

**THE BACKGROUND  
INTEGRATOR**

**s.y.2018/2019**

***A path for happiness: Empaty***



"The ability to step into the shoes of another person, aiming to understand their feelings and perspectives, and to use that understanding to guide our actions." The Mind Journal

"The Mind Journal" - The Mind Journal

"Empathy is like a universal solvent. Any problem, immersed in empathy, becomes soluble. "Simon Baron Cohen

School Year 2018/2019

## THE BACKGROUND INTEGRATOR

*DEVELOPING EMPATHY: "Going one way to live happily with others!"*

The integrating background (Paolo Zanelli 1986 - A background to integrate) is one of the most important concepts of Italian institutional pedagogy, representing an educational tool for organizing the Educational Context. This educational tool, indicates an educational design methodology, but is also configured, as a large container, in which to bring together the contents and the paths aimed at building a significant environment, establishing objectives and resources.

Our team, composed by the Organizational Scientific Direction, the Psycho-Pedagogical Coordination and the Educational staff, meets every year to develop the Didactic-Educational Planning, which includes the definition of the educational objectives in the didactic programming. On this occasion, choices are also made of content and method and the Integrating Background is traced as an instrument to collect and irradiate the educational work to the whole Community, represented not only by children but also by their parents and by all teachers.



For us, therefore, the background integrator does not have the mere function of linking the objectives to educational work, but allows us to spread and build a shared psychopedagogical culture, passing from educators to children, reaching the parents, in a full systemic spirit and community.

We often repeat, provoking some laughter, that the real users of our services are not the children but the parents, and in what seems a joke, one of our main objectives is hidden, working with parenting; in fact, children have an innate push for growth and change, while adults have consolidated deep resistance to all forms of transformation, which if not solicited, crystallize, hindering every change. However, a parent can count on a great coach, who urges and motivates him to change every day, every hour, every moment of his life: his own son!

Our mission is therefore to offer you the opportunity to seize this opportunity. All the parents I have personally followed have benefited of this new point of view and they have made it their

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point of strenght.

The theme of this new school year is also very important for the health and for the future of humanity: empathy is a skill that often correlates with a happy life, thus allowing us to work in continuity with our Mission of happiness. .

In recent years, a lot has been discovered about the neurological mechanisms that mediate this ability and why it was so important for the success of our survival and for the construction of our well-being.

We will start from the children, of course, because investing in them is a great responsibility for us, not so much because they represent our future (I hate this phrase), but because we have a duty to offer them a future!

Now we are going to move on to the school theme and to the project that gave it life (...)

"When I was thinking about this kindergarten and I was writing about its project (P.Boccaccini 2004 - A Me Mi Piace: guidelines for early childhood educational services that are competent in promoting wellbeing), I set myself the goal of creating a place where the children entered happy and where they happily wanted to stay. A place built on smiles and joy, intentionally promoted with choices aimed at making people feel welcomed, serene children and motivated educators.  
"Perla Boccaccini

(...) creating a "welcoming" place not only in the physical space, but above all in the mental space.

We will come to you parents, with activities, seminars and workshops, which will set out to promote your empathic skills, to be addressed especially to your coaches (children)!

The integrating background, therefore, is the first informative tool, which allows us to reach all of you, telling you how we intend to achieve the educational-didactic objectives and which theme will link them together, offering a practical-theoretical framework on which to reflect and with whom to grow up together.

Below you will find: the definition of the concept of empathy, the explanation of the neurological mechanisms that mediate this ability, its negative from the psychopathological point of view, the description of the early causes for its development or not in the child and a map of the actions that we mean to undertake to develop this competence in our students.

With these wishes, I wish you a fruitful school year, full of emotions, surprises, relationships and changes, offering you all our support and our understanding dott.ssa Perla Boccaccini direction scientific and organizational Klc School - kids learning center it background: the frame theoretical.

*Dott.ssa Perla Boccaccini*

Scientific and organizational direction

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## The background: the theoretical frame

### What is it the empathy?

the empathy (from greek en-pathos: hear inside) consists in recognizing the emotions of others as if they were own, lowering in the reality others for understand points of view, thoughts, feelings, emotions. The empathy is an important emotional competence, thanks to which is possible to enter more easily in tune with the person with whom you interact, is also a social skill of fundamental importance and represents one of the basic tools of a effective and rewarding interpersonal communication. The human beings are able to recognize the emotions of others and even more give an emotional meaning to simple gestures, doing inferences on emotional state of the person who performs them. If we see one person that moves agitated, we can almost feel his fear as if it was ours. This ability is innate and a mechanism called mirror neuron system as recently been discovered in our brain that average this function (Rizzolatti and colleagues, 2001).

This group of neurons, that includes parietal areas, lower fronts and pre-motor fronts, is in charge of recognition of the actions not only when we observe them but also when we read or listen one word associated to an action, subsequent studies have demonstrated that observing others determines the activation of the pre-central regions (welsh et to., 2004; Rizzolatti and Craighero, 2004; Keyer and Gazzola, 2009).

In summary the mirror neurons concern with the interpretation that we give to actions, they can help to internalize and repeat an action, but also to understand and give a sense, understand why the other act in a determined way and if they need help.

This means that we are strongly influential, so that the state of soul of others can change ours, the same effect occurs when one is exposed to the actions of others, especially in tender age. For example the exposure of children to violent actions and behavior, increases the possibility that they behavior becomes violent, because they tend in an automatical and innate way, thanks to their mirror neurons, to imitate all the things they see. To develop empathy in children means to help them to give a name to actions, and to do hypotesis on why of these actions and especially means to teach them how to choose which actions undertake, in short, this reduces the possibility to develop alexithymic attitudes or behaviors.

### What is it the alexithymia?

The alexithymia (from greek a: lack, lexis: word and thymos: emotion; literally not to have the words for the emotions), is one syndrome that involves those people that have a deep difficulty to recognize, control and adjust their own emotions. The emotions have a physiological base, motor-behavioral and experiential-cognitive and they express through the interpersonal communication. The alexithimic subject is lacking, especially, in the cognitive-experiential component and in the

interpersonal communication of emotion. The physiological and motor-behavioral levels, remain without a conscious, cognitive and verbal regulation, also, these subject are not able to use the interpersonal relationships to adjust the emotions and this lack of the social sharing, prevents them from identifying the emotions themselves, for this reason the alexithymia is defined as an affective regulation disturbance (Taylor and to., 1991). Most of the theories, agree in stating that the regulation and the containment of the emotional experiences, occur in the very first years of the child's life, within of the relationship with the primary caregiver or caretaker (Bion 1962, Winnicott, 1965, Kohut, 1976; Bowlby, 1989; Main, & to. 1985).

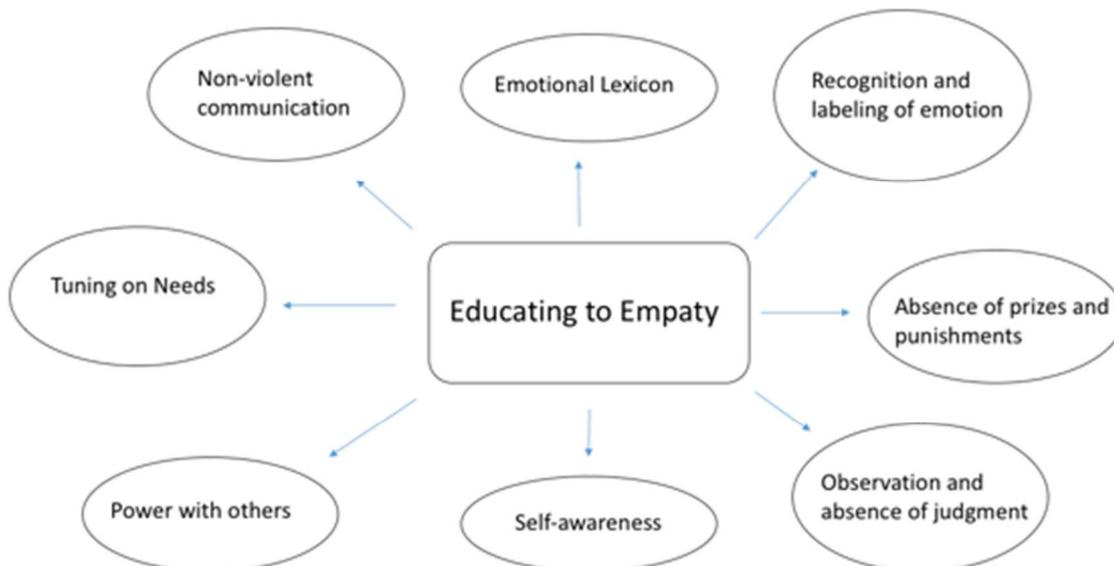
For example, the Infant Reserch study investigated the role of mutual mother-child regulation, demonstrating that the latter has the task of regulating the child's emotional states, while the affective signals coming from the same, have the role, in turn, to regulate the affectivity and behavior of the mother in a mutual process of tuning (Stern, 1984,1985; Emde et al. 1991).

Another important maternal function was investigated by Bion (1962), who described how the proto-emotions, or the primitive sensations without elaborations, defined by him  $\beta$  elements, and derived from the experience made by the child, must be transformed from the mother, through what he defines as  $\beta$  function. This process of metabolization, which takes place with maternal containment and defined as a Reverie function, allows these primitive emotions to transform into mental representations of emotions, dreams, fantasies, thoughts, in synthesis in mental representations of the child's internal world. In cases where this maternal function is deficient, these proto-emotions remain undigested ( $\beta$  elements) that is, not representable, thinkable and perceptible. The Bionian model helps to understand why a alexithymic subject can get to cry without understanding the reason (very common situation in young children who need to metabolize the proto-emotions): crying can have two very different functions, that of expressing an emotion and to evacuate a painful thing which in reality is unknown in its origin and its meaning (element  $\beta$ ). Winnicott (1965) has also unveiled the role of caregiver in emotional regulation, contributing (with the concept of holding and transactional object) to the internalization of regulation. Observational studies conducted on newborns in the interaction with their caregiver, show that in the child is present a communicative activity centered on the expression of emotions (Crugnola & Baioni, 2002). If the presence of basic innate emotions, expressed from the beginning, is therefore demonstrated, the subjective-experiential aspect of basic emotions and the most complex emotions (love, shame, envy, pride, guilt) develop during early childhood .

## EDUCATE WITH EMPATHY: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

How to educate in Empathy? What dimensions should be developed to raise emotionally competent and empathic children?

Thanks to the years of theoretical and practical experimentation carried out in this kindergarten, we have succeeded in delineating the psychoeducational guidelines to educate children to happiness, and consequently, promote their well-being. The promotion of empathic competence is one of these ways. Our experience has led us to the conclusion that empathy in children is given by the possession and development of the following dimensions:



Starting from these dimensions, the educational team will use the integrating background to bring together the contents, objectives and paths of the didactic-educational projects of each section.

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