect for the opinions of others, and how and to what extent we are open to exchanges of point of view, to transformative dialogue, are crucial elements for its quality.

In Reggio Emilia's municipal infant-toddler centres and preschools the practice of assembly is widespread and happens almost every day, gathering the whole class of children to be counted together, share their stories, discuss themes brought in by children, tell each other about the work they are doing in the various small groups children divide into and gathering comments on it from others.

Here is what children aged five to six years have to say about this time:

We sit in a circle Daniele

In a circle everyone can sees everyone else and everyone can listen to everyone else Luca

Children talk together Jordan

Everyone can talk. Mattia

To be an assembly there have to be all the children's thoughts. Ettore

It's beautiful because you can talk and say the things you want. That is, one person says something and the others have to decide if they agree or if they disagree. Luca

When you don't agree, you can argue. Ettore

... you can discuss. Emma

Or if someone doesn't agree they can say "No, thank you". Amina

But the idea can change, the thought can change and then it resembles the thought of someone else. Ettore

In assembly we put thoughts together and practice talking. Emma

After assembly you feel light-hearted and satisfied because you have said your thoughts. Ettore

These words are representative of many other conversations on the theme and highlight how offering children a space and time to talk makes it possible for them to give shape to their ideas, in a dialogue with the ideas of others. We intuit a sense of belonging and, at the same time, a sense of responsibility toward the group to "put thoughts together"; our own, so that we can express them, and everyone's thoughts, so that we can know each other and learn from one another. In fact, there is an interesting attunement here with the words of Luigi Bobbio, when he says,

> *A public debate can be considered successful on the level of participation, not when there is a [particularly] high number of participants, but when the positions expressed include all the most significant points of view on the subject debated (Bobbio, 2010, p. 53, our translation).*

This taking practice in public debate, of taking the responsibility of making our contribution, of being attentive to how we discuss together on an issue, is an exercise that promotes not only respect but an interest, free of preconception and prejudice, towards the opinions of others, to which we can respond "no thank you" or which might lead us to change our mind, offering children not only the skills but a willingness and participatory tension we hope later school years. will valorise further.

The following conversation between children aged 5 to 6 offers an example:

Teacher: *[When we were] talking about planets the other day Stefano used the word "mortal".*

In your opinions what do "mortal" and "immortal" mean?

It's when you never die.

There's my brother's game too.

It's also a virus and you die straight away. But how can someone never die?

A game [never dies] for example.

What if it breaks?

Even when you destroy it, because it doesn't die, it's just destroyed.

Immortality can live up to thirty, a hundred years.

But there's immortality inside death, you can't say they're alive.

It's not that some people die and some live, everyone lives. They put the word "immortality" for people who aren't able to die.

You die anyway. So it should be called "immortality that makes you live". We call it living.

Marco is right, because when you die you live another life, the life of heaven. You become a star, and you are an Angel-Star.

OK, but even though the word "morte" [death] *is in it, immortality means you don't die.*

If you don't want to die, you mustn't go into danger.

We can't all live all of us. As soon as we're old, we die, because immortality gets tired.

We don't have any immortality. No one has it in Italy.

Those who are good never die.

So does that mean a child who is bad dies straight away? And what about my grandparents who were so kind?

I didn't mean to say that bad children die.

God is immortal, because seeing as created us that was a good thing, and therefore he's immortal.

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If God were immortal, he would have given us, who he created, immortal powers. And he didn't have that power when he was on earth, but in heaven he did.

Immortality isn't a nice thing. They show it in films and you get so you're always old, always old isn't nice.

It's not nice because if you die you don't go to heaven and you don't see your mother again who is in heaven.

It can be a jealous thing too. Because if some people have it and others don't, then you say: you never die and I do.

Everyone dies. Even the dead die, because after you die you go to the first Paradise, then you die and go to the second, and on and on like that, until good nothingness.

Planets die too, because if a rocket comes along that makes them explode…

Planets are immortal because they're made of stone, stars are mortal because they're made of fire and they can go out.

From: Tra cielo e terra: viaggio nella spiritualità dei bambini [Between heaven and earth: a journey into the spirituality of children] (1999), publication in the Documentation and Educational Research Centre, Istituzione Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres of Reggio Emilia Municipality.

In our view this is a very interesting conversation, chosen among countless conversations collected in publications in Reggio Emilia's infant-toddler centres and preschools, and which on one hand substantiates the idea that everything can be discussed with children and, at the same shows how children, in a context of free expression, are capable of accepting and debating different ideas with great civility.

However, adults taking the role facilitators of exchange and of conducting the group, must have awareness of certain things.

