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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF BECOMING A KINDERGARDEN TEACHER: FROM
SELF-AWARENESS TO NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract

Keywords: autoethnography, education, nonviolent communication, social change.

This study seek to represent my educational journey from childhood to the present. It aspires at answering two main research questions that I faced over my time working as a kindergarten teacher in a local school in Verona, Italy. They are: what have been the principal factors (life events and knowledge gained) to lead my educative journey? What has been the impact nonviolent communication had on my educative practice?

Embracing the view of transmissional theorists which see education as tool to change socio-cultural values, I reflect on the perspective nonviolent thinkers have on the western modern culture. I take on different disciplines, such as anthropology, linguistic and neurosciences, to address the importance of transmitting nonviolent values through education, in order to possibly overcome the violent paradigm spread within the contemporary society. I approach nonviolent communication as a strategy to bring such a change.

The main research questions are considered under the autoethnographic approach which makes the study a highly personal account. The results of this work demonstrate that the factors determining my choice of being an educator have been influenced by both my personality, my schooling experience and the knowledge I matured throughout my life and my working experience. Finally, I state that to enact a social change through an educational practice, good will is not enough. Personal, cultural, anthropological and neuroscientific awareness on the role education, have been crucial in order to shape my profession, as well as myself as a person. At present, I acknowledge that through my educative performance, I can contribute to change a predominant violent cultural paradigm into a nonviolent one.

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This thesis represents the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one, for my personal, educative and professional life. This work show to the reader the fruit of a journey where many people have been crucial for its grow. I would like to first thank my supervisor Magda Karjalainen for always believing in my capacities as a researcher and for her dedication to support me on my autoethnographic path. I especially thank Mario Bonfanti, my nonviolent communication facilitator who introduced me to the practice and gave me beautiful insights about nonviolent living. I thank Cinzia Bolgrini for her support and “giraffe” listening. Thank you to all my classmates that have been a resources of creativity and inspiration all along the process of writing. I thank my family who encouraged me and challenged my ideas. I finally want to dedicate special thanks to all the children of the kindergarten, as they have been the main triggers and motivators of my work.

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1 Introduction

I choose to undertake an autoethnographic study as I am devoted and curious to explore the interconnection between the self and cultural and to be transformed by it. Autoethnography means for me to become more aware of the intra-relation between myself and the world; it represents my chance to explore the past, the present and the future of myself, to welcome the change and the movement this study might bring to my life and to explore the strength of showing a vulnerable self. I therefore invite the reader to be a compassionate witness of a personal, educative and professional journey that I will be unveiling throughout the text.

Taking a step backward, when I think of what brought me to education, at first was a feeling of dissatisfaction and disorientation in the complexity of the contemporary world. Not knowing clearly what was that I could not understand of society, I ended up undertaking a Bachelor degree in Anthropology, Religions and Eastern Civilisations to better grasp the constitution of values, cultures and meaning of human civilisation.

Throughout my undergraduate studies, a life-changing thought crossed my mind: “What values of a globalised world are passed on to new generations? If education perpetuates existing socio-cultural values, what kind of world do I want to create in face of conflicts, contradictions and detachment from natural living of the contemporary world?”. I welcomed the challenge this insight opened myself to and I looked for masters opportunities that would give me the tools I needed to face such questions. The Master in Education and Globalisation from the University of Oulu indeed provided me background to think of and theories to explore. However, it is only when I started working with children that I gained a deeper insight about education.

My experience with the children changed myself on an educative and personal level. This work aims to explore these two dimensions. My perseverance to explore new educative tools and be more conscious of my educative responsibility with the children was nourished by some educative theories I encountered. In particular, it was the work of Gert Biesta (2015) about the teleological practice of education - the power of education to bring about social change – to strengthen my feeling that I was doing something more of being a kindergarten teacher: I was contributing in creating new minds, new perspectives of the world and of society.

I acknowledged that my micro reality in Verona went beyond myself. Biesta's transformative paradigm came to help me and empowered me. What happened next has been a continuous search for meaning and being, reflecting, questioning on myself, on my educational practices that lead me to meet the topic of this thesis: to explore what have been the main influences of my personal and educational journey (in terms of life experiences and educational theories) that shaped me to become the educator I am today. In particular, what influenced my educative practice has been the encounter with nonviolent communication and its theoretical background which takes the major part of the theoretical section of this work.

Impressed by the way children interacted and managed conflicts, the way they reproduce the language of their culture, showed me a destabilizing side of human behaviour. Why are children so judgemental and stressed about being 'good enough'? I asked myself what was that made them being so harsh with themselves and conflictual with their peers and what was my role in all that. If education passes on the values society wants the new generation to be inspired by (Demarrais, Bennet & LeCompte, 1999; Biesta, 2013), how am I educating children to interact between each other's? The process of transmission of values is not fixed in time, it requires a constant adjustment. To reflect on socio- cultural values, their

consequences on people's lives and to evaluate what kind of society I want to contribute to for the future, made me explore new educational values and opened new horizons. Questions in my job as a kindergarten educator in Verona for the year 2018-2019 have been: what values are behind my actions and words that I enact every day with the children? How much coherence is there between my personal values and who I am as an educator?

I have been taught to manage conflict with the intention on the affirmation of the self at the expense of the other turning the scope of communication on prevailing one side opinion. The binarism right/wrong thinking has become part of the way I also think. I observed that lots of effort is directed on being defensive rather than on connecting with one another. Is this way of interacting producing harmony or is it rather reinforcing a competitive and individualist paradigm? Can education reframe such a way of thinking and communicating? Facing many questions on the practices and intentions of my role as an educator, I finally encountered nonviolent communication as a communicative practice and an educational philosophy. This led me to discover a multitude of theories and practices that, all along I was learning them, they were also changing myself as an educator. They showed me a new educational journey for which I ended formulating my research question: what theories and life experiences have contributed to form me as an educator? In particular, how has the philosophy of nonviolent communication and its theoretical background influenced my educational practice?

With the present study on my journey through an educational change, I hope to contribute to open up the field of nonviolent communication within education and to make the field of education more integrated to the sphere of feelings and self-knowledge. I wish to shed light on the crucial role of education as a vehicle to bring about social change and nonviolent alternatives and to reinforce autoethnography as a qualitative inquiry. I finally desire that my intention of bringing coherence and clarity to my life path as an educator, from childhood

to the present, would also inspire others to engage in searching for their own *fil rouge* in their educational/vocational path. By *fil rouge* I mean some of the meaningful stages of my life that influenced my choice of being an educator. They shaped me and characterize my sensitivity and personality. As Carolyn Ellis (2003) postulates it, when we look back to our past, there are some events that we can recognize as determinant in the process of becoming the “I” of the autoethnographic research. Likewise, also the collected autoethnographic writing will show some fragments of myself bringing up memories from childhood to my present educational role. The personal and private accounts of this work engage with feelings and inner states; I trust the reader sensitiveness in entering into the autoethnographer world with empathy, respect and openness to might be moved by its content.

The onto-epistemological background of poststructuralism

I have the habit of recording my life with notes, pictures and audios. Every night since I was a child I write some reflections about the past day and I feel very incomplete when I leave blank pages for too long. When it was time to write my Master thesis, I discovered that autoethnography would be a methodology reflecting both the way I take on a part of my life, and an opportunity to unveil the complexity of my last year experience as a kindergarten educator.

The autoethnographic “I” used throughout the text represents both the subject and the object of the research. In other words, it is through the way I see and feel the world – my whole experience of the phenomena – that I produce new awareness on the topic. Starting from the autoethnographic elaboration of my own experience of the phenomena, I create new knowledge. Therefore, it could be said that the autoethnographic choice combines ontology (my presence in the world) with epistemology (the knowledge I create) (Baran, 2007). The onto-epistemological characteristic emerges from the realisation that the exploration of new educational theories have not only been an intellectual acquisition. They have shaped my

being as a person and an educator. In which way this change happen will be therefore explored throughout this work.

I choose to represent my research merging the empirical and the theoretical aspects along the text. I do so embedding italic sections within the text to point out clearly my own data. These represent a collection of personal reflections both raised during the time I have been working as a kindergarten teacher (years October 2018 – June 2019) and of some critical moments of my life. The collection of the data partly come from my own memories, as well as they are selections of few a written journal entrances that I used to keep throughout the year. The “I” person will be also dominating as a mean to make the research more personal and evocative.

Guidance of this study

Chapter 2 and 3 will unfold some background theories of nonviolent communication. I will provide an overview on the notion of culture of violence and domination system, the nature of human behaviour and the normalisation of violence in the contemporary society. Such theories influenced my perception of education and my work with the children. I also explore the implications culture has on determining education. According to transmissional theorists, cultural values are mirrored in educational purposes, therefore to bring social and cultural change one could start from changing educational practices and deconstruct pre-existent dynamics of domination. I end the first theoretical section of this thesis focusing more on nonviolent communication as an educative and relational strategy to build a nonviolent living.

Chapter 4 looks at autoethnography as a method and at the onto-epistemological position of the researcher and bringing explanatory examples from other types of autoethnographic works. Chapter 5 present the findings of this study divided between the descriptions of

memories of my past as a child and tells about my schooling experience and university. To get more recently to show some journal entrances concerning the time between October 2018 – June 2019 when I have been working as a kindergarten teacher in a local school in Verona. Every data entrance is accompanied by further research, links to theories, explanations and insights. Finally, the finding section ends revealing the link between education and neuroscience, proofing the positive outcomes of nonviolent education in early childhood and its crucial role for social change. In the end there will be a discussion and conclusion part, drawing the common lines between the theoretical and empirical part and suggesting future research possibilities.

2 Contextualising Nonviolent Communication

Being a kindergarten educator over the last academic year 2018-2019, has changed my vision of education and my practice with the children. My educative approach have been influenced by new educational theories such as nonviolent communication. When I refer to nonviolent communication, I do not only mean a communicative model but a whole worldview on human relations and human nature, cultural practices, educational purposes and a way of being that affected my outlook on education.

Nonviolent communication embraces an alternative perspective of life to the mainstream one, puzzled by different pieces of theories. I dedicate the following paragraphs of this Chapter to their explanation. Finally, I point out to the reader that throughout the text, I embed some connecting sections - that I insert into a italic - in order to make autoethnographic comments and connections between the topics.

2.1 Understanding a Culture of Violence

When I was first reading about nonviolent communication, I simultaneously came across some theories on culture of violence. I believe they have been crucial for me in order to understand nonviolent educative practices, as they clarify the concepts of normalisation of violence and its impact on the language we use and on the values society transmit through education. This study acknowledges that violence is deeply embedded in our global culture, but it does not consider it to be intrinsically natural for human behaviour to act violently. The origins and the meaning of culture of violence are investigated from the perspective of nonviolent thinkers such as Walter Wink (1990), Johan Galtung (1990), Pier P. Giorgi (2001) and Marshall Rosenberg (2005).

At present, modernity has created a highly specialized and civilized society, which brought technological evolution, scientific discoveries and pushed human civilization at its extremes.

As well as it has created mass genocides, world wars, natural exploitation, the deprivation of human rights and new physical and psychological diseases (Galtung, 1990). The way things are – how politics, economics and society work in the contemporary world - reflect pre-existing values deeply embedded into the western culture. To this extent, Wink (1990) refers to the concept of worldview as “the way whole society sees the world. A worldview provides a picture of the nature of things. (...) through the sense of our worldview we make sense of our experiences.” (p. 14) Perpetuating violence is therefore the expression of an underpinning belief on humanity (see below section on human nature) manifested through religion, ideology, art, empirical and formal science and language – the six domains used in Galtung’s theory (1990).

From these initial assumptions, I elaborated some questions that I aim to answer as follow: “What are the origins of a worldview promoting a culture of violence? What are its theoretical assumptions? What are its characteristics?” According to Walter Wink in his book “The Powers That Be” (1999), the modern western culture perpetuates a culture of violence that sees its origin back to Mesopotamia 3000 B.C.E. Wink’s vision of the use of powers in the western society does not assume that violence is intrinsic for human behaviour. On the contrary, it has been passed on through the history of humanity within complex societies as “the way it should be”, without reliable biological reasons (p. 42). He links the origin of structural violence of the contemporary world to the naissance of the bureaucratic system. He describes when around 3000 B.C.E. in Mesopotamia “Social systems became rigidly hierarchical, authoritarian, and patriarchal. Women were deprived of the right both to speak their minds and to control their bodies” (p. 40). Although Wink’s contribution digs far back to the history of mankind, which is out of reach for the present study, his vision helped me to reflect on the roots of the normalization of violence that shaped the mind of men and women for centuries. Wink (1999) sees the roots of violence in the conquest state:

“The conquest state brought about changes so fundamental as to mark a new epoch in human history (...) As warfare became the central preoccupation of states, taxation became necessary in order to support a standing army, a warrior caste, and an aristocracy. After 3000 B.C.E. we encounter evidence of warfare on a grand scale. Social system became rigidly hierarchical, authoritarian, and patriarchal” (p. 40).

The description Wink provides on domination systems refers to “unjust economic relations, oppressive political relations, biased race relations, patriarchal gender relations, hierarchical power relations, and the use of violence to maintain them all” (p. 39). According to his theories, the conquest state is the original point of a worldview based on conflictual relationships and power-over.

2.2 Theoretical assumptions

If at first my interest might have been more under an educative level, I soon engaged on the debate around culture of violence and other linked theories on the nature of human beings. My curiosity in getting to know more about such themes, started to open my mind towards alternative historical and anthropological visions of humanity.

I interpret the use of punishments and rewards and of an authoritative language within my educative settings after Wink’s theorisation on a domination system. It is founded on two main beliefs: the first one is that through violence peace can be achieved; conflicts are managed by an authoritarian imposition of power, the wrongs must be punished and order is imposed by force (Wink, 1999 p. 44). The second one concerns the antisocial nature of human beings.

