

An unexpected encounter: educational science and psychoanalysis in the phenomenological pedagogy of Piero Bertolini

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ABSTRACT

The present paper offers a reflection on the interconnections between pedagogy and psychoanalysis as interpreted in the phenomenological pedagogy of Piero Bertolini. Interest in the topic is justified by the fact that throughout his work (especially in Bertolini, 1988; 2005) this author himself repeatedly argued for the existence of such links. In the current paper, I outline and analyse some key points of intersection between phenomenological pedagogy and the psychoanalytical perspective. Specifically, I examine the theoretical bases justifying a comparison of these two sciences, the core thematic affinities between them, and finally the implications for the practice of phenomenological pedagogy that arise from this interdisciplinary encounter.

Keywords: *Psychoanalysis – Pedagogy – Phenomenology – Education*

Un incontro inatteso: pedagogia e psicoanalisi nell'opera di Piero Bertolini

Il presente contributo intende offrire una riflessione sugli intrecci fra pedagogia e psicoanalisi all'interno della pedagogia fenomenologica di Piero Bertolini. La motivazione di tale interesse si radica nella più volte rimarcata attenzione verso i suddetti intrecci che lo studioso ha argomentato nelle sue opere (soprattutto in Bertolini, 1988; 2005) e che in questo contributo verranno analizzati e ripercorsi, seguendo lo svilupparsi di alcuni snodi. A partire da una riflessione sui presupposti teoretici che consentono una riflessione comparata fra pedagogia fenomenologica e prospettiva psicoanalitica, si andranno sviluppando i principali nuclei tematici di contiguità fra le due scienze, per giungere a definire quelle indicazioni prassiche che la pedagogia fenomenologica deriva dall'incontro fra le suddette scienze.

Parole chiave: *Psicoanalisi – Pedagogia – Fenomenologia – Lavoro educativo*

Introduction

A core theme within the complex thinking of Piero Bertolini, who outlined the bases for his proposed phenomenological pedagogy in *L'esistere pedagogico* (Bertolini, 1988), is the interdisciplinary approach demanded by educational work. This explains Bertolini's interest in psychoanalysis and its relationship with education, an interest that is reflected in a number of his key writings (Bertolini, 1988; 2005). The current paper explores this relationship, identifying key aspects of the link between pedagogy and psychoanalysis that bear significant implications for scholars and practitioners in the field of education.

A first key aspect – which legitimizes us in comparing the two disciplines – is the fact that Bertolini himself saw them as resting on similar scientific premises; to use the definition he gave in *L'esistere Pedagogico*, both are “sciences of man and for man” (Bertolini, 1988, p. 282), that is to say, they do not primarily stem from an interest in scientific enquiry *per se*, but from “an explicit desire to help the human person” (*ibidem*). This suggests that they are both practical disciplines, although they approach action from well-defined theoretical perspectives that endow it with meaning. Thus, in Bertolini's view, psychoanalysis and pedagogy, when the latter is understood in the phenomenological sense, are “structurally analogous”, because they are both simultaneously committed to theory and practice while approaching similar objects of enquiry.

In relation to the affinity between the objects of enquiry of the two disciplines – which is the second key aspect to be noted –, phenomenological pedagogy views the “ontological region of education” as involving development or “biopsychological growth that is enabled and at times determined by interpersonal communication and cultural transmission” (Ivi, p. 155); while psychoanalysis offers an interpretation of human personhood that acknowledges the role of education thus defined. In keeping with this shared outlook, Piero Bertolini's pedagogical perspective focused on the “self as personality”:

Being a personality means having an individual consciousness that is capable of intent, of attributing meaning to all that is extraneous to oneself, and internalizing this meaning; and at the same time having a body and a psyche that while belonging to the world of nature and following its laws, remain closely and indissolubly bound up with consciousness. (Ivi, p. 91)

Furthermore, the process of understanding proposed by Bertolini and analysed in the course of this paper, is similar to the process of psychoanalytic interpretation, which works back from the subject's conscious “intent” – driven by the need of each individual consciousness to attribute meaning to the world – to plumb the depths of the underlying interpretative processes, which take place far beneath the conscious level.

In addition, in one of his early works, Bertolini advocated that “the child should be understood not in terms of what he is not, or is not yet, but in terms of what he/she already is” (Bertolini, 2001, p. 6): by this, he meant that the adult should strive to comprehend the child as a subject that is already *becoming*, which already has its own (hi)story, and already holds its own vision of the world. Bertolini’s pedagogical perspective thus presents us with a global subject, made up of body-psyche-consciousness, which however is too broad and too complex to be confined to the sphere of consciousness. Herein lies the complementary relationship between phenomenological pedagogy and psychoanalysis:

Psychoