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**The “Table for Education”:
learning from community life experiences**

The paper aims to propose the learning potential of dialogue as well as of breakdown and conflict in a special context (the Table for education”) and using a particular tool: the MAG (méthode d’analyse en groupe, ie. method of analysis in a group) (L. Van Campenhout, J-M. Chaumont, A. Franssen, 2005).

The complexity of community contexts implies the presence of diversity and requires to implement not only a plurality of levels of action, but also a plurality of interpretations. In this sense, MAG represents a useful methodological device that allows to face the analysis of phenomena that characterize the life of a community, while promoting in people involved capability to engage with diversity and otherness.

In groups, or in general in the relational contexts that involve more than one subject, the representations of the phenomena are divergent, as well as the needs and resources that each one brings. Assuming that this heterogeneity is unavoidable, we propose a possible way through which it could be managed and also promote learning.

This perspective of a relational, plural and conflictual construction of social phenomena and their hermeneutics refers to a theoretical framework that allows to assume conflict as precondition for a cooperation that is intrinsically conflictual but, precisely for this, enabling awareness of a real togetherness (Ricoeur P., 1969).

1. The “Table for Education” and the research approach

The paper presents a research experience carried out in the municipality of Orzinuovi, a large municipality in the Province of Brescia, (Italy), which adheres to the International Association of Educating Cities (IAEC).

In Orzinuovi, in 2010 a “Manifesto for Education” was shared and, in 2012, an “Educational Pact” was signed. In addition, in 2013, a widespread educational sensibility and a strong sense of

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community led to the creation of a "Table for Education". Around this "Table" the representatives of main educational institutions working in the territory sat: family, school, immigrants, entrepreneurs, cultural-sports-voluntary associations, Catholic Church, politics. The purpose of the Table is to create a renewed educational alliance among various community members.

For this purpose, the themes of dialogue, mutual listening, negotiation, participation are considered strategic, not only as goals to achieve but also as elements characterizing the way of working within the Table itself. It is important that those who participate feel themselves as an active part of community life and have the ability and responsibility to contribute to it, creating sense of agency and social responsibility.

For these reasons, it was decided to propose a research approach that could also become an educating way of working, capable of promoting different views, sharing ideas and projects, pooling resources and actions. It was also important to start from community life experiences, by telling stories, and creating opportunities for reflection.

The method chosen was the MAG, that is, the method of "analysis in the group" (L. Van Campenhoudt, J-M. Chaumont, A. Franssen, 2005). This method is based on the hermeneutic approach of P. Ricoeur, namely the conflict of interpretations (P. Ricoeur, 1969).

The MAG has the peculiarity of addressing a heterogeneous group of people who share the same object/matter of research, but carry out different representations and divergent interests, even though they are all on the same plane (regardless of age, sex, status ...). As researcher, I opted for MAG, precisely because this method of research (but also of intervention) has the particularity of addressing groups composed of people who are directly involved and affected by the problems faced, while maintaining different positions and roles.

In concrete realization, people who are part of the Table have jointly analyzed the experiences/situations actually happening in the community. These events have been narrated by participants themselves, following a rigorous methodological procedure, conducted by researchers themselves. The MAG, in fact, provides a sequence consisting of a series of collective analyzes of the proposed narratives.

A research or an intervention conducted through the MAG follow a well-defined sequence of multiple collective analyzes (at least 2 or 3) of the narratives proposed by the participants. In its essential structure the MAG was divided into four phases (narration, interpretations, analysis, practical perspectives and evaluation) and 15 stages (as illustrated in the following summary table) and requires that the group meets two or three days.

Active participation by all the people sat around the table was promoted at each stage.

First phase: THE STORYTELLING	
1st stage	Story Proposals
2nd stage	Choice of stories
3rd stage	Narration
4th stage	Issues seen by the narrator
5th stage	Information requests
second phase: INTERPRETATIONS	
6th stage	First " turn of table "
7th stage	Reactions of narrator
8th stage	Re-listening to the narration (optional)
9th stage	Second "turn of table"
10th stage	Reactions of narrator
third phase: ANALYSIS	
11th stage	Convergences and divergences
12th stage	Theoretical contributions
13th stage	Researcher hypotheses and new issues
fourth phase: PRACTICAL OUTLOOK AND ASSESSMENT	
14th stage	Practical Perspectives
15th stage	Assessment

Van Campenhoudt L., Chaumont J-M., Franssen A. (2005). La méthode d'analyse en groupe. Applications aux phénomènes sociaux, p. 66.