Reflecting on the nature of human beings has a consequences on the possibility to embrace peaceful alternatives within a system saturated with violence. According to Giorgi (2007) violence against other human beings is a recent invention of food-producing cultures (7-8,000 years) which has been passed on culturally providing the false impression of violence being genetically determined. The lack of understanding on nature/nurture debate, has

caused misunderstanding on the intrinsic nature of human beings - which turned to be more of a political than a scientific debate (Giorgi, 2007 p. 44).

Human behaviour intrinsically tending towards peace and cooperation is not taken for granted in a domination system and requires to be questioned and justified. On one hand, traditional anthropologists observed that human behaviour is influenced by the environment, resulting that the prosocialness is not biological but influenced by socio-cultural factors (Köster, Schuhmacher, N., Kärtner, 2015). Under this view, human nature and nurture are mutually influenced. On the other hand, Giorgi's overview on modern anthropology (2007) supplies evidence that solidarity and cooperation are far more common than behaviour of greed, competition and violence. Instead, he believes that, whereas violence is socio-culturally constructed, nonviolence and cooperation are intrinsic of human behaviour (p. 43).

When I reflect on the presence of violence, I used to take for granted that it will never be eradicated. I almost have the tendency to be expecting something bad to happen or that there will be some guilty one punished by x authority. I started to become aware of it, is only after getting to know more about structural violence, domination system and the discussion around human nature. I could see it in my educative experience: I remarkably noticed that even in early childhood the system of punishments and rewards is well established and it creates tensions, conflicts and the use of verbal violence.

To consider human beings as innately violent may promote punitive and repressive social solutions which lead to justify the use of violence (Giorgi, 2007 p. 43). Some authors, such as S. Wink (1994), Giorgi (2007) and Riane Eisler (2019) investigate on the social environments that make social organisation prosperous without the use of violence. In particular Eisler (2019) and W. Wink (1998) look at the prehistoric society characterised by an egalitarian system with no specific gender roles.

Furthermore, to confirm the theorisation on human prosocial behaviour, there is a vast anthropologic literature from the 20th Century. The first author investigating human cooperation was the Russian Peter Kropotkin (1902). His overview goes back to 100,000 years ago to the modern world investigating the presence of mutual aid within human aggregation. His thesis finally confirm that the tendency to collaboration and solidarity has been far more common than competitiveness in the history of human beings. Furthermore, the anthropologist Richard Lee (1979) reports the study on Southern African hunter-gathering culture of so-called Kalahari Bushmen, which live by sophisticated nonviolent strategies to manage conflicts and interests. Moreover, Jo Groebel and Robert Hinde (1989) differentiate human and animal behaviour, making a distinction between aggression for nutrition and defence and aggressiveness such as killing other members of the species, which is only manifested by human behaviour. Groebel and Hinde (1989) claim that beyond physiological and social aspects, human beings are not congenitally violent. Finally, Giorgi (2007) arguments that recent analysis of prehistoric rock art demonstrate no evidence of violence and war for about 40,000 years. Anti-human weapons, only appear after the emergence of food-producing cultures (p. 44).

Moreover, philosophical and anthropological discussions around the nature of human beings have shaped the minds of men and women for centuries and influenced the socio-political structure of societies, in particular of the western one. Stephen P. Wink (1994) collected information on the organisation of nomadic hunter-gathering societies who prove the existence of social organisation still alive today that preserve an egalitarian, cooperative and nonviolent living (p. 6). The Batek Negrito of the Malay peninsula are an example of it. They are characterised by: shared roles; no hierarchy; no gender discrimination; no overuse of power; no private ownership; non-aggressive and non-competitive games for children and the use of reasoning and dialogue to manage conflict. Although they live in a very different

context and have different means of living than most of the western contemporary people, they show a possibility of living without the use of violence and imposition of power.

Marshall Rosenberg (2005), the founder of nonviolent communication, considers the natural prosocialness of human beings a cornerstone for his communicative practice. He argues that educating towards nonviolence may reinforce the prosocial tendency of each person building up a path towards peaceful relations (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 46). Like Rosenberg, also Emma Seppälä (2013) argues that it is more life-enriching for humans to assume a compassionate behaviour, rather than an antagonistic one. From her stance, *Homo Sapiens* are naturally inclined to help one another: the act of giving brings them happiness and longevity (Seppälä, Rossomando & Doty, 2013 p. 413). Therefore, the assumption towards the natural inclination of human beings to be prosocial seems to deconstruct a widely spread thinking in society. It deconstructs the Hobbesian concept that antagonism and violence are evolutionary and biological (Giorgi, 2008; Fry, 2013 p. 545).

Being interested about this discussion from an educative point of view, I can feel the heavy weight of the discourse on human nature and the influences different socio-cultural worldviews have on the tendency towards violence/prosocialness. In spite of this complexity, I opt to enforce the prosocialness of human beings and their potential for peace (Gay, 2018). Indeed, the more I face a culture of individualism and competitiveness, the more I see the urgency to promote empathy, cooperation and nonviolence. Education is the fertile ground from which a social change can grow its roots. In alignment with self-responsibility that nonviolent philosophies advocate, every person is responsible to remove “the veil of cultural killing” and be an agent of change towards peace (Gay, 2018 p. 54)

2.3 Language

According to my experience as a kindergarten teacher, I ask myself what is the most commonly mean used to influence children's harmonious or conflictual relationships? The way language is used and constructed vary from a culture to another and it is shaped by the worldview of a society. I intend here to investigate some theories on the affect speech may have in the transmission of a violent or nonviolent paradigm.

Language manifests a system of values and believes of a culture that influences the way people think and communicate: “any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form” (Galtung, 1990 p. 291). Galtung points out six domains as the manifestation of violence within society, which are: religion, ideology, art, formal science, empirical science and language. All of them, including language, are not in theirselves violent, but it is their use that make them tools to spread violence or peace. Violence, as well as peace, can be mediated through language; depending on its ordinary use, whether one or the other become culturally acceptable (Galtung, 1990) and “normalised” (Gursozlu, 2018).

An example of normalisation of violence brought by Giorgi (2001) and Wink (1998) is represented by the presence of aggressiveness in TV productions. The most commercial cartoons and movies, such as *Ninja Turtles*, *Pokemon* or *Street Fighter*, portrait a dynamic good vs. evil where the resolution always ends with the elimination of the evil ones (Giorgi, 2001 p. 188). Therefore the young mind is trained to violence as it learn that violence is part of the everydayness. Wink suggests not to train young minds to think and act violently but to subvert the present dynamic that sells violence in the television as pleasurable (Wink, 1998 p. 43-44).

To continue, one of the first author to discuss the legitimised use of violence and to open up the field of peace studies in the 21st century is Johan Galtung (1990). His interested is in

dismantling the roots of violence and understanding it under an historical and anthropological light. He talks about cultural violence in relation to a legitimization of violence in its structural form. It is manifested in society under many shapes, such as religion, ideology, language, empirical and formal science. Galtung intends to portray a system that makes violence unobserved and ordinary. The vast manifestation of violence in society saturate people's lives so much that it might have consequences not only on the human body, but also on the mind and the spirit (Galtung, 1990 p. 294).

Another author approaching cultural violence is Fuat Gursozlu (2018) who explains it as an embodied phenomenon because it permeates every aspect of life. It is also integrated into the social and political system in which language is its subtle and most used form of expression (p.35). As said earlier, language is a neutral tool that can create peace as well as violence (Gursozlu, 2018 p. 37). In fact, Gursozlu's interest, as well as Rosenberg's one, lay in showing different faces of language, recognizing it firstly as a medium for mutual recognition, encounter, dialogue and bounding. They invite the reader to use it as a gateway to nonviolence and the ground on which a peaceful society can grow its roots.

Semantic and linguistic researchers confirm that language is an expression of a specific culture and its mindset (Galtung, 1990). Also Rosenberg, realising that the way humans speak is not neutral, takes in consideration what is behind a language that creates conflict and separation. Language is a tool that we can use to judge, blame, criticise, label, control and punish; or, it can be employed to connect, solve problems, unite, meet, empathise and create harmony. In other words, in a world dominated by separation, scarcity and powerlessness, language also reflects a tendency towards conflicts instead of understanding. The kind of violence I have been debating above, concerns the structure of a society, the western modern one, based on conflictual, dichotomised and alienating dynamics where language is an expression of them. Within this scenario, I am interested in understanding the

theoretical roots of a culture of violence and whether nonviolence communication offer a dismantling peaceful alternative. In front of such a discussion, I gained more awareness on the matter of structural violence and the fundamentals of nonviolence.

Considering those theories always in relation to my work as an educator, I believe in the possibility to transmit nonviolent values starting from early childhood education. As I approached in paragraph 2.1, the question about human nature being good or evil, also opens an existential debate on the natural tendency of human behaviour. Indeed, Dawn Raymond and Miki Kashtan (2016), underline that nonviolent communication approach intends to go beyond that dichotomisation, as good and evil coexist in every person which undermines the chance to live peacefully. *To conclude, if the “bad guys” do not require to be controlled, tamed nor punished, what shall I do with them?* This is how the needs theory kicks in Chapter 3, explaining further the possibility to overcome the commonly spread idea of control and punishment over the evil, re-examining one’s behaviour as an attempt to meet one’s need.

3 Nonviolent Communication and Human Needs

Having noticed myself how much language can influence the wellbeing of children within the school I was working in, I dig to discern what could be the basis of a different type of language. What is that makes humans engage empathically? This section will overview the theorisation on universal human needs as the ground for building empathic dialogue according to nonviolent communication. It will compare Maslow's hierarchy of needs with Rosenberg's discourse and expose some critiques. Human needs are told to be the background of any human action. In other words, for any behaviour there is a motivation behind that lead the person to act in a direction instead of another. According to nonviolent communication strategies, such motivation is to satisfy a certain need within a person (Raymond and Kashtan, 2016).

There are two main need theories, both exploring how motivation drives human behaviour and seeks the fulfilment of personal needs. According to Abraham Maslow's need model, there is a hierarchy of universal needs that all human beings have in common. From the lowest to the highest, they are: physiological needs, need for safety, need for love and belonging, need for esteem and need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943 pp. 370-396; see figure 1.). The fulfilment of the lower need allow to step forward to the higher ones; to reach the edge of the pyramid of needs therefore means to achieve the best version a person can be because all its needs have been met. No higher needs can be attended before the lower ones have been satisfied.



Figure 1 Figure 1 Maslow's Need hierarchy (McLeod, 2018)

Maslow's need model has been criticized by Anke Sandra Bouzenita and Aisha Boulanouar (2016) under several points. First of all, it has been accused of ethnocentrism, as it only focuses on western values; secondly, it is scientifically unreliable, as its theory does not have empirical grounds; thirdly, it is incomplete as it does not include the spiritual need of human beings. Finally, it has been criticized for its simplicity and limited view of human behaviour. According to Maslow's model, a human being with precarious physiological conditions cannot have his higher needs satisfied, which is limiting the possibility to achieve the need for love and belonging, as well as the need for esteem and self-actualization to the world population with their survival needs compromised. Maslow's model has become pervasive and highly used in marketing in spite of its validity issues, as Bouzenita and Boulanouar states: "It may be symptomatic of our time and age and the state of the academia worldwide that the more simplified and diluted a model seems to be in relation to its original idea, the more successful it is" (p. 77).

The interest of this study in understanding human behaviour towards cooperation or conflict, brings the discourse to step backward looking at what are the motivations of people's actions. Taking in consideration humanist psychologists Abram Maslow and Marshall Rosenberg, the fulfilment of needs is the main force driving human's choices. Maslow is

displaying needs in a hierarchical list and does not provide an explanation on the matter of prosociality vs. aggressiveness. On the contrary, the call of Rosenberg to create a list of needs, is to answer the question: “What motivates and constitute people peaceful and harmonious relationships?”. His interest moves beyond Maslow, finding out that a state of wellbeing and prosociality is the consequence of the matching of personal needs without creating any harm to the other person (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 53).

Whilst Rosenberg, similarly to Maslow, talks about human needs, he does not refer to a hierarchy, neither does he leave behind the spiritual realm. He refers to needs, seeing them at the roots of feelings, which means that feelings are the expression, like a signal of fulfilment (pleasant feeling) or unfulfilment (unpleasant feelings) of one’s needs. Feelings are connected to needs because they are the parameter of the state of needs of a person. Rosenberg communicative model has been created on the basis that humans seek for the fulfilment of their needs, however the strategy adopted to meet them might create harm to oneself and the others. For this reason, he suggests that learning to express one’s feeling and to seek for the needs alive behind it, a person might have better chances to prevent conflicts (Raymond, 2016).

Before January 2019, I never heard about Rosenberg’s perspective on communication. My interest in education had not focused yet on the matter of needs related to feelings. It has been a baffling discovering. I used to manage conflicts in order to defend myself, to affirm my opinion, or to report something wrong. Such conversations most often lead to interacting without the intent on understanding the other’s part opinion. To children I have always been teaching to tell the teacher what happened, ask the adults to be defended, instead of starting to fight. Nonviolent communication lead me to dealing with conflicts redirecting the attention, instead on the affirmation of one’s own rightfulness, to what was I feeling and needing in front of the adverse situation. Doing so, I felt to be empathising with myself and

left threatened by the circumstances, which helped me to succeed in empathising with the other and connect to its own feelings and needs, eventually finding a common agreement. The strategy of nonviolent communication is the result of a wide quest to understand human behaviour towards prosociality and to provide a strategy to live according to our compassionate nature.

CONNECTION	CONNECTION continued	HONESTY	MEANING
acceptance	safety	authenticity	awareness
affection	security	integrity	celebration of
appreciation	stability	presence	life
belonging	support	PLAY	challenge
cooperation	to know and be known	joy	clarity
communication	to see and be seen	humor	competence
closeness	to understand and	PEACE	consciousness
community	be understood	beauty	contribution
companionship	trust	communion	creativity
compassion	warmth	ease	discovery
consideration	PHYSICAL WELL-BEING	equality	efficacy
consistency	air	harmony	effectiveness
empathy	food	inspiration	growth
inclusion	movement/exercise	order	hope
intimacy	rest/sleep	AUTONOMY	learning
love	sexual expression	choice	mourning
mutuality	safety	freedom	participation
nurturing	shelter	independence	purpose
respect/self-respect	touch	space	self-expression
	water	spontaneity	stimulation
			to matter
			understanding

Figure 2 List of Need for nonviolent communication practitioners by the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC, 2004).

The list of need displayed in Figure 2. shows a selection of most common needs that are alive within people and might motivated their actions. In bold are expressed the family of needs; for each section there is a list of needs more specific to that cluster. I.e. The need for “PHYSICAL WELL-BEING” is a group of needs which includes the more specific needs of air, food, movement, shelter, touch, etc. According to Rosenberg, all efforts to communicate is an attempt to meet a certain need (Rogers, 2005 p. 60). This list of needs is used by nonviolent communication practitioners to learn to identify what is alive within them

and express it to the other person. To speak out one's need, according to Rosenberg, promotes empathic dialogue and compassion to flow from both interlocutors.

There is also Figure 3. about feelings. They serve as a signals to show if one's needs have been met or unmet. They are indicators that *we all have* to tell us the presence needs. Feeling are at a "surface" level meaning they are the physical response to a deeper need within the person. They are tangible as the person can perceive them under amazement, energy, joy, comfort or anger, disappointment, embarrassment, etc. just to name some from the list. Rosenberg suggests to connect first to one's feelings and articulate it, only for after looking at the cause of it from the needs list (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 3).

<i>Some Basic Feelings We All Have</i>			
Feelings when needs "are" fulfilled			
• Amazed	• Joyous	• Comfortable	• Moved
• Confident	• Optimistic	• Eager	• Proud
• Energetic	• Relieved	• Fulfilled	• Stimulated
• Glad	• Surprised	• Hopeful	• Thankful
• Inspired	• Touched	• Intrigued	• Trustful
Feelings when needs "are not" fulfilled			
• Angry	• Hopeless	• Annoyed	• Impatient
• Confused	• Irritated	• Concerned	• Lonely
• Disappointed	• Nervous	• Discouraged	• Overwhelmed
• Distressed	• Puzzled	• Embarrassed	• Reluctant
• Frustrated	• Sad	• Helpless	• Uncomfortable

Figure 3. Feelings for NVC practitioners. (Rosenberg, 2005 p.214)

To contextualise the need theory under the discourse of domination system and a culture of violence as described in Chapter 2, according to nonviolent communication, the presence of human needs is within every aspect of human life and they are at the core of human motivation (Rosenberg, 2005). As they are the common ground between the diversity of human kind, the question that raise is whether they can serve to connect people on a level of compassion and reduce the separation and conflict created by a culture of violence (Gought,

2015). While their presence is shared, the strategies to attain their fulfilment are subjective. In fact, every person chooses with different level of awareness how to meet their own needs. The urgency in talking about feeling and needs is due to the fact that in a world ruled by a domination system, the strategies to meet one's need happens to be of harm for oneself and the other. Ian Gought (2015) considers their unfulfilment a "serious harm" (p. 1195) which may cause antisocial behaviour and conflictual relationships. Ervin Staub (2003) also outlines that the frustration from unfulfilled human needs can be the cause of aggressive behaviour and violence (p. 16). What nonviolent communication outlines is to become aware of the presence of common human needs as the underlying motivators of human choices and behaviours. The recognition of each other's humanity – all humans share the same needs – could encourage self-consciousness of one's need in order to mindfully act in response to them (Baran, 1998 p. 535).

3.1 A strategy to meet one's needs

What made Rosenberg to formulate the nonviolent communication model has primarily been the need to create an alternative to the mainstream paradigm of culture of violence and legitimization of violence. His career in psychology also drove him to reflect on the role of language in promoting peace or violence. He also observed how powerful it could turn to create space for empathic dialogue and mutual understanding on the basis of revealing one's feelings and the needs. He looks at the concept of linguistic violence beyond insulting, shouting, threatening, instigating, propaganda, the media, etc. Rosenberg (2005) talks about *life-alienating communication* in reference to a language that harms others and ourselves, rich in words that classify and dichotomize people and their actions. He sees the origin of a conflictual mindset in the tendency towards dichotomisation and judgement towards oneself and others within personal, professional and social life. Rosenberg conceptualises it under

the concept of *violent communication* or *life-alienating communication* which hinders liberty, denies responsibility, diminish the worth of people and blocks compassion. It has the following characteristics, illustrated by some examples from everyday language:

a) Moralistic judgements: judge as wrong and bad all behaviour that is not in harmony with one's values. It is most often about blaming, insulting, putting-down, labelling, comparing, diagnosing (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 15).

A. Examples of moralistic judgements:

1. "You are so lazy."
2. "Everybody understands my class, what is the matter with you?"
3. "You have always been so stubborn against my opinion."

Both the examples express a judgment which label the listeners and block the possibility for dialogue.

B. Use of comparisons: comparing is a form of judgment that blocks compassion and makes oneself and the other feel miserable (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 18);

Some examples of language of comparisons that hinders compassion:

1. "Why are not you like your sister?"
2. "It seems like you are the only one to succeed."

These examples express a degrading judgement towards the other, withdrawing the possibility for acceptance and listening.

C. Denial of responsibility: not recognizing the responsibility for our feelings, thoughts and actions. They are typically used expressions such as "make one feel", "have to". It is about shifting from a language that skip responsible choices, to one that recognize and acknowledge its own choices (Rosenberg, 2003 p. 70).

Some examples of denial of responsibility in language:

1. I have failed my exams because there was too much mess around me.

2. I go to work because I have to.
3. I was too stressed from work to help you out.

Such considerations show the tendency of pointing out the responsibility for one's happenings instead of declaring oneself as responsible for them. The examples assign guilt to unspecific situations outside themselves, however one can also blame another person.

D. Demands, rewards and punishments: making the other do what you expect instead of letting the inner motivation to conduct the actions and words of a person (Rosenberg, 2003 p. 81).

Some examples of demands:

1. If you finish your homework on time, you will get a surprise.
2. You get no dinner tonight because you did not tidy up your room.
3. If you do not finish your meal, you will have no play time.

These last examples show that the motivation for answering a demands, is a rewards instead of the pleasurable feeling of helping out the other person.

Moralistic judgement, comparisons, denial of responsibility, demands, rewards and punishments are, according to Rosenberg, all symptoms of a culture of violence that subtly manifests itself in everyday language. *A life-alienating language* limits the possibility to meet the other person and reduce the capacity for true listening which creates disparity in relationships, misunderstandings and conflict (Rosenberg 2005).

Having considered that human beings are not innately violent (Giorgi, 2007) and that violence is culturally influenced (Köster, M., Schuhmacher, N., & Kärtner, J. 2015), Rosenberg's quest on human motivation towards violence or compassion brought him to elaborate a communicative strategy that would meet human needs and contribute to nonviolent relationships. Human needs are universal but the strategy to meet them depends on each situation and individual. Nonviolent communication model is a tool to connect

people on a need level. This allows humans to interact beyond opinion, judgement, evaluation and blame and to go at the source of communication: the tension towards the fulfilment of each other's needs (Rosenberg, 2003).

To act nonviolently does not mean the absence of conflict but to undertake a strategy of compassion and dialogue where both sides are eventually understood and have their needs met. Nonviolent communication is a practical process for peace building. It is about communicating in a non-antagonistic and respectful way based on listening of one's needs and those of others within the conflict. It is a practice of observation and connection to the feelings and emotions moment by moment. It allows to live by one's own values and to make requests to ourselves and others that can be uplifting for both (Rosenberg, 2003 p. 15). The language of blame, judgement, domination and threatening is avoided, as the aim of nonviolent communication is to recall the inner motivation to communicate rooted in the experience of pleasure for the contribution to each other's' well-being (Rosenberg, 2003 p. 36). Rosenberg's assumptions on human beings and human interrelations see compassion as a universally shared capacity for which human beings innately enjoy giving (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 144; Seppälä, Rossomando, & Doty 2013 p. 412). Nonviolent communication aims at bringing communication back to the natural flow of giving and receiving that emerges when there is a compassionate recognition of the unmet needs behind conflicts (Rosenberg, 2003 p. 35).

The concept of inner motivation refers to the condition in which a person's action is carried out because of a personal enjoyment rather than an external demand (Cherry, 2019). The assumption on the cooperative nature of human beings goes along with the idea that nonviolent living does not derive from any external factor but it is a motivation internally elaborated from the person. Nonviolent communication aims to shed light on the experience of enjoyment of giving and receiving in a compassionate way and believes that once a person

experience empathic dialogue, naturally finds the pleasure to be listened and relief. Rosenberg used to poetically refer to the joy of giving and receiving as intrinsic motivation in nonviolent communication in the song “Given To” (Rosenberg, 2005):

I never feel more given to than when you take from me — when you understand the joy I feel giving to you. And you know my giving isn’t done to put you in my debt, but because I want to live the love I feel for you. To receive with grace may be the greatest giving. There’s no way I can separate the two. When you give to me, I give you my receiving. When you take from me, I feel so given to. (p. 24)

3.2 Development background

Nonviolent communication has been initially influenced by the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers with whom Rosenberg collaborated during the 1960s. Observing the crucial role of empathy in a therapeutic relationship, the frankness in expressing the patient's feelings and emotions and listening that allows the person to feel unconditionally accepted and not judged, was of insight and inspiration for Rosenberg’s work (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 113).

After Rogers’s influence, the development of nonviolent communication model moved from a therapeutic relationship to a larger community focus, shifting from the exclusive counselling practice one to one, to larger groups. The intention was to translate the quality and meaningfulness of the learning experience of a therapy one to one to a wider scale. Rosenberg acknowledged that the social structure of a community had an influence on the mental health of a person and that to bring wellbeing into a community therapy alone was not enough (Little, 2008 p. 23). His career soon directed him from being a clinical psychologist to approach communities all around the world that witnessed conflicts of various kinds.

The development of nonviolent communication begins in the 1970s when Rosenberg realised that language had a determinant role in generating conflict (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 127). Rosenberg had a vast career as a peace activist and psychologist which brought him to

mediate conflicts in war zones, such as Sierra Leone, Burundi, Serbia, Sri Lanka and the Middle East; to be a peace mediator for families, schools, communities and interpersonal relationships, as well as a researcher and a humanist clinical psychologist (Little, 2008 p. 27). Although being in contact with conflicts between people on a daily basis, his outlook on human beings was far from being fatalistic. Instead, he embraced the idea that violence is culturally built rather than biological (Giorgi, 2008 p. 49). Therefore it can be eradicated when people are re-educate to communicate with one another in a peaceful, compassionate and constructive way (Rosenberg, 2003 p. 111). Rosenberg refers to nonviolence within communication as a process of interactions with oneself and the others that arises when anger, ill-will and hate are eradicated from the heart. The term nonviolence has been used with reference to the nonviolent path of Mahatma Gandhi, which has been an example of refusing to answer violence with violence, using instead, the force of peace (Little, 2008 p. 26). The term violence refers here to the Sanskrit word “*himsa*” meaning the presence of ill-will, anger and hate within oneself (Little, 2008 p. 26).

For teaching purposes Rosenberg explains *life-alienating communication* and *life-enriching communication* with the use of two puppets: a jackal and a giraffe.



Figure 3 Marshall Rosenberg lecturing nonviolent communication using the Giraffe and the Jackal Puppets in San Francisco (April, 2000).

The Giraffe language is called as such because of three reasons (Baran, 1998 p. 533). Firstly, giraffes have the largest heart size of any land animal - they symbolize the focus on understanding feelings and needs of oneself and the other. Secondly, they have an excellent vision that they use as wisdom to look at the situation in an objective way. Finally, they speak out their own voice and are assertive when it is required. On the contrary, the Jackal language refers to the language of violence. The Jackal bites and cry loudly, so it is taken as a metaphor of an aggressive, blaming, self-centred, moralistic language. Violent language, as Rosenberg intends it, is characterized by slander, gossip, blaming, lying, insulting, etc. It can be both intentional and unintentional, often hardly noticeable in daily communication: it appears as diagnosing, labelling, analysing, interpreting, judging, punishing and rewarding, etc. The Jackal language often makes oneself and the other feel worthless, threatened, ashamed, fearful and oppressed (Baran, 1998). In nonviolent communication the Jackal language is *life-alienating*: its alienation consists in communicating in a way that separate individuals from their own feelings, cutting off their minds from their natural capacity for compassionate connection to other humans.

Linguistic violence causes harm in various ways. The existence of invisible form of linguistic violence, which are part of everyday social life, is seen by Rosenberg as a language that strengthens a social structure of hierarchy and domination, where people are cut off from their emotions and feelings (Rosenberg, 2003 p. 55). Being unaware of the needs and feelings within oneself, people might risk to act out of an imposed cultural, social, political common sense (Baran, 1998 p. 534). Nonviolent Communication instead, aims at reconnecting human beings to feel, think and act according to their awareness of what is happening within themselves in every moment. Being in contact with their real needs, every person can choose to communicate in a way that creates no harm for oneself and the other

(Baran, 1998 p. 537). *Life-enriching* communication is built on the awareness, or the intention to become aware, to respect the feelings and meet the needs of oneself and others. To recapitulate, so far I have been talking about the normalisation of violence as a contemporary phenomenon that sees its roots back to Mesopotamia 3000 B.C.E (Wink 1999) and has widely spread across the western world till the present days. Discussions on whether violence is a biological feature of human beings or whether it is developed and learned from the environment have been debated. Although there are different opinions on the matter, this thesis suggests that antisocial behaviour are not predetermined by nature, on the contrary, it seems that there are proofs of prosociality and cooperation within diverse prehistorical tribes and there are still today living societies that do not use violence and hierarchical power-over dynamics within their social organisations.

The interest in understanding the normalisation of violence emerged together with the discovery of the nonviolent communication practice created by Marshall Rosenberg. Believing in human nature not as innately violent opens the mind to a vision of humanity that can live nonviolently.

Amongst the authors investigating on human behaviours, also Rosenberg supports the vision of humanity as more naturally compassionate rather than violent. He points out that the reasons behind conflicts could be alleviated by connecting to what makes us similar rather than different. According to nonviolent communication model, the possibility to live compassionately happens when people become aware that any behaviour is an attempt to meet a certain need and they open their communicative practice to first connect with their present feelings, then with their needs and finally making a request that could help them to fulfil their need without harming the others.

Nonviolent communication model first emerges as a strategy to spread nonviolence in a society that has normalised violence. This chapter reviewed the theoretical development

supporting Rosenberg's communicative approach: violence is socio-culturally determined; human nature is intrinsically prosocial; violence is also expressed through a *life-alienating language* that disconnects humans from their needs. Compassionate and nonviolent relationships can be built on a mutual understanding of the presence of needs behind the words and actions of every person.

4 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is body and verse.

It is self and other and one and many.

It is ensemble,

acapella, and accompaniment.

Autoethnography is place and space and time. It is personal,

political, and palpable.

It is art and craft. It is jazz and blues. It is messy, bloody, and unruly.

It is agency, rendition, and dialogue.

It is danger, trouble, and pain.

It is critical, reflexive, performative, and often forgiving.

It is the string theories of pain and privilege forever woven into fabrics of power/lessness. It

is skin/flints of melanin and bodies in the gendered hues of sanctuary and violence. It is a

subaltern narrative revealing the understory of hegemonic systems. It is skeptical and

restorative. It is an interpreted body of evidence. It is personally accountable.

It is wholly none of these, but fragments of each.

It is a performance of possibilities.

(Spry, 2011 pp. 15-16)

4.1 Why autoethnography?

I shall display the choice to undertake an autoethnographic study under different perspectives. Firstly, I believe autoethnography reflects better the way I see the world and how I conduct my life. Saying so, I mean that before knowing about the existence of an autoethnographic approach to academic research, I was already collecting data as if my life

was an autoethnographic study itself. I have been interested in writing journals since I learned to write as a child and I used them to reflect on my life and on the socio-cultural environment I was living in. In fact, for this particular study, the journal entrances I used as data, have been written even before I knew that I would have conduct a research.

I could say that writing an autoethnography has been “most natural” choice for me to take, although not the easiest path, as it required me to balance the emotional charge of writing about myself with the stress to match the academic requirements of transparency, truthfulness and ethics.

Secondly, I decided to embrace an autoethnographic study being inspired by the work of Karen Barad (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway* who writes about onto-epistemology and intra-activity. Knowing becomes an intra-active practice where I am not *in the world* as an outside observer, rather I am *of the world* (Barad, 2007 p.379). The practice of knowing and being are inseparable, mutually implicated. I myself create knowledge being part of the world, not as a bystander of it, therefore, the boundaries between epistemology and ontology blur away and leave space for a unified concept of onto-epistemology (p. 409).

I see a connection between Barad theorisation and an evocative autoethnographic research. The parallelism lays in the fact that the self (onto-) is changed and transformed by knowledge (episteme-) he produces and encounter. Being in the world and knowing about the world are intra-connected. I intra-act with the research; with its theories and with the autoethnographical research process and I am continuously changed by it, transformed by its theories and by the autoethnographic experience.

The autoethnographer should consider each person’s story connected to his/ her personal one (this point will be further extended below). The interconnectedness of one story to the culture and the other selves, reminds me of the theorisation of Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) on the intra-action which could be conceptualised in the sentence “we are

part of that nature that we seek to understand” (p.26). Intra-action claims that the self is not conceivable as separated to the context in which he/she is located. There is no longer an interaction of factors; the self and the culture, including the material world, are more than inseparable, they are mutually influenced: one is the extension of the other (Barad, 2007).

I use the concept of intra-action to explain the conjunction of the self and culture. Their unity creates my autoethnographic space where the distance between the self and the culture is fading away. Myself, the autoethnographer, is both subject and object of the study as I conduct the research in a co-creative process. I am never separated from the culture, blurring the boundaries between what happens outside and within me.

According to Barad’s theory (2007) on the constitution of identities, no self exists separate to the others. Identities are constituted by an interconnectedness of coexisting factors and are continuously influencing one another. What determines an identity is not one single factor, but a complexity of inseparable entities. This “ontological inseparability” (p. 128) is called “intra-activity” which has at its basis a fundamental inseparability between the self and the phenomena. In contrast with the notion of interaction, which presumes the existence of separate entities, intra-action represents a conceptual shift (p.139). It is blurring the boundaries of the self and the culture, as it is in the intra-action of them that an identity is shaped. Figure 3. represents the researcher position created by the union between self and culture. It is from the acknowledgment of the researcher’s intra-active identity and ontological inseparability between self and culture that the ontological and epistemological position of this autoethnographic piece are defined.

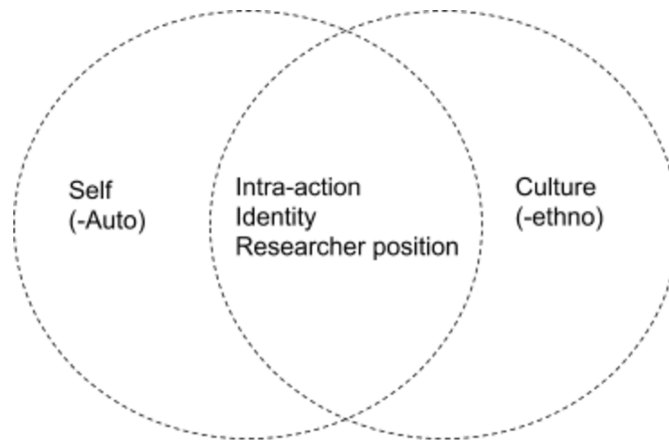


Figure 4 Shows the researcher position between the self and the culture.

Finally, my experience as a kindergarten teacher, has been an embodied ensemble of experiences of the social world representing both the personal, emotional and cognitive life. It has been life-transforming to the point I felt the need to investigate deeper and to find the reasons for such an educative shift. I saw in autoethnography the possibility for such immersion in myself and in a cultural understanding. Although undertaking an autoethnographic research could appear as a vertiginous choice there are infinite possibilities of doing research, transforming it into a process of always becoming. As I report from Immy Holloway and Francis Biley (2011): making research of something new and unusual could be a life-changing choice; theories can change the self and the self creates new meaning (p. 973).

4.2 Contextualising autoethnographic research

There are many ways to reveal what autoethnography is. In this section definition, purposes, contextualisation, methods, examples, strengths and limitations of it will be described.

During the XX Century, cultural anthropology was born. Ethnographers were interested in studying the “primitive” cultures, eager to discover the native worldview of distant exotic countries. First ethnographers were interested in integrating into the indigenous culture and

study for a long period the world of native people (Duncan, 2004). Then ethnographers directed their focus closer to the researcher reality, opening the field to local institutions, schools, suburbs, etc. Although the interest studied diverse aspects of culture and society, ethnography remained the study of an outsider culture. It is only in the 1990s that autoethnography emerges and became a qualitative inquiry methodology that sees the researcher no longer focusing on its outside culture, but takes its inner world as part of the research; this is where the major shift happen in ethnographic works together with advent of autoethnography (Duncan, 2004).

The cultural anthropological studies of the tradition has been criticised by postmodernism for its ethnocentricity and western dominating paradigm (Gannon, 2017). It has also been judged for not considering the ethical consequences of their studies and, on the contrary, indirectly giving to the western world the justification to impose itself on the culturally different ones. Postmodern tradition is therefore questioning the practice and the purposes of modern traditional science as it has been used to strengthen power-over dynamics. It does so believing that knowledge production has political and social influences and that data are always socially constructed; “a vision of universal truth is really just a dream of power over others and that liberatory, emancipatory projects are better served by alternative knowledge production process” (Wall, 2006 p. 148). Therefore, in a world – in particular the western one - of domination, inequality and oppression, postmodern tradition seeks for alternatives to deconstruct an old evolutionist hierarchical scientific paradigm.

Postmodernism is the theoretical framework of autoethnography. Postmodernists turn upside down the positivist tradition; they challenge neutrality, objectivity, a-historicity, a-culturality of the researcher who has to minimize/annihilate the self to produce a scientific work (Wall, 2006); they aim at denouncing the power-relation of knowledge-production; they give voice to the marginalised ones and broaden the academic paradigm toward new

horizons. The *post-* outlook opens up to new methodologies, new ways of doing scientific research and it questions the meaning of science itself. The *post-* philosophies are about deconstructing the taken-for-granted traditions; they challenge the meaning of words, assumptions, identities, cultural models, remodelling the boundaries of knowledge (if there are boundaries at all) (Lee, 2018).

Autoethnography emerges as a qualitative research inquiry within the postmodern tradition. It was in 1990s that the work of Carolin Ellis and Art Bochner started to use the self as a part of the study of the cultural practices (Elli, 2004 p. 25); as suggested by the etymology of the term auto- (self), -ethno (culture), -graphy (practice) (Ellis, Adams, Jones 2017). Autoethnography helps to think of alternative ways of knowing, acknowledging that even the positivist tradition is not free from bias: any kind of science is socially constructed (Wall, 2006). Autoethnography connects the personal to the cultural and it is both a genre of writing and a research method. In this study, autoethnography alternates the focus on my “vulnerable self” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000 p.739) challenged and transformed by the complexity of culture of domination.

Writing about the self as the cultural practice varies as much as every person’s story. Each individual's life experience is singular, which leads to a uniqueness in producing autoethnographic work. The writing styles used for autoethnographic production are many; they range from personal narratives, collaborative and evocative autoethnography, critical autoethnography (more focused on power-relations) autobiography, performative writing, literary fiction, poetry, creative writing. Writing becomes personalised as it reflects to the self and it becomes a tool for knowing; “writing is also a way of knowing - a method of discovery and analysis” (Wall, 2006 p. 151).

I took some examples of autoethnography to better understand my own choice of research.

They are presented and justified as follows:

Catherine Lee's story (2018) in *Culture, consent and confidentiality in workplace autoethnography* is about the traumatic challenge of being a lesbian teacher in rural UK and her experience of the dissonance in combining her sexual identity with her professional one. Her account shows the heteronormativity of a social context in which she was living and working. She addresses questions of identity, health, wellbeing and discourse of power within the school culture. She brings up as well ethical concerns about the representation of others, such as school members and her aggressor, and how that could affect her future career and her aim to be ethical towards their representations (Ellis, (2007). Her autoethnographic work has helped her in elaborating a traumatic experience and to call attention on power discourse of heteronormativity present in UK rural contexts.

My choice to write autoethnographically and to use my own experience as data for my research has similarly helped me to better understand my life choice to be an educator.

Tami Spry (2016) in *Body, paper, stage: writing and performing autoethnography* opens the scenario on the body as culturally inscribed. She produces a performative autoethnography which is about reading the body and translating its language of feelings, emotions, sensations, insights into words. This process requires a language that draws from arts and fiction. It needs to explore possibilities of expression beyond the traditional narrative and create evocative texts, living words; because "we - the autoethnographers - write from the space of personal, about our own bodies, feelings, hungers, desires, hopes, dreams, fears" (p.11). Spry's autoethnography inspires me as she explores the interconnection of culture and the body, which in my work is evoked by the emotions and materiality. Spry gives me

a special insight on how the culture is felt, lived, embodied, as well as perceived through the senses and flesh.

Sarah Wall's autoethnography (2012) *Ethics and the Socio-political Context of International Adoption: Speaking from the Eye of the Storm* explores the literature on adoption to better understand her experience as an adoptive parent. In relation to that, I have also explored the literature on nonviolent communication and the nature of human beings to reveal aspects of my educative choices and become more conscious about my work. The theoretical aspects of a nonviolent communicative model challenges my own practice of being in relationships with others. I find no conflict with the theoretical aspects of nonviolent communication and my own conduct, instead they are a suggestion to act in conformity to them. It is different for Wall as she finds that the discourse around adoption does not mesh with how she conducts family life and argues that the theoretical perspective on adoption should be less polarised.

Her autoethnography allows her to connect the macro- of the international politics on adoption and its complexity, with the micro- of her experience in being an adoptive mother. Wall's story promotes understanding and dialogue around a socio-political issue for a broad audience within and beyond the academic world.

In *If the Truth Be Told: Accounts in Literary Forms*, Pelias (2016), is a fascinating text that creates a series of literary narratives written in a fictional and non-fictional way, leaving the reader without knowing if the stories told are from the real life of the author or imaginative. Pelias writes an example of narrative that goes beyond science and it is challenging the boundaries of the autoethnographic domain, converging, science, art and literature in the mind of the reader.

Carolyn Ellis' *Manifesting Compassionate Autoethnographic Research: Focusing on Others* (2017) work with the Holocaust survivors represents an example of autoethnography that

has to do with compassionate interviewing and storytelling. It is a practice of speaking, interviewing and writing stories of the participant in a respectful, empathic way where ultimately the interlocutor feels relieved in sharing his/her own account. I connect with Ellis autoethnographic works as she demonstrates how research and life are strictly intertwined. In this case, the holocaust survivor Jerry Rawicki and Ellis became friends, extending the field of study to encompass both lives.

In my own autoethnography, life and research are also interconnected: one is the extension of the other and they serve one another. On one hand, my research provides me better understanding of my role as an educator in the society; on the other my life experience serves as a tool to create an autoethnographic study.

Some other examples of autoethnography are the work of Margot Duncan and Andrew Sparkes. Duncan's autoethnography (2004) has been the study influencing factors in the productions of hypermedia educational resources during a 6-year period. Her research is considered to be a conservative autoethnography (Wall, 2006) as she has been rigorous and meticulous in collecting her data. Her intention in conducting such a research was to ameliorate her work practice through consistent inner dialogue and self-reflections, interviewing, gathering documents and artefacts.

Sparkes (1996) in *The Fatal Flaw: A Narrative of the Fragile Body-Self*, engages in autoethnography exposing the story of a fragile and vulnerable self. The author finds between the lines of writings a space for revealing itself and hopes to create an emotional compassionate connection and leave some changes in the reader. He invites the reader to join and connect with his story and find some truth for his/herself too. "I invite you to think with my story. This involves drawing upon your own highly personal sedimentation of experience in order to join and resonate with it, allowing your own thoughts to adopt the story's immanent logic of causality, its temporality, and its narrative tensions" (p. 467).

Autoethnographies reflect the uniqueness of individual experience and are attempts to write the account of inner worlds shaped by the culture and society in a peculiar life situation. Lee (2018) shows an example of evocative autoethnography about the heteronormativity of rural UK discourse on sexuality. She aims at bringing awareness about similar issues in order for some new policies on inclusiveness to be made. Similarly, Wall (2012) explores the literature on international policy on adoption to reflect on her own experience as an adoptive parent and find a discrepancy in the theoretical representation of adoption with her own life. With her autoethnography she aims at revealing bias on the subject of adoption and opens up the field to a more critical engagement. Lee (2018) and Wall (2012) are written in a traditional sort of way, combining the culture to the self without drawing from the arts. On the same line, Duncan (2004) is elaborating an autoethnography that follow a rigorous method of data collection. Spry (2016) and Sparkes (1996) autoethnographies belong to the performative realm and are combining the literary form to the body experience within the culture. They are evocative and emotional aiming at having an impact also on the reader sensitivity and reflexivity. Finally, Ellis (2017) work show how autoethnography and life can become one the extension of the other, mutually influenced, in symbiosis and fused.

I trust that any methodological choice has its strengths and weaknesses. The autoethnographic ones are interconnected and make of it a unique genre of writing and research method. I would like to briefly tell about these features, beginning with language. Language used in an autoethnographic writing is accessible to a wide audience. It aims at opening the field to a non-academic reader and it can vary according to the researcher's necessities; it can be very close to narrative literary style (Ellis, Adams, Jones, 2017 p. 4). Another characteristic of autoethnography is that it can reach out to the most silent self and give it a chance to speak about its story. It does not have filters in choosing who can write

and about what. Every story is potentially worth researching on. Voices and taboos can find a place of expression and legitimisation (Ellis, 2004 p. 86; Adams 2012, p. 189).

Furthermore, autoethnographic text requires an autoethnographic reader. The interconnection between the two is tight and have the force to move the reader and make him/her connect to the intimate world described by the researcher. Evocative and emotional autoethnographies claim for openness and reflexivity. Depending on the reader's sensitivity, the story can embark the audience on a life-changing experience. Revealing the fragile self of the autoethnographer may touch the fragile self of the reader, creating a compassionate and moving bond, emotionally relieving both sides (Sparkes, 1996)

Another strength of autoethnography is to bring clarity within a personal path. It can become a healing process for some, of discovering oneself, digging into the details of emotions, let them breathe through words. It can take to surface pain and transform it into art. The therapeutic agency of autoethnography often occurs when the researcher tells about an epiphanic moments of life (Adams, 2012 p. 182) such as traumatic events, life-changes, unexpected experiences, encounters, etc. Self-narrations also have different layers of profundity. Telling about the self may starts from the surface of telling events, to dig deeper and deeper, words after words, in the vast picture of the self. It might bring healing, fresh air, light and transformation within (Ellis, 2004 p. 135; Spry 2016).

Finally, autoethnography sheds the light to the micro reality of the self-interconnected to the macro one of the culture (Gannon, 2017; Wall 2012). It has opened the field of science to the field of emotions, feelings and heart. It contributes to making science more humanised (Chang, 2008 p. 52) , empathic (Spark, 1996), and more accessible (Ellis, Adams, Jones, 2017), and it honours the strength of revealing the fragility of human experiences.

Regarding the weaknesses of the methodology, there are critiques about it too. One of the pitfalls of autoethnography may be to only rely on the changeability of the self (Wall, 2006).

It risks of being a genre too narcissistic and self-indulgent because of the excessive focus on the “I” (Chang, 2008). In this regard, it is useful to warn the autoethnographer to consider that there is no individual culture, but an inter presence of many cultures that constitute many stories altogether. An excess of self- focus may lead to a “self-exposing” story which is far from being an autoethnography (Mendez, 2014).

The over emphasis on the self seems to be the cause of another weakness: writing an a-theoretical, transferable autoethnographic work (note that critique on generalizability is more broadly challenged by postmodernism); the overemphasis on self- narration might cause the omission of a complete and relevant cultural analysis.

Another pitfall of autoethnography is to rely only on personal memories. Memories are resources that can be omitted and faded; they are not fixed in the past but are influenced by the emotional link the author connects to them (Damasio, 1998; Chang, 2008 p. 57). Therefore, autoethnographies have to take into account also other sources for re-evoking the past, such as interviews, images, video tapes, drawing, memory boxes, photographs, letters, conversations.

To conclude, at the end of the 20th century, doing research started to be seen as a process of meaning-making rather than the product of a search for an objective truth. Questions on subjectivity, identity and power were sought by new ways of inquiry in social sciences. Among them, autoethnography emerged inward the necessity of seeking into emotionality, subjectivity and personal experience in relation to culture (Ellis, 2011). During the last decade, theoretical discussions about the definition and characteristics of autoethnography have been undertaken by academics and non- within the social sciences and the arts (Chang, 2008).

4.2.1 Poststructuralism and nonviolent communication

Autoethnographic studies emerged following the wave of poststructuralism which emerged as a philosophical movement beginning in the 1960s that has widely influenced different research areas: the arts, history, sociology, literature, politics, and culture. It emerges as a critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss' theorisation on the scientific study of human behaviour through the use of universal patterns and closed system of meanings that himself had created (Harcourt, 2007). Any claim for purity and truth in science, is considered by poststructuralists to be limited and relative (James, 2014).

The complexity of human beings are investigated by the postructuralist researcher and finds diverse ways of expression, i.e. through discourse analysis and critical reading (Lee, 1992). Poststructuralists deconstruct and investigate language for its core role in the construction of meaning (Lee, 1992) and the production and reproduction of the social structure (Allan D. & Hardin PK, 2001 p. 164). The way language is used, either for interactions or for public reasons, it is an expression of cultural identity. Where identity is not understood to be fixed in time a space, but a constantly changeable factor. How people speak themselves and the way the social structure is verbalised in public discourses, represent an always emerging identity. In fact, roles and relationships produce meaning through the use of language: Allan D. & Hardin PK (2001) bring the example of a clinician enacting a taxonomic language towards the patient creating identities of 'insanity' (p.166). This shows how much speech creates meaning, influencing being and knowing and producing dynamics of power.

I recognise myself within poststructuralism not only because of my autoethnographic research choice. I also see an association between postructuralist critique on language and Marshall Rosenberg's attempt to deconstruct a *life-alienating* language of a western modern society.

Poststructuralism provided me with the theoretical framework to look at language with different eyes as nonviolent communication similarly did. Poststructuralism see individuals as agents of reality embedded in dynamics of power-relations within every social organisation; people are endlessly constructing and deconstructing meaning through the use of language. The question itself is not concerning language *per se* as an ensemble of rules. In fact, like Paul Ricoeur (1998) says “Language is innocent because it does not speak, it is spoken” (p. 34). Ricoeur is postulating that language is a tool, a channel to transmit meaning. What constitute its meaning depends on the system of values society attributes to it - language is entangled with both culture and thought. The poststructuralists are interested in understanding the constitution and use of language in society with the intention, not much on clarifying a system of rules, but to grasp the underlying social structure that forms it. To this extent, I link the postructuralist discourse to the one earlier describe on the culture of violence that is expressed via language in the western modern society.

5 A story of becoming a kindergarten teacher

I am not sure when this research started as the data I collected come from both distant memories on my childhood, to journal reports of the last year October 2018 till June 2019. Adding to that, it is long before I knew I would have done an autoethnographic study about my own educative journey, that I started gathering reflections about my role as an educator. Overall, the research process has been two folded. On one side, I could say that I start collecting my data when I chose to write about the present study in Spring 2019. On the other, my research started long before the intention to write an academic work and will keep evolving and growing even after the submission of it, as it concerns choices of my life path. As Bochner and Ellis (2016) write on evocative autoethnography, memories speak about ourselves, evoke shades and nuances that might transform us and have to do with our life beyond the academic realm. In addition I would say that, according to my experience, once you grow the habit of exploring your past experiences and get confident in exploring your memories, autoethnography might become a life style on its own.

The following sections will present both some salient memories from my childhood to university and some journal entrances during my work experience as a kindergarten educators. Data are differentiate by the use of italics throughout the text.

5.1 Becoming an educator

Children learn to speak for imitation. They copy us, the adults. They do not only simulate our words, they also reproduce the behaviour they ordinarily see. I did not learn this in any book, I experienced it when I first started working with children n age 1-6 in October 2018. I soon realised how eager they were to find ways of expression and interactions. They integrate quickly how to tell the adults their basic needs, even before start talking. They grow learning how to speak and interacts, however I was astonished in front of their incapacity of dealing with their emotional needs. Frustrations are ordinary in a

kindergarten: children cry, fight, scream mostly for wanting to play with a friend who refuses it, for wanting a toy that is not theirs, for needing more time to play, for being tired, for missing home, etc. The list could go much further. What I saw was a continuous manifestation of small conflicts that ended with a teacher interference of punishment and blaming. I felt that they were in an emotional trap – they could not deal with their feelings. For instance, when they could not find a way to release their anger and their words were insufficient making their emotional stress increase, they would start physically fighting. In the beginning I was feeling trapped too in the dynamic of the conflict and I would interfere raising my voice. Although that might have worked sometimes, I remained with the feeling that I used a dynamic of power to stop the conflict but I was not providing the children a tool to solve it with their own resources, neither I had sent any educative message. They were only learning to be stronger and defend themselves blaming and threatening, like adults. My colleague used to tell them “use your voice, not your hands!” but they did not tell them how to use their voices and what to say.

I can recall here the first connection with Paolo Freire and Giroux in the need for emotional freedom through words. Language can help the children to express what is within them that they are looking for. At the time I did not know how, but I knew that for a child learning how to express and deal with its emotions and needs was very urgent and would help him/her to live with more harmony.

My attitude in front of conflicts was not to escape from them, on the contrary I aimed to take children troubles seriously. I wanted to find different strategies to provide knowledge, skills and support for teaching how to react nonviolently. At the time, I did not know nonviolent communication, but I had a look at peace education strategies. My vision was not to find a about living in a conflict-free educative path, but to acquire the skills to live creating less harm possible for oneself and the other.

The moment I decided to look for some tools to support my understanding of education and empower my presence as an educator, Paulo Freire's theorisations and neuroscience came to help, along with the discovery of nonviolent communication.

Firstly I was inspired by the work of Paulo Freire (1996) and Henry Giroux (1981). Their revolutionary paradigms invite educational practitioners to change by critical conscientization the reproduction of an oppressive socio-cultural paradigm (Freire, 1996). Transformational theorists, such as Giroux (1981) and Freire (1996), critique the reproduction of social power-relations within education. To subvert them, Freire (1996) elaborates the concept of critical conscientization of the oppressed which will bring liberation for themselves and their oppressor. There is a link between Freire's and Rosenberg's work and it is the concept of empowerment for both Freire's thesis and Rosenberg's nonviolent communication. Freire's critical conscientization and Rosenberg's communicative practice are both ways to contribute to social change through education. Freire's empowerment happens through critical literacy and it is known as conscientization (Freire, 1972). His purpose is to eradicate the oppressive dynamics of power-relations existing in the education system. On the other hand, Rosenberg's intention is to break the vicious cycle of violence (Galtung, 1990 p. 302) perpetuated by society and reflected into education. His approach towards empowerment happens through the recognition of each other's humanity based on the presence of universal needs that creates relationships between human beings based on a level of compassion and empathy rather than individualism, competition or judgement. They are both reversing a system: Freire a system of knowledge-oppression, Rosenberg a system of violent-relations (which are clearly intertwined).

It has been acknowledged, at least on policy level, that critical literacy and intellectual freedom are essential in a democratic society (Freire, 1972). The purpose to live nonviolently

is here considered as a fundamental step towards the construction of a peace. For that to happen, there is only one way: live according to values of compassion, listening, presence, forgiveness, unity, which are different from what modern society has soaked the school system with: competitiveness, separation, stigmatization, labelling, judgment (Quezada, 2004 p. 4). Nonviolent communication applied to education could be a way to put into practice what the transformational theorists have written about. To enact the transformation starting from compassionate communication within early childhood education could be already a practical step for socio-cultural change.

Although it has been assumed that prosociality is an intrinsic characteristic of human nature, peace does not grow automatically; it has to be nurtured and built in the minds and hearts of man and women. Likewise, violence is culturally transmitted and inherited from the social context. Harris's overview (2004) points out few postulates on peace education: explaining the roots of violence, providing nonviolent alternatives, teaching to tackle different forms of violence and acknowledging that conflict is omnipresent (p. 7). The concept of peace is multilevel and it embraces different aspects of life.

What touches me in working with children, among many things, is that their conflicts are mine too. When they face a disappointment, a frustration, a sense of loss, inner confusion, they reflect my sense of disappointment, frustration, loss and confusion. The way they ask them to act in face of such feelings has to come from myself, from the way I do and what works for me (translating it to childhood, surely). I ask myself, how do I deal with conflict? Do I relate to others holding revenge or empathically? Starting from this point, I approached nonviolence and I started looking for strategies to integrate the principle of peace within myself as well as within the school.

5.1.1 Childhood

Narrative on my childhood memories will be explored as I believe that my journey through nonviolent communication in early childhood education and my role as an educator are partly connected to the experiences I had as a child (Harris, 2004 p. 8). Kyle Miller (2014) writes about the influence that working with children might have on bringing up memories from personal childhood. In particular, she says that spending time with children, during significant moment of their lives, such as start going to school, birthdays and passages of transitions are moments toward which the adult empathizes better. I trust this is the case for me. Working daily with children, brought me to dig back into my past and revisit my memories that have shaped my personality and influenced my interests.

Although emotions constitute the self in every moment and are triggered all the time by the nervous system (Campbell and Garcia, 2009), there are also “old emotions” which are more constitutive of the personality. Neuroscience says that meaningful memories from childhood’s are stored in the lasting memory of the brain and those are determining for the personality of the adults and in the choices they make. To become aware of that web of emotions, allow me to understand better my path related to nonviolent communication and education. In fact, to understand the role of childhood emotional memories is relevant for me in the order to overview the journey of becoming an educator.

Memories of my childhood are especially related to my feelings and sensations. One of the most overwhelming was the uncomfortableness of being treated like a child from the adult world. How I felt myself instead was just as a human being. Why was I supposed to feel like a child? I never understood what that meant. It seemed to me that the adults had more serious things to do, more crucial troubles to solve, whereas my own were not as relevant. I remember the frustration I was getting when my dilemmas were not taken as seriously as I wanted them to be. I used to ask what I felt was of vital importance: I wanted to know about

other people's feelings, about the meaning of life, death and love, about unity and separation and other existential questions. They just came to me as relevant as learning to walk. I was hoping so much that growing up would have meant to finally live up to the adults and to be all knowledgeable.

The sensitivity of a child is likely to influence the personality of the adult (Miller, 2014). Getting in contact with the inner world of childhood emotions allowed me to look for the determining influences that made me become an educator. Today I take children as seriously as I take adults, as I remember clearly what it meant to feel undervalued.

Another clear passage of my childhood was learning about my emotions. I remember that I used to be very aggressive when I received a wrongdoing from my siblings, such as teasing or being made fun of. The tantrums raising in me were a mix of conflictual sensations. My whole body reacted with anger and I was persuaded that all the pleasant sensations were just gone forever from my flesh. I would manifest them in screaming, stumping on the floor, crying out loud with a heart wrenching feeling of injustice. Most of the time I was embodying my rage and calling with all my means for some listening and attention. Learning to manage my emotions took me a long time. In the end, I learned both to calm them down or smother them, instead of going to the roots of my aggressiveness and see what triggered it.

I rarely fought or argued with my peers. I was so attentive instead, on the other person's feelings that my parents used to call me "sponge child" or joke about the fact that I had "antennas" to capture what was going on within the people surrounding me. For instance, I used to be so worried of leaving one of my family members alone, being afraid they would suffer from loneliness or feel abandoned.

I describe my sensitivity as a child to be: susceptible to other people's wellbeing and to experience full-emotional embodiment of my anger when arguing with my siblings. Cases of children oversensitivity are common and they require them to learn to manage their

feelings and articulate their emotions to be able to express them without harming anyone. My remembrance of such perceptions allows me to be more empathic towards the children in my present work.

My emotional memories help me now to empathise with children in my educational work. When they are struggling, somehow 'I know what they feel'. For this reason today I try my best not to play the adult role of labelling children as 'too little' to be taken seriously.

Neuroanthropology provides a description of what embodiment means and its effect on memories and personality. Embodiment is the subjective experience of the body in constituting culture. This means that through the body it is expressed all that is part of a culture, including the nuances of disclosing emotions (Campbell and Garcia, 2009 p. 2). "Embodying rage" had an effect on my personality because it required a great effort to learn to manage my emotions as a child. The relevance was not much on the experience of "fighting with siblings", rather it was on the exposure to self-emotional understanding at a young age without means to understand the reasons behind such feelings (Harris, 2004 p. 8). As I grew up, I matured and developed more comprehension about my emotional life and the one of others (Margaret, 2009). The memory of embodying emotions may be another influencing factor that constituted my life and brought me to be interested in exploring my emotional life and the one of others, especially within my educational practice.

The need "to be taken seriously" reminds of the concept of childhood as a carefree time. This idea is confuted by the emotional experiences of sadness, anxiety, anguish and inner troubles that children may feel. Their needs and concerns are often ignored because of this bias, creating a miscommunication with the adult world. However, it has been shown that, not only children's feelings and emotions go beyond happiness and joy, but they are the backbone to ensure emotional balance during growth and adulthood (Karnick, 2018 p. 132).

5.1.2 Schooling years and University

When I was 6 years old I went to public school in my neighbourhood. Many of my friends were from kindergarten and I was socially integrated in the classroom amongst my peers. I remember my enthusiasm in learning to read and write, my motivation was especially nurtured by the willingness to keep pace with my classmates. However, by the end of the year, anxiety kicked in and I started detesting to go to school. I was anxious about homework, frightened by my teachers and panicking for tests. The results of my school performance used to pull my mood up or down heaps, so much that I used to often have nightmares and crushes for school.

The situation went out of control in the beginning of the second year with my Italian language teacher when she started to use a whistle to set us in order and call our attention. I stayed at school for one more month until I refuse to go anymore. My parents tried to convince me, but my desperation was so evident that they had to look for an alternative. It was only few weeks later that they enrolled me in a Waldorf school. It was November 2000 that I started to live a new life. My school was surrounded by nature, the classroom was small, we were in 7 and the material I was using was so different than the one I used before. I had no notebooks and pens but blank papers with colourful pencils. We drew a lot, paint, build, sew, knit, sculpt, went for walks in the woods, played music and most of all, we were free to play for a long time in the garden of the school. I remember how much I loved to climb up trees and play hide-and-go seek in the bushes. The feelings of fear and my panic was then just a memory.

I was having much joyful time, although not everything was perfect neither in the new school. In fact, when it was time to enrol in middle school, my academic skills were so poor that at the age of 10, I could barely read well and make basic math calculations. This factor did not help my emotional balance in the following years, since I left the Waldorf school, I needed

to get support from private teachers to keep up with the school program. My joy for learning decreased steeply and my motivation to succeed was mostly fed by the need to feel accepted by my peers and to have my parents proud of me. I moved on throughout the years, from middle school to high school with very little intrinsic motivation to learn. School was just something I had to attempt because that was what everyone was doing.

Moving on in time to my teenage hood. When I think about my teenage years I have a pang of emotions. I remember that it was a life period so disorienting, where I was bodily and psychologically changing so much. I wanted to explore my limits, to get to know about myself and all the changes happening inside and outside me.

Overall my school experience left me an unforgettable mark: I could never understand such an institution created so much against the constitution of human beings. Emotionally alienating, physically degrading, intellectually mostly developing cognitive skills, leaving behind creativity and intuition. Early I asked myself, what was the purpose of educating if most students stressed out and lived school with low interest and boredom? I could not understand why had I to spend so much time learning things that had no relation to my life, just to pass a test and later forget about the content.

School memories are part of those past experiences concerning social trainings and practices that in a certain way, influenced the way of thinking of a person (Miller, 2014). The memory of mainstream public school shook me not much for the subject taught but for the authoritarian and hostile attitude of the teachers. The abuse of authority, legitimized by a discourse of power-over, is manifested by practices of reprimand and punishment such as the use of whistle to recall order in the classroom. I identify the role of the teacher as a constructed role, product of a discourse that on one hand avoids stigmatization of its role, and on the other, establishes its status through language (Weren, 2014 p. 97).

The presence of conflictual situations in my memories report the overuse of power by the Italian language teacher which made me look for a schooling alternative. In front of this extreme situation, my family and I reacted looking for a different choice that was at the opposite of the previous pole. The case of alternative school as a solution to the language of authority abused in the primary public school, placed me in an environment that would soon deconstruct any rules learned during the previous year. The new school environment belongs to the non-mainstream sphere under which are mostly common the names Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia and Libertarian schools. I want to underline that the experience I describe above is subjective and cannot be generalised to all alternative school system. I acknowledge it shows only my experience and it is here cited as it is part of the significant memories that I consider to have shaped my personal and professional path.

The years in the Waldorf school allow me to experience and perceive adults under non-commanding light. In the new school where I was relocated I relate to the teachers with a horizontality which made me feel freer and more mature which reinforced my intrinsic motivation to learn. In fact, what moves a child to learn is either an intrinsic or extrinsic factor. It is for Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000) that intrinsic motivation constitute the natural human propulsion to learn, which, in my case, have been hindered by the authority of the primary school teacher at first and during the years of high school.

Another significant passage of my educational path, was the choice of University. I knew that it was not mandatory to undertake a degree and that was what probably motivated me to continue studying. I had the desire to start learning about world cultures and meet different educational styles and perspectives from around the globe.

My Bachelor in Anthropology, Religions and Eastern Civilizations had been in itself a journey in the mind through cultures and new perspectives. I soon understood that there were some common grounds that all human beings have in common. I came up with the idea

that we all have values that lead our lives and we have a sense of belonging to a group with whom we share the same beliefs, practices, customs, and language. However, observing the world around me, I could not feel integrated with my peers and with the trends that the mainstream media and culture were diffusing. I had the feeling of a world crumbling down on profundity and selling very ephemeral values to lead our lives. I was overthinking on the place of my own values within this scenario until I decided to keep thinking while doing something about it.

I started to get involved in education with volunteering in Bologna (Italy), France, England and Cambodia in local NGOs, soon realising that I would dedicate myself more consciously to education. I wanted to find enriching values to nourish new generation with ideas of solidarity, empathy, collaboration, caring and joy. I was persuaded that globalisation put the world upside down, especially the world of customs, rituals, beliefs that forge people's identity. I saw this crisis as an opportunity to create something new and contribute to plant the seeds for a new conscious generation.

When I came across the Master of Arts in Education and Globalisation at the University of Oulu, in Finland, I thought to have found the path to gain the educational tools that let me move in a world of complexities and make of education my profession.

This passage describes the transition from schooling years to University. What I find relevant is the inversion of the tendency I had in being motivated to study extrinsically at first to intrinsically in the end. This have strongly changed my approach to learning and the openness to integrate knowledge in life. Intrinsic motivation is defined as the “doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external products, pressures or reward” (Rosenberg, 2005 p. 24). Nonviolent communication is grounded on the idea of intrinsic motivation to empathic and prosocial

relationships based on the joy of giving and receiving. Rosenberg therefore is refuting any form of punishment or rewards in learning, as it falls into the extrinsic motivation area. In inviting to reconnect with the intrinsic pleasure of learning, he believes that education may turn to be a life-enriching experience (Rosenberg, 2003).

Whereas, extrinsic motivation is “a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome. Extrinsic motivation thus contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself, rather than for its instrumental value” (Ryan and Deci, 2000 p. 56). When learning is carried on by an intrinsic motivation, it becomes fluent and natural. It is a critical cognitive, social and physical attitude that guarantee a lasting and meaningful learning for the individual, as previously reinforced by Rosenberg (2003). This is not only valid in childhood, but affects human beings performance, wellbeing and persistence in all epochs of life.

My years at University characterized a moment of ontological crisis in the way I used to see and live within my socio-cultural context. I started to no longer recognise myself with many of the values of the globalised society and internally criticise the outdated educational system I had been enrolled all my life. I believe that when the world of beliefs is crumbling down, new perspectives may enter to create opportunities. In fact, often personal and social changes start in moments of disequilibrium that enclose strong emotional impetus (Silova, Millei and Piattoeva, 2017). Periods of crisis, might also be necessary for people to find again their meaning in life (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). As Thomas Bay (2006) describes getting lost is an opportunity to meet the life we were unconsciously looking for. “And perhaps we even have to lose ourselves first, our bearings, our lives, in order to find new dwellings where we can come into full possession of our power of action, and where new modes of existence may be invented” (p. 1). Similarly, it is in a moment of change and loss that I encountered a new beginning.

5.2 180 degree shift: Nonviolent Communication in my life

From University to being an educator has been a jump into the void. From the previous outlook on my memories of childhood to schooling years and finally to University, I will now take the reader into the world I have been living daily for the past year and a half. This transition leap from the past to the present, shows how the experience of the past have shaped my educative role today. The following extract illustrates the routine of the educational work in which I have been working from October 2018 till today.

I wore new eyes only when I started working in a private local kindergarten in Verona. I took my theories off and roll up my sleeves. To face children was to meet a whole universe in each one of them. Suddenly all my childhood memories came to help, I connected to my inner child and engage in playing with them. Although my role consisted in teaching English to children from 1 to 6 year-old, I would focus more on the children of 5 and create some playful opportunities where we would also speak in Italian. My joy of being with children was in contrast with my working environment, sprinkled with a frustrating everydayness.

A scene from an ordinary day:

My work starts as soon as I get off the car and greet the porter's lodge. Children are getting to school, they can see me, I should be wearing the teacher's role as soon as possible. Leaving Beatrice in the car.

I climb down the stairs, usually I meet some mothers with their children. Some of them are disconnected and absent-minded, perhaps they are already thinking about their work at the office upstairs. Others are happy to meet me and exchange brief comments.

I breath before entering into the school door. Another day is about to start. New emotions, new insights, new challenges, new frustrations, new learning: a new journey. Am I ready? Time is up, I step in.

Hello you. I greet every child, I look into their eyes and feel happy to meet them again. I take the time to do it. It's one of my favourite moments of the day. These few seconds in the morning when we say hi and look into each other's eyes I believe they can uplift the day for both of us. It's an out-of-time connection.