While it is important at this age for even the most improbable and off-topic ideas to be expressed, it is also constructive to underscore the different ideas – if children don't already do this themselves – so that we do not have a simple declaration of everyone's beliefs but also discussion and debate. An assembly is not simply a ritual of "going around the table" in which everyone has their say and nothing more, but an exercise in reciprocal listening, of expressing agreement, of amplifying, adding and disagreeing that bring greater awareness, knowledge, changes and reinforcements of our own opinions. The adult is the first to be welcoming of all the ideas, suspending judgment, asking for deeper and more detailed explanations, and giving strength to certain ideas that might move the thinking forward, reiterating them with the group, saying for example, "She said something that seems very interesting to me. What do you think?", and where possible, drawing on lived experience and experimentations that have confirmed or disconfirmed children's beliefs and opinions, not to teach them theories that are certain, but to give value to thinking procedures that encourage children not to trust the first idea that comes to mind, and look for elements that make an argument convincing. If not the scientific method itself, then this at least is something approaching it, on which over time the children can build a capacity for evaluating the credibility of information. In fact today hate speech is also linked to the discrediting of science and its findings.

The paradigm of resonance proposed by German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, could in our view be useful for further qualifying the space of the assembly and schools as spaces of life, a criterion for evaluating quality rather than competences in schools. Resonance is the opposite of indifference and its meaning is that of "making something one's own to the point that it not only belongs to me, but affects me on an existential level, and is even capable, in principle, of transforming me" (Rosa, 2020, p. 60, our translation). Schools as spaces of resonance are schools in which "the spatial aspects of the school building and the way individuals move within them also play an important role. Resonance is always a physical phenomenon. It is already recognisable in stances, encounters and interactions in classrooms and staff rooms" (ivi, p. 65, our translation).

This introduces two more central aspects which are central in the Reggio Emilia Approach and fundamental for education that counters a culture of hate: the aesthetics of spaces and environments and the relationships between adults.

7. The aesthetics of the environment

In the words of Loris Malaguzzi,

> *It is the 'aesthetic vibration' that pushes us to name things, to name figures and colours that seemed not to exist, and to better the constructs of our interpretative and creative sensibility, discover its value and the pleasurable effects we generate within ourselves and others: a further "boldness" for seducing and being seduced. In this way the seduction of aesthetics is revealed to be a possible dimension of knowledge, illuminating something which perhaps does not belong to rationality alone. A dimension we also feel when speaking, reading, admiring an image, discovering a concept, listening to a symphony. Malaguzzi, 2012 in Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012, pp. 87, our translation).*

While we believe beauty to be an important quality of places, when we propose the term aesthetics in relation to spaces and environment, we mean the importance

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and possibility of taking pleasure in feeling, perceiving, admiring, and knowing through their body that the spaces we design in our infant-toddler centres and preschools offer to those who inhabit them. In fact, "Individuals do not limit themselves to relating with the external world in an objective way, from a third-person perspective, but literally inscribe themselves in the world, in that their body constitutes an integral part of it and, at least partly, [also] constitutes the origin of it" (Gallese & Morelli, 2024, p. 232, our translation).

The perceptual and sensory qualities of environments where children grow and learn, discovering people and the world, the emotions and the pleasure of use that they effect, are important elements for forming and nourishing a culture of care towards public spaces which with time, all of us can experience and enact as our own responsibility towards increasingly broader contexts; the whole school, our city, our country, the Internet, and the planet. We think in terms of open spaces that invite relations rather than insularity, to encounter rather than avoidance, to respect rather than insult, that is welcoming and encourages us to enter, linger, explore, that is open to holding the traces of children's thinking and actions, and which frees both the children and the environment itself from anonymity and indifference.

This idea of open environments participating in and producing a "pedagogy of relations", has been given coherent shape in Reggio Emilia's infant-toddler centres and preschools through an intense dialogue between pedagogy and architecture.

In the words of Malaguzzi, "the system of relations enacted in s school is a system that is real and physical, a living organism and, at the same time, a symbolic system, a system of reciprocal representations" (Malaguzzi, 2012 in Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012, pp. 77, our translation). One of the primary elements creating favourable conditions for relations is the "transparency", realised by opening up walls as much as possible with child-height "windows" that let them see beyond. It is possible to see what children in other classes are doing or the cooks, the garden and all its variety, follow parents who have accompanied us and are leaving with our gaze or glimpse them before they cross the threshold of the infant-toddler centre or school. This allows children to be aware that, beyond the wall that delimits a space, there is a world that continues to exist and live. Transparency aims to counteract what Edgar Morin (2000, our translation) defines as "a weakening of global perception" which leads to a weakening of a sense of responsibility and solidarity, of promoting the feeling we are part of a whole and not only our own group, of relating things that are separate, creating connections, and of generating a broad sense participation and co-responsibility in adults and children.

These values are amplified by the accessibility of spaces, facilitated both by the removal of architectural barriers and by material and immaterial open doors, which increase the freedom of walking through spaces, pausing in them, choosing them and meetings between children and between adults, both teachers and parents, all through the infant toddler and preschool spaces.

Finally, we have the presence of a place to which all rooms in a school lead us, the "piazza" or square (again, a change of vocabulary and language gave new meanings) which represents the idea and value of democratic exchange and debate in our spatial architectures, because, as Italo Calvino says, "every time you enter the square, you find yourself caught in a dialogue" (Calvino, 2010, p.72).

A final element of an aesthetic of spaces and environments is the integration between analogue and digital technologies, shaping an ecosystem that reproduces the context we all live in today in the infant-toddler centres and preschools, making it available to the curious gaze and reinterpretation of children who are great creators of builders of images, representations and performance. Having the digital world in dialogue with the analogue world, with simple, easy-to-use devices, makes it possible to construct immersive contexts through projections of images, photographs, drawings, paintings and transparent construction work, inside of which children can move, imagine, construct, and stage their imaginaries in a world at once physical and virtual and share them, or perhaps relive and remember their past experiences. These are opportunities that make it possible for them to discover dynamics and possibilities that often are inscrutable, concealed behind speed and ease of use, and leaving us little opportunity for steering a game or changing its rules. However, in environments conceived in this way – between digital and analogue – children can explore and learn about digital tools from a multiplicity of points of view, which often at home are reduced to the individual use of a screen. And so, we see the creation of what we defined earlier in this article as "shared meanings among children in the form of rituals, games, and linguistic exchanges" (Decree of the Italian Ministry of Education 22 November 2021, no. 334: Adoption of "Pedagogical Guidelines for the Integrated 0-6 System"). With them, adults can observe how new generations move and interact in these ecosystems, contributing to the discovery of new forms of coexistence that more than ever before require new rules and new constraints, work it is of crucial importance to also realise in our secondary schools.

We believe that these aesthetic forms of coexistence proposed in school spaces and environments, can also contribute to forming a mental *habitus* that can resists alphabets of hate.

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8. The relationship between adults

Relationships between adults are often hardly considered in schools. Each teacher is responsible for their own class or classes, their own timetable and the subject they teach: relationships between colleagues are governed by collegial bodies or forms of organization for parallel classes and subject groups that schools establish. How do children perceive the relationship between adults? What values are conveyed to them? What idea is conveyed to them of the world of relationships?

In Reggio Emilia's infant-toddler centres and preschools the relational pedagogy is a reference point that also informs the work of adults. Co-teaching for most of the day between colleagues of equal status, with two teachers per class in preschool and three teachers in infant-toddler centres, is the first nucleus of a relationship that offers children a variety of adult reference points with their differences manifest and, hopefully, valorised in contexts of sharing. Teachers talk with each other, exchange points of view, make shared decisions, help each other, and support each other in times of difficulty. They do not always necessarily agree on everything but they know how to find mediations that make it possible for them to continue working side by side every day.

Secondly, the staff working in each school, with their different roles and responsibilities, form a single working group called the collective. We have spoken of shifts in language and how they have been important in constructing a new idea of the child. The idea of a collective in each school (and Reggio has been very attentive to this) leads to a different conceptualization of relationships between those who work in an educational institution. Whatever their function or task, each person has an educational role that contributes to shaping a holistic project, asked to design situations that will also involve children in activities in the kitchen or in caring for spaces and environments, and to take responsibility when needed for intervention with children in spaces without the constant direct supervision of the teachers, in ways which are coherent with the pedagogical culture of the school. This diffused presence of adults, as we mentioned earlier, conveys to children a sense of the school as an open place in which every space can be inhabited and moved through. In a collective, adults learn to become a group that knows how to discuss together, and in which each person can concretely try out their own capacity for valuing differences of opinion and action. The collective is the context in which, while reasoning on a theme, we can and should also reflect on how to approach it together, how each of us feels when faced with different ideas that they do not share, how and if we can converge together on educational opinions, strategies and approaches. This dual gaze helps each one of us to "see" beliefs we were not explicitly aware of but which shape our actions. This is of great value for children and for adolescents, both in terms of the constant reflection and vigilance adults are encouraged to practice in relation to their actions, and because it dismantles preconceived classifications of professions, in that all of them are presented and experienced through the important value they have of offering quality daily life.

The other important adults at schools are parents. We are aware that teachers often experience this as a conflictual relationship, feeling themselves to be the target of demands – if not threats – aimed at defending a child whatever their behaviour, efforts with schoolwork or difficulties that stand in the way of reaching established objectives. These problems are real but they are further fuelled by the individualist and personalist vision view of relationships schools promote.