Without going into the specific, it is important, however, to clarify some essential steps of the process, providing some essential details for each phase:

- In the first phase each participant must tell a fact/event related to a situation directly experienced, which seems significant compared to the theme/issue of the meeting. It is fundamental that narrator is directly involved in the story. The narration lasts about 5 minutes and it is also necessary that each one gives concrete and evocative title to his own narration. Already this first phase offers an interesting opportunity to take note of the plurality of stories and experiences.

Afterwards, a single story is chosen by vote (providing arguments). The narrator of this story proceeds with a new narration, more detailed, carefully explaining the reasons for the choice and also responding to the informative (and not interpretative!) questions formulated by participants.

- The second phase leaves space to the interpretations of participants, avoiding however judgments. Narrator can further integrate his story, following this “tour” of interpretations. If it is deemed necessary, it is possible to proceed to a new listening to the story and narrator's replies.

- In the third phase researchers propose to the group a synthesis of the interpretations, highlighting in particular the convergences and divergences emerged with respect to the explanation of the situation. Basically, all possible interpretations are put in relation, in order to find "an agreement between the disagreements". In order to foster the growth of knowledge compared to the issues addressed, researchers can offer some theoretical and interpretative contributions. The phase closes with the possibility, for participants, to further re-problematize the issues, starting from concrete experiences.

- The fourth and final phase leads to the identification of practical perspectives, starting from shared analysis, with the aim of booting change processes. Remaining faithful to the peculiarities of MAG, even the choice of actions to be taken has no absolute value and contemplates the presence of divergent interests and conflicting opinions.

What is actually needed, to close the MAG research process, is that participants make an assessment of how they have experienced the process, what has turned out to be problematic and what were the resources.

For their part, the researchers involved draw up a report according to the following track: an introduction about the object of the work and the peculiarity of the device; the presentation of

narratives; the report of partial analysis (transcription of narration, main information gathered following participants' questions, convergences and divergences, theoretical contributions, hypothesis and practical perspectives); a general conclusion in which the main outcomes obtained and their relationship with the aims of the research are indicated (L. Van Campenhoudt, J-M. Chaumont, A. Franssen, 2005, p. 167).

Concretely, therefore, among all narratives brought by each participant, one is chosen and, through well-coordinated "rounds of table", where convergences and divergences emerge on several occasions, each one expresses his own interpretation of the events.

The process of confrontation and negotiation makes it possible to arrive at a "synthesis scheme", which collects the different interpretative hypotheses and problematizations, arriving at a formalization of disagreements and dissent. The summary scheme also includes a specific area dedicated to exploring and discussing possible concrete actions to be undertaken in relation to the question / problem analyzed. The elaboration of this scheme represents a crucial passage of MAG device.

The "Table for Education" is a context particularly suited to MAG, which, to better fulfill its potential, requires the presence of a special circumstance: that of bringing together people affected by the studied problem and willing to be involved in a "collective exercise", on a plan of equality, regardless of status, age, gender.

The reciprocal is also valid: the MAG tool is also particularly useful with respect to the Table's mission. The Table for Education was in fact designed as a space for dialogue and reflexivity, in which relationships are experienced as resources and occasions for learning. By listening to the narratives and interpretations of others, people who participated in the table could discover their role in shaping experience and meaning, and how they are part of the construction of togetherness, common knowledge and we-identity.

In Orzinuovi, the MAG was tested in the year 2014/2015, in correspondence with the initial phase of multi-annual community planning. Following the conclusion of MAG, in 2016 an idea arose: to put in place interventions that could be closer to community needs, as the expression of a specific attention to the territory of Orzinuovi. A participative methodological device has been prepared, assessing community needs and resources: the Community Needs Assessment Survey (Neuber, K., et al., 1980; Allison, M.J., J. Kaye, 1997).

The "Table for Education" therefore continues its path of research and training in the perspective of togetherness, remaining faithful to the intention of functioning as a real "coalition": ie as an organization of social subjects with different interests, who "put together" their resources (human

and material) to achieve change (which they would be unable to obtain on their own). Sociological literature teaches us that coalitions also increase the sense of sharing projects, they help groups to have mutual trust (D. Chavis, 2001).

The fact of creating a coalition implies, however, a precise commitment (and training) towards the ability to develop more systemic visions of problems, becoming also "incubators" of original solutions. The coalitions have a coordinated, holistic, collaborative, promotional, comprehensive and culturally relevant action (T. Wolff, 2001): in this direction, the MAG device has set up a tool with a potential for the Education Table.

2. MAG's potentiality

From the beginning to the end of the research process, the involvement and active participation of people was necessary.

The enhancement of each participant is a central element of this device, proposed to groups of people who are committed to analyze situations in which they are involved in various ways. Participants, for some aspects, find themselves in the condition of "knowing more" of researcher himself, by virtue of their competence.

Moreover, the contribution of each one is fundamental, as it brings a piece of truth and delivers it to others, not only through the narration of one's own story but also through the analysis of other people's stories (Demazière D., Dubar C., 1997). It is an important recognition and an activation of reflexivity both in the narration of one's own experience and in the critical analysis of the cases proposed by others. This makes it possible to enhance the knowledge that comes from experience, that is, the fact of living within contexts and experiencing social situations (M. De Certeau, 1984).

Along with the enhancement of experiential knowledge, however, MAG leads, moreover, to weave this knowledge with scientific knowledge (the one represented by the researcher). Thus a virtuous circle of interdependencies is created between practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. This is also considered one of the most special aspects of MAG, also distinctive compared to other methods (such as the focus group), whose final analysis and understanding of social phenomena remains a matter managed by the researcher (G. Bajoit, 2003).

In addition, this research tool generates "shared reflection": participants don't learn individually, but through interpersonal relationships. The resources of reflexivity, in a sense, is distributed and disseminated among all participants. This is because each person offers a unique point of view, a specific knowledge (in the case of "Table of education", a specific knowledge of Orzinuovi community).

Finally, relying on real experiences narrated by the participants, it is possible to experience the learning potential of narrative research and build togetherness through a common construction of knowledge without excluding discontents. This aspect is particularly significant for nowadays contexts, in which it is increasingly important, according to Nussbaum, to be able to put ourselves in the shoes of the 'other': it's an essential requirement for developing democracy (M. Nussbaum, 2010).

The complexity of life contexts, the fragility of relationships and individualism keep people away from the possibility of sharing representations and developing overall visions of events, especially social events. The individual perspective is absolutized, with the risk of not entering into dialogue with other points of life (J. Habermas, 1987). Certainly each one has its own legitimate way of interpreting reality, but it is a fragmented and isolated point of view, which cannot coincide with the overall vision, for which a work of comparison is necessary, but also of conflict of interpretations.

This way of doing research and of constructing the knowledge of phenomena can explain the diversity of experiences, the complexity of representations and the dialectic of positions, precisely because it starts from them and remains anchored to their concrete occurrence. Practices are really put at the center and with respect to them we take note of the interpretative plurality that reaches them, a plurality that is constitutive of every social and communal situation.

In the specific case of the Orzinuovi Table, the MAG allowed to create a sense of agency, sharing responsibility for and participating in the building of community projects. It was also fundamental to have the opportunity to develop complex readings of social phenomena and not to simplify the inevitable peasantry and conflict. The plurality of interpretations and the coexistence of divergences are conditions that are not only ineliminable but also generative.

Togetherness implies the ability to value the singularity of individual experiences without undocking them from a collective construction of social phenomena. It's a tension that strongly characterizes every community life and on which it is important to work in a rigorous way, not to cancel tensions and not to simplify processes (P. Corcuff, 2007).

For this reason, beyond the example shown here, the MAG lends itself to be used in other contexts such as, for example, neighborhood groups, school classes, educational institutions, services, professional groups, associations ... (M. Mercier, A. De Muelenaere, 2007). It isn't a coincidence that, since 1980, MAG has been proposed to groups made up of social workers, or teachers, professionals in the health sector, psychologists, magistrates, state officials, etc. We can also mention the NGOs and associations, as well as the various realities referable to the private sector.

3. Togetherness and educational approach to conflict

The fact of being a "relational" device makes the MAG particularly formative even compared to the challenge of togetherness. By promoting people's participation and involvement at every stage, this approach allows to experience the complexity of social relationships. It is in the game of relationships and in the dialectic of confrontation that individual practices and representations can be generative. Educating people not only in the interpretative and reflective attitude, but also in taking on conflict as a paradigm intrinsic to that of cooperation, is an important educational challenge.

The MAG is configured to all effects as an organized confrontation, which begins with a story, follows certain procedures and is guided by precise tasks (L. Van Campenhoudt, J-M. Chaumont, A. Franssen, 2005) .

People confront and clash around the same situation, but in an "ordered" way, that is listening to the narration of others, gathering information, giving space to the plurality of interpretive approaches and accepting both agreements and disagreements. This structure in a certain sense "oblige" not to bypass interactions.

The fact of organizing communications following the "turn of table" criterion, together with the acceptance of both convergences and divergences, gives everyone the right to speak and makes the participants feel challenged to express their point of view. The organization of the debate, in this perspective, is aimed at favoring the full expression of interpretative contrasts and conflicts, avoiding that only a few people take the upper hand. Guaranteeing a word space to everyone is a useful condition to bring out all differences.

The construction of the interpretative approach doesn't reject some hypotheses in favor of others, but makes them coexist and interweaves them into a deeply dialectical (but also dialogical) hermeneutic framework, which aims to formalize dissent rather than consensus. The relational characterization of the device allows conflictuality to express itself and be analyzed, because where there is a divergence it means that a melting pot of interpretations is in action; there are glimpses of novelties and the hermeneutical processes are less static. In this perspective, contradictions and divergences express a heuristic potential.

Correlating divergences and convergences constitutes the truly distinctive element of MAG, making it useful to bring out the presence of both a cooperative dimension and a conflictual dimension in approaching social phenomena. Working to find an "agreement between disagreements" allows to give space to new thoughts, problematizations, interpretative nuances.

In order to reach the outcome of the process, the dialectical dimension is not flattened. The fact of not bringing the participants to a single thought, rather accepting the complexity of interpretation, allows to stand in divergences, resisting the temptation to reduce them to mere search for consent.

Regarding specifically the theme of conflicts and togetherness, they are included in the MAG within a democratic vision of knowledge (but also of power). In this sense we can employ Ricœur perspective, according to which a democratic society recognizes itself as "divided" and its purpose is to manage its conflicts, through confrontation and debate (P. Ricœur, 2017).

Furthermore, the comparison is not merely theoretical and intellectual. By dealing with direct experiences and concrete situations, identity aspects also surface in the play of interpretations, as well as experiences, fears, defenses and resistance, the emotional world of people, doubts and questions, previous stories. (P. Bourdieu, 1997, 2001).

In short, through the experience of Orzinuovi municipality's "Table for education", we can recognize that MAG offers the possibility to understand relational processes and social phenomena in a more reflective way, also measuring with the presence of limits, divergent interests, systems of different values. It is a device that allows to work on different perspectives, also enhancing the conflict as a triggers for transformative learning. Participants are really offered an opportunity to learn how to deal with discordances in a healthier, safer, more respectful and rewarding way (OECD, 2009). People who participated in the "Table for education" have repeatedly expressed the satisfaction of having developed a less passive and more dynamic conception of togetherness, welcoming the dialectical coexistence of cooperation and conflict.

4. Conclusion

The MAG stands out as a method based on a not merely consensual conception of community life. On the contrary, it allows to put at the center a dialectic of both cooperation and conflict (the conflict of interpretations and judgments).

Living fully this dialectic allows everyone to discover diversity as a resource, welcoming the dialectic coexistence of cooperation and conflict: it is an opportunity to learn how to handle disparities in healthier, safer, more respectful and rewarding ways.

In the case presented here, that of the "Table for Education", this tool provided members with a device to be used in order to favor learning and make more effective and democratic decisions for the community. By pursuing a democratic vision of learning and developing the ability to share "critical resources", it helps to increase togetherness (L. Tanggaard, 2016).

Certainly what emerges from the MAG application cannot be generalized; it strictly concerns the context to which the participants belong. The local dimension is an unavoidable aspect of this

approach. What is produced is valid and relevant to those who have been implicated: it doesn't represent a "scientific truth" (L. Van Campenhout, J-M. Chaumont, A. Franssen, 2005, p. 196). Surely the participants are called to overcome a merely subjective view of the facts, passing through a systematic comparison of interpretations and a tension between convergences and divergences, but the outcomes of this process cannot be generalized.

However, the device, while producing a "local" knowledge, favors decentralization, comparison and reflexivity, through the narration and the construction of a truly "collective" analysis of problems. An analysis that values interpretive pluralism and does not encourage people to take on the dominant interpretation. In this way the complexity of experiences is left open and value is given to the diversity/plurality of hermeneutics (B. Lategan, 2015).

In conclusion, the MAG experimentation at the "Table for Education" allowed the participants to really feel the results of their work in the group. New ways of comparison and new forms of relationality and being together have been established among them. The mutual recognition of common aspirations and divergent representations has accompanied people to develop a truly democratic vision of knowledge and power.

From an educational perspective, this is a very strategic objective, in order to allow people to accept the complexity inherent in the pluralism of our communities and make it a resource.

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