I take my shoes off in the changing room. As I wear the orange apron half of me is fading away behind the cloth, absorbed into the educator's role. In between these feelings, I hurry up. Go to the toilet. I look at myself in the mirror and recognize some underestimating thoughts towards myself. I'm judicious for some reasons that I don't understand. I breathe, I can see my thoughts...soon then they slip away. I vow that I will look deeper behind them and write about it. I breath, recenter myself and step out.

I'm on scene: the classroom.

"Good morning teacher Beba!" – that's how they call me at work – "Good morning everybody!" I'm the jack-in-the-box that just popped out: it's the trilled part of me that will have to be smiling around all day. At this point of the day in my head there are different scenarios: my colleagues, the children, the routine, my English lessons and my educative message. These fragments coexist within me as different persons living in only one body.

With my colleagues, I'm just a colleague, I adapt to the person I am talking with, I just want to connect and be in harmony with the team. Whereas, when I'm in the educator's shoes I'm reminded to be natural, sincere, authentic, open-hearted and joyful. With the children, I'm playful, happy, curious, natural. I try my best to avoid being there just standing with my arms crossed supervising the children. When it happens, it seems to be playing the game of cops and robbers.

There is also a part of me that can't help following the routine; "I am a routine-slave" – I think. We have a little bell to play to show when time's up. The routine creates the day schedule, which is basically the same throughout the year. It has become addictive to look

at my wrist watch and check what's next in the repetitiveness of the day. Finally, I'm also an English teacher. My English lessons is my space alone only with the kids, where I can be creative in teaching and engage with them at their pace.

When I look at my fragmented self at work I feel confused. I would like to integrate who I am, my values and beliefs in my educational role. Instead, I find myself running around, stressed out, sometimes playing the role of the authority to ask for silence and order. I often can't recognise myself in that and I wonder what leads me to behave like that. Why am I rushing and stressing so much? Why am I so scared of judgments from the school institutions? Why am I feeling so out-of-space?

It's time to go. My shift has finished.

Silence.

I'm begging for silence. I'm not talking though, I am alone, in my car, finally getting back to Beatrice again. This is the moment when all comes out, like a can of water that has been plugged with the tap for too long. All my thoughts spurt out louder and louder. I feel soaking into this sound in my head. My eyes are full of images and I can still hear the children around me, the bell and the instructions and the corridor conversations. I close my eyes and rest before I start driving. I breath and try to relax, to clear myself from the place I have just been. I review every image of the day, every word I said, every comment I heard, every game I played, the gestures and expressions I saw. The film goes on for a while until I consciously stop it and focus on turning the keys to start driving.

After few months, the experience, the children, the walls, the sounds, the food, the colleagues, the colours, the smell has become part of me. I spent the first term divided between many fragments. Trying to play different roles to fit in. I was far away from pursuing my initial educational purpose to combine my values with my educational work. I needed to integrate myself, to breath freely even within the walls of the school building. I had no

intention of re-evoking my frustrations related to school of my childhood. I chose to become an educator to create something different and enhance children's creativity, joy for learning. But I was not yet there; instead I struggling to stand on my own educational roots.

What I represent above is part of an ordinary day and it is influencing my quest to find my place as an educator. Between the lines emerges how am I looking for integration and coherence between myself as a person and my role in the school. The need to feel connected with my educative profession and my own values lead me to keep studying and analysing myself, for improvement and more truthfulness.

In the text it appears that I feel a disconnection with the system I work in, which is shown by three situations. First the half annihilation caused by the orange apron that “cut” off my identity. Wearing it every morning meant to me the entrance into an institutional role which felt to partly took away a side of me and replace it with my profession. The materiality of the orange apron affected me on an emotional and personal level, as Jo Labanyi (2010) says: “there is a continuum that runs from emotion to materiality, with affects occupying the complex middle ground of the real-material-but-incorporeal” (p. 227). The materiality and the self are entangled and create an identity that is not fixed but in constant change. The cloth I had to wear did not only represent a role but the whole system of hierarchy I was working in. I could “hide” behind it and exercise some authority in front of the children, leaving my personal values behind it. It is remarkable how the sense of belonging to an identity can be influenced by the materiality of the self (Lebanyi, 2010). In my case, I admit that I partly experienced losing my personality for acquiring the one of a teacher and an institution; my educative shift has been triggered by that and it opens my mind to search for pedagogic alternatives.



Figure 5 Wearing the orange apron

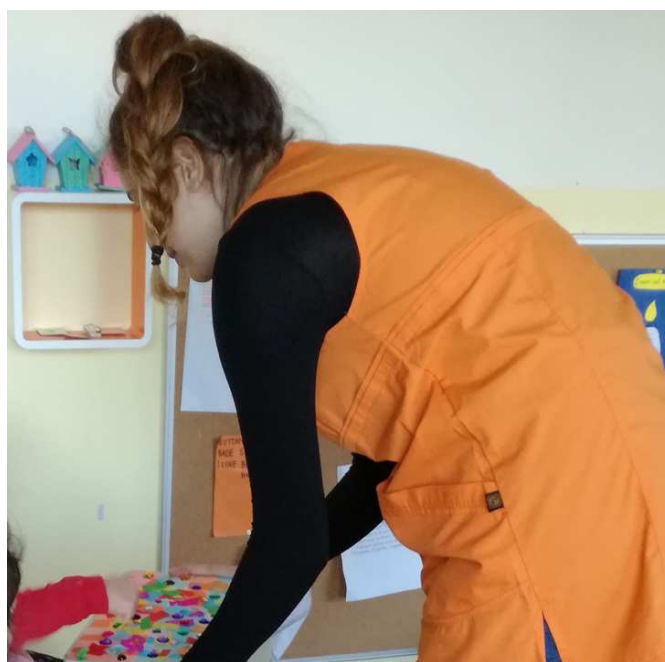


Figure 6 Orange apron

The discourse on the materiality brought up by the orange apron I was wearing, is the manifestation of a larger institutional structure that establish roles, behaviours and languages. The typical language used by teachers in the kindergarten is built on commands, such as “Respect the rules of the school”; “Go to the bathroom”; “Tidy up”; “If you do that, you will not...”; “You are always the same...”; “Who did that? Who is the guilty party?”; “Finish on time!”; “Do like everybody else”; “Listen to the teacher. The adults choose, the child follow”; “Say sorry if you are guilty!”; etc. The language is repeated throughout the day like radio and creates a non-stop flow of words that occupy all space within the classroom and within oneself. Despite the vital energy of the children that in front of commands still reacts with joy, I found the language of the teachers had an impact on the way conflict amongst the youngsters were managed. They become aggressive and with a tendency to command their peers which creates disparity, irritability and uneasiness. To this extent, when Rosenberg (2005) refers to *life-alienating* language he does not only refers to

a spoken practice, but also to gestures, feelings and thoughts embedded in an environment where emotions are cut-off from the people.

Moreover, relevant to what emerged above is a reflection on the self that can be found in connection to the Italian novel “One, No One and One Hundred” by Luigi Pirandello. The author describes the life of a man, Vitangelo Mostarga, who realised that his identity was not only constituted by what he thought of himself, but also of what any other person thought of him (Pirandello, 1990). The novel makes the reader reflect on the coexistence of multiple identities within oneself which are part of the mutability and complexity of life. Likewise, I have felt fragmented at work and I had the perception of playing different roles, which provoked me confusion and fatigue. On the contrary, my aim was to live in one integrated self, where I did not have to play any other personality but my own self.

In January I went to a “ONGO” course - combination between nonviolent communication practice by Marshall Rosenberg and Zen meditation - for four weeks, every Monday evening. What brought me there was the need to find coherence at work: bring together my educational role to my values. The course was scheduled in the evening with a small group of people, there were 5 of us. I already knew one of the participants, the others were new to me. The atmosphere was relaxing, with blurred lightening and comfortable meditation cushions for us to sit on. The 2-hours practice were held in circle, we initially meditated, then had some nonviolent communication exercises and finally shared our insights. Time seemed to slow down and recreate an atmosphere for safety to be myself at my own path. When the time came to share our experience at the end of each session, I encountered a new form of listening. I noticed that the other participants, before saying something, they were really taking the time to listen to what they were feeling and choosing their words with care to express them. That seemed to me unusual in the way I normally speak. The first perception I had was in the difference of time. The moment before expressing oneself is first made of

silence. Not an empty silence, but a moment of diving into one's inner movements. Then, only when the inner picture appear clear, the words come out so neat, clear and liberatory. I was asked to recall an uncomfortable situation and to tell about it, trying to listen to my feelings and needs. The situation I chose was when I made dinner for a friend and he showed up one hour later than the agreed time. How did that make me feel? I firstly found a poor vocabulary in expressing my feelings, such as: I felt "bad" and "sad". I was requested to be more precise about them. So I found the words "disappointed", "angry" and "frustrated" to be meaningful enough for that situation. Once communicated the feeling, I had to look for the need behind them that made that specific feeling to emerge. Needs were something even newer to come across with. I initially said that I felt "frustrated and angry at him because he arrived late without caring about the fact that I spent 2 hours cooking for us to enjoy that meal". The facilitator handed me the table of needs and asked me to express my needs, not his wrongdoings. So I found that, actually, what was happening is that: "I really cared to enjoy a special meal together so I felt frustrated, sad and disappointed when he showed up late. I needed to be appreciated and respected, that is why I felt so furious". I understood that there was no judgement in this second sentence and that I felt relieved in formulating my disappointment in such a way. I was finally asked to phrase the full sentence and make a request to the other person that could match my needs and respect his ones. I tried first with: "...Could you be so kind to come on time when I invite you next time?". The facilitator told me that in saying: "Could you be so kind" I was already accusing him that if he wasn't doing as I asked, then I assumed him to be rude and such a demand was satisfying my need to be on time, without taking into consideration what were his needs. Second try: "Will you be willing to arrive on time when we agree on having dinner together? We can arrange a time that would suit us both." This last sentence was a clear request that would allow the other person to understand my request clearly without feeling accused.

To re-elaborate a conflictual situation and formulate from it one single sentence took me almost 10 minutes. I wondered if I could ever be able to apply it to my everyday life, to empathise with my needs and feelings and be able to express them. The facilitator, noticing my puzzlement, said that the goal was not to master nonviolent communication overnight, but to become each day more aware and listening to our world within.

Willing to get more experience and become more practical with nonviolent communication, I took 2 more weekly courses and attended a weekend workshop with an international facilitator. At first I was doing it for myself, to gain more clarity in my relationships and to become more mindful about my behaviour and my feelings.

However, the more I became aware of my needs and feelings, my working environment became tighter and suffocating. On one side, the fact that I was getting to know my emotions and needs, lead me to feel more frustrated at work. It has been like opening Pandora's box. On the other, at the same time, more emotional awareness served me to build a stronger bond of empathy with the children. At a point that when I witnessed my students' frustrations, I remembered mine as a child. I started empathising more with the children and become more understandable towards them. They play, eat, sleep inside a building from 8 to 10 hours per day. They have their first experiences: they say their first words, learn to walk, eat by themselves; they make their first friends and store their first memories. How can this wonderful panorama of first encounters with life be so scattered with judgements, orders and emotional hindrance? I often heard children being described as lazy, hyperactive, noisy, spoiled, too sensitive, too clever, "behind", problematic, difficult, aggressive, naughty. I felt dazed by these words and often wondered the purpose of giving a taxonomy to the children. I had no courage to defend my opinion that they are not "too little to understand" and perceive the judgments they are identified with.

I asked myself if I could at least bring something different. In which way could I be with them without judging them? How could I tell them the right and wrong I believed without falling in any moralism whatsoever? How would I tell to the other educators to stop labelling and judging?

The experience of nonviolent communication moved me to be more demanding as my doubts on the preconceived educative systems increased. I choose at first to take a moment of silence and listening.

I became much “slower” in the routine because I was taking the time to hear the child’s needs and I enjoyed noticing the many nuances of their personality that I could not see before. I engaged in playing with them, more like in the way they play rather than by the adult standards. So I spent lots of time running around, drawing, role-playing, singing and dancing. It was my way to connect with them, to gain their trust and to understand their world. This period, from February to April 2019 it was also the time I drove apart from my colleagues. I was so focused on the children that I had little connection with them. I found the time I spend with them useless. I had little interest in undertaking conversation because I found their comments on children behaviours too severe and judgemental. Although at that time, I had already taken all the nonviolent communication courses, but I could not yet manage to find an empathic connection with my colleagues.

What brought nonviolent communication into my work environment was at first to gain familiarity with silence. As I preannounced above, silence is not an empty space but a field of freedom where the mind can choose whether to rest, analyse herself, create new thoughts or listen to her emotions, thoughts and internal movements (Savette, 2018). Silence has been the fertile ground to discover listening of my needs and feelings and the one of the children. It has become my prerequisite for speaking and my tool for learning to engage on an empathic level. The presence of silence has also changed my perception of time. Being

focused on the happenings within myself and the children, I noticed that I start perceiving time more intensely. I did not longer have in mind the preoccupation about how long the day would have been, but I felt plunged into time with presence and no hurry; occupy time and the routine became less rushing.

The perception of time changes according to the daily routine of a person and it is influenced by its state of mind (Avni-Babad and Ritov, 2003). Under pressure or feeling relaxed, time assumes different meanings. I myself found a shift when I focused my attention less on the quantity spoken words and more on the quality of them rose by the connection with my emotions. Such experiences, as the realisation of the importance of silence, might appear as “invisible” details from an external eye. Instead they represent a change in the quality of my presence with the children and have contribute my understanding of education.

5.2.1 Beyond education

From the reflections I found dated April 2019 on my kindergarten notebook:

“Why am I an educator? - I ask myself as I collect my stuff to go home.