A school is a community; each individual's well-being is dependent on the well-being of all. There is no such thing as a problem in a class that doesn't derive from the relationship between individual and context, and therefore involving everyone. In the relationships with families this is completely lost, reinforcing a culture of competition, of seeing failure as an individual's fault, of identifying and possibly ousting the culprit (those slowing down curriculum or disrupting). Clearly schools cannot follow these cultures, and on the strength of their pedagogical processing (which is always cultural, social and political) have a duty to offer regular meetings with the parents of a class, building a group that is capable of discussing together, taking a view of the complexity of the whole, and not just their own child.

Shifting perspective, learning to learn from others, challenging and questioning one's own certainties, lets parents have a first-hand understanding of some of the difficulties children and teenagers have and to accompany them with greater sensitivity in the difficult and exciting journey of growing up; at the same time offering children and young people an aesthetic of relationships that will be an important reference for them in the future,

To reflect on these affirmations, we include a short excerpt from a conversation, one of many collected during meetings with parents in Reggio Emilia preschools.

The meeting began with teachers presenting ideas that have been gathered with children, during a morning assembly on the theme of war:

"I see you address certain topics at school, we at home and you here at school have different roles. You work on groups, on the relationship with others, on differences, so for me it's very important that [these issues] *are addressed here, because this is the world*

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we're immersed in. Then, at home we all re-process things based on our subjectivities."

I really agree about "not telling lies", obviously with respect for each family's lived experience. I think dialogue about feelings is very important."

With Marco I've always had the habit of watching the news before leaving the house... Sometimes he says he wants to turn it off because he doesn't want to see certain things. This is already a growing, a detaching.

Gaia hasn't talked about the war, but I understood you had talked at school because when she saw scenes on the news, she asked if there were any dead, because she saw bodies on the ground.

Talking about war or letting them see is the same thing, it depends whether you explain it to them.

Words and images have a different weight, especially if they are not contextualized… I wouldn't be able to let Elisabeth watch the news.

It depends if I have time to dedicate to certain topics, to the questions that can come later. If it's a rushed evening I don't, so that he's not left with doubts we haven't been able to discuss together.

I try not to let him watch the news, I try to explain it to him myself, to find the right words, but the fact that children are dying is difficult.

As an adult this situation really affects you; you don't know how to deal with it or talk about it. I don't address the issue because they're still little.

They have the right to be carefree now.

How to talk about peace without explaining war to them? And how to explain war without traumatizing them?

The questions are heavy going for us.

Often what holds us back is a fear of making a mistake when we give an answer or address certain issues, in trying to discuss them, talking about them together is very hard work.

Sometimes when you question them [the children] *they stop, perhaps to tell you the reply you expect them to make.*

What I'd like to do as a mother is respect my son.

9. Conclusions

Countering a culture of hate requires new paradigms and new words. Through the experience of Reggio Emilia's municipal infant-toddler centres and preschools, and by including some documents, we have tried to argue which, in our opinion, are the most relevant.

Has this educational experience produced results on this level?

Looking at the research conducted by economist and Nobel laureate James Heckman ["Investing in Childhood", research project with the University of Chicago, the Jacobs Foundation (Zurich), and the CHILD Centre at the University of Turin] whose findings, he has repeatedly stated, cannot be considered definitive given the complexity of the subject and the several variables at play, we notice that in a comparison between adults who attended schools following the Reggio Emilia approach and those who did not participate at all in any formal program of preschool education, statistically significant positive effects were identified in the area of socio-emotional competence, educational qualifications, job type, and levels of voter turnout. Despite the difficulty of processing data this way, the findings appear to support this approach to education as a valuable tool for countering a culture of hate and building new alphabets.

The belief is also supported by Howard Gardner, who is highly knowledgeable about Reggio Emilia's municipal infant-toddler centres and preschools and who has written:

> *The attainment of an ethical mind is easier when one has been raised in a milieu where good work is the norm […] My own favourite contemporary example is the picturesque northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia, a community that I have visited and studied for twenty-five years. From everything that I have observed over the years, Reggio Emilia works exceedingly well. The community is civilised, offers high-quality services to its citizens and is replete with artistic performance sand treasures. For the past several decades this community of somewhat more than a hundred thousand individuals has devoted un paralleled human and financial resources to the development of quality infant-toddler centres and preschools. In 1991, Newsweek magazine dubbed these Reggio institutions "the best schools in the world". When visitors inquire what happens to the graduates of these schools for the young, longtime residents issue this short but revealing answer: "Just look at our community." […] Reggio Emilia would not have achieved distinction in education in the absence of committed individuals who in the aftermath of the devastation wrought by World War II, banded together to create the kind of community in which they and their children could thrive. They asked, in effect, what kinds of citizens do we want to produce?(Gardner, 2006, p. 131).*

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