I am an educator because I believe that under the concept of education merge a world beyond schooling. I believe tout simply that through education we can contribute to create a better world. I know I am a drop in the ocean, but I want ceaselessly to look for ways to be more authentic and transmit this quality to the children on a daily basis, moment by moment. I feel I do have a great responsibility to build a more respectful, sensitive, relational and joyful living.

What confirms me that with children I am in the right place is that, when I get home after a day at work, I feel overwhelmed of love. Their image stay impressed in me for hours. I can still see all their faces, their joy for living and feelings, their daily improvements and it make my heart blossom.

Curiosity and the willingness to reach the other person and understand what is within oneself and the other is the first step towards nonviolent relationships (Malinowska, 2019). The letter I wrote manifests the intellectual and affective commitment I feel for children. Nonviolent communication has been the educative tool that nourish my commitment to education and have also opened me the way to other further pedagogical insights. In fact, to gain better knowledge on nonviolent strategies and be more consistent within my work with the children, I start looking for authors and theories related to the topic. I soon found out that the relevance of moving against the wide-spread use of violence through nonviolent education is supported by neuroscientific evidence. As the anthropologist and neuroscientist Pier Paolo Giorgi (2018) claims:

“The neuronal system of a human being at 6 months old is for its great part not yet defined. Unlike the other functional systems of the human body, the brain follow a different time in developing. From age 0 to 5 years old, children’s brain plasticity is at its highest potential; it is acquiring the information from the environment to shape the body, articulate movements and learn a language to become part of a specific culture. At preschool age, children learn the basis of living in the culture they are born in. The question about children’s education at that age should be considered of primary importance for the development of culture and society” (Giorgi, 2018).

The contribution of neuroscience in explaining the development of children during preschool age allows to understand how much the impact of emotional and social learning can affect the child’s upbringing towards peace. During early childhood the brain functions as a “sponge” to the external world. Its plasticity allows a child to grasp all the information to structure himself as a human being: learn a language, walk and use its opposable fingers (Giorgi, 2018). Young children age 0-3 learn from all they experience in the environment and their behaviour is also influenced by the example of their caregivers. Addressing the affective domain is determinant during this early stage of life to enhance their capacity for cooperation, prosociality and peaceful living. The following years, especially until their 5-6 years old are less critical in terms of brain development, but they are still crucial for the

social skills and emotional balance of the child. The environment and the people surrounding young children are their examples to learn how to regulate their emotions. (Moiser, 2013 p.79). An attitude in communicating with empathy and unconditional positive regard is associated with a positive developmental outcome (Moiser, 2013 p. 79). Favouring children's emotional intelligence, compassion and empathy, all elements essential during the upbringing of young children.

What is commonly required by school usually focus on the capacity of attention, learning, memory, decision making and social functioning. According to Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio (2007) neuroscience confirms that cognitive development is underpinned and inseparable to emotional experience. There is an interconnection between intellectual reasoning and *emotional thought* that determines human behaviour (Immordino-Yand and Damasio, 2007 p. 2). This suggests the importance of focusing *in primis* on providing a strong, healthy and balanced emotional background for preschool children, as their brain plasticity is at its early stage of formation. According to neuroscience, early childhood brain is the most fertile land to plant the seeds of social change: an attitude towards nonviolence, compassion, altruism and empathy may be the answer for a different future (Giorgi, 2018).

Teaching empathy and compassion helps to provide a child the skills required in a world at its "anthropocene" era. We live in a planet exploited by human impact like never before. According to Mary Renck Jalongo (2014) human unsustainability is calling for urgent solutions and one way to tackle the dilemma of the anthropocene is to invest in early childhood education. Young children are the inheritors of the present world and they will be the ones facing the struggles we envision today (Jalongo, 2014 p. V). Jalongo (2014) questions how early childhood education should move forward to provide the children the skills to create a more compassionate world. Her suggestions advance the necessity to teach

young children kindness, altruism and compassion, contrary to the common thinking that they are “too little” to understand (Jalongo, 2014 p. 33). In fact, as Jerome Bruner (2003) states it “[a]ny subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development” (p. 33). Also, international agencies influencing educational policies, such as OECD, recognize the need for compassion, kindness, altruism and empathy, as well as emotional awareness, to be the tools for a social change in front of the dramatic social-environmental issues of today’s world (OECD, 2018).

A prosocial behaviour for young children means to learn from early years to manage conflicts nonviolently, sharing, being kind and empathic, having a sense of togetherness with the other children, trusting the presence of the adult and caring for other’s feelings. Prosociality includes respect for all forms of life and being responsible for the environment (Jalongo, 2014). Considering the emotional side is therefore crucial for learning to live together and make ethical decisions. Starting at a young age to perceive feelings and emotions to recognize and express them, will most likely teach a child to be in contact with his/her own inner world and become more understanding also towards other living beings (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007).

To conclude, the point raised by neuroscience together with the current environmental, cultural, social crisis opens up the question on how to educate to be a compassionate, nonviolent human being. Acknowledging that the cognitive growth develops in relation to learning a sensory emotional process of learning from the environment (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007 p. 7), what could be the educative strategies to promote a healthy-emotional life as well as empathy, nonviolence and prosociality? Nonviolent communication strategies applied in preschool age could help the children to manage their feelings which is “one of the most challenging tasks of early childhood” (Moiser, 2013 p.87) and promote the values and skills to contribute to peace building.

6 Ethical concerns

This study has been conducted with the use of autoethnographic research method and writing genre which makes it a personal text written in the first person. I have been adopting my own experiences, both recorded on journal and through memories, to present the data and I discussed each session connecting with different theoretical inputs. The autoethnographic research represents the data on linear chronologic process (Frankel and Devers, 2000) and it begins far back in the memories of the past, back to childhood, when I did not know about autoethnography at all. At present, when looking at the past with the awareness of the methodology, I discover insights, meaningful conversations, encounters and unexpected events that together represent the constellation of my autoethnographic data.

The data I used for this study are collected both from a range of memories, episodes and reflections during my life that constitute my interest in education; and the experience of being a kindergarten teacher over the year October 2018 - June 2019.

In the first place, the criteria I used to select my data was to find out the roots of myself as an educator in the past of my childhood and my schooling years. I discovered that the way I used to engage with my feelings as a child and how I used to see the world of the adults and how I experienced school, influenced my sensitivity and empathy I have today towards the children.

In the second place, I collected data from journal entrances about my time at the kindergarten. Those are recent proofs of my thoughts, perceptions, sensitiveness, motivations, feelings and emotions, strengths and weakness of my educative role which brought me to discover nonviolent communication. I ended reflecting on the role of nonviolent communication in opening my horizons towards a broad vision of education that englobe neurosciences, culture and social responsibility.

The data I have been collecting, I believe they answer the research questions. However, they open up ethical concerns. The review on autoethnographic studies (see above) confirms that the realm of feelings, emotions, memories, personal accounts, stories, etc. reveal cultural and social aspects through the expression of the self. On level of procedural ethics, in the representation of third parties in the text, I do not declare the name of the school, neither I cite any of the colleagues nor children I have been working with. Nevertheless, other relevant ethical concerns are related to relational ethics (Tracy, 2010). Although I am not naming directly any institution or colleagues, if they were to read my work, they might be affected by it. As Andrew Sparkes (2013) writes: "After all, our stories are not our own. In the process of writing about ourselves, we also write about others. In this act we run the risk of making those we write about not only recognizable to others but recognizable to themselves in ways they might not feel comfortable with or agree to even if they have given their informed consent (whatever this might mean) for the story to be told." (p. 207).

While writing this autoethnography I realised that the process of creating, putting ideas together and transforming them into words, is part of the autoethnographic journey itself. The theme of truthfulness therefore emerges as this work represents a continuum between my self-awareness and the research. Writing allows me to relive, reflect on my experiences, but it also leave inside me a sense of deep curiosity for the possibility I can explore using autoethnography. I am grateful for having had the chance to explore my way of seeing, feeling, thinking, embodying and relating to the world and make a research out of it. Lived in such a way, this work goes beyond the commitment of an academic task. I have the feeling that, while reaching the end, I am only beginning to know an aspect of myself reflected into a phenomenon I lived. However, there are infinite ways to keep exploring and creating. I can say that autoethnography has become part of my way of living, than a research method limited to the realm of academics.

7 Looking at the whole picture: final considerations

Summary

Data entrances are divided in 3 parts.

First part. In *Becoming an educator* I contextualize my choice to be an educator and my needs to look for nonviolent tools for transforming conflicts into nonviolent learning opportunities. Second section, *Childhood*, intends to represent my personality as a child. I believe it partly influences the way I interact with children today, based on sensitiveness and care for their feelings and their independence. Then, in the third part, *Schooling years and University* tells about the passages from public to private school and their different teaching styles. In particular, I explore the changes University brought to my understanding of society and education. It has been mostly relevant for my future profession as an educator, the shift I found from a learning motivation nurtured by an extrinsic impulse, in comparison to an intrinsic willingness to learn. Intrinsic motivation has been the one that opened my mind to learn for pleasure rather than by force, which I believe it is most fundamental for meaningful and enduring learning, especially for young children.

Second part concerns most recently the last working year 2019. Within the sections I represent both my experience within the school and the first approach to nonviolent communication skills and practice.

Third part reveals what I feel in regard of being an early childhood educator. I reflect on the contribute neurosciences provides in underlying the crucial role of educating towards nonviolence in order to change a social paradigm.

Overall, Chapter 5 reveals some passages of my life from childhood to the present that I believe contribute to my educative vision and practice and constitute myself as an educator. Along the content of my writings of the fifth Chapter, I explore my memories and some

written reports that both open further theoretical reflections and help me to be more conscious of the choices I made in my educative path.

My initial interest has been in reading my childhood experience of schooling, that moved from an authoritative public school, to a more libertarian and finally went back to a traditional system. Although those passages are part of a distant past, they represent my emotional experience of schooling which are partly constitutive of myself (Campbell and Garcia, 2009). Being the experience of schooling constituted by an extrinsic motivation for learning, determined by the willingness to feel accepted and to socialise, I soon lived school and learning as a “must do” task. It has been only at the time of university that I opened my mind to the complexity of the globalised world and I become more intrinsically interested and active in learning. I realised then, that my feeling of disorientation was partly due to a sense of loss of values, incumbent in an highly interconnected contemporary society.

After my studies, I finally started working as an educator and it is only then that the theories I have learned found a real challenge: children. Children brought me back to connect with my experience of schooling and emotions as a child and they opened my perspective towards nonviolent educational alternatives. The presence of doubts, frustrations and crisis that working in a kindergarten implicated, lead me to search beyond my knowledge. They brought me to undertake few nonviolent communication courses and explore the world of neuroscience and emotions, as well as to write the present thesis.

Finally connecting the dots

What this study brings is a discourse emerging from a couple of questions that I initially made: what have been the influencing factors (in terms of life experiences and theories) that made me become an educator? Has nonviolent communication strengthen my educative practice? If am an educator today, it is because of some experiences, encounters, paths and thoughts I had throughout my life. Together with the theorisations on a culture of violence

and my experience as a kindergarten teacher, I could notice that there is a connection between the use of language and the wellbeing of the children. This insight came to me in a moment of crisis on my educational role in the school. I recognised that a language structured on dichotomisation and judgements, typical of a domination system, leads to conflicts and polarisations between the children; on the contrary, I was bewildered to comprehend - after attending few nonviolent communication workshops – that a compassionate communicative approach has the potentiality to change the environment in a more caring and cooperative one. From this intuition, I moved on investigating more about nonviolent communication; all along that period, I was also looking for a thesis topic.

Putting together the pieces, I directed my research questions at first, in understanding the practice of nonviolent communication within schools. Then, after investigating on the theme, I observed how my outlook on my educative setting and more broadly on culture and society, started to change. As much as I was moving my personal and pedagogical perspective towards new discoveries, I also decided to write an autoethnography and to include my own life experiences into my research.

The reason why I exposed some of the background theories of nonviolent communication as literature review, is due to the fact that I was aiming at demonstrating that a personal and pedagogical shift happen within me starting both, from considering human nature as naturally cooperative, instead of violent; as well as, from introducing a communicative approach that is inclined to empathise and connect to every person's needs and feelings. In the theoretical section, I focused therefore to understand human need theories and to look at language as a mean to spread violence or peace within the society.

Moving on the discussion to the methodological choice of undertaking a autoethnography, I would say that it came naturally to me when I formulated the research questions. The focus of the research is to understand a phenomenon through my own self: my flesh, my eyes, my

thoughts, my feelings and emotions and my memories. It has been a smooth choice because of the tendency I have to collect written reports about my experiences and to reflect on them. In addition, neither it was for me a news to decide to approach this research through autoethnography, as I was already passionate about it during my first year of Master. For these reasons, I felt confident enough to undertake such a path, acknowledging its strengths and weakness within the academic world.

The dialogue between who I am professionally and my own self, together with the theoretical discussions emerging from the data, constitute the results of this study. Collecting material from my distant past and my recent working experience, I aimed at demonstrating that the path of becoming an educator is a practice that requires self-consciousness, integrity and socio-cultural responsibility. It engages the whole self: the educator transmits to the children who he/she is as a person, its values and vision of the world. The social responsibility of an educator goes beyond his/her professionalism: it aims at shaping the minds and hearts of the future generations. Questions about culture, society and neurosciences have been crucial for my educational change and I believe they could also be for all educators that aims at creating a nonviolent environment.

Overall, on a personal level this study brought me to explore with more clarity and deepness essential questions about my profession and myself. Under an academic perspective, I trust my own voice might be of insight for other teachers and bring the reader to self-reflect on its own life experiences that determine his/her professional identity. I finally hope to contribute to broaden the field of nonviolent communication to an academic and non-academic audience. As there are few academic researches on the matter, this might open the possibility for more studies to be held in the field of nonviolence.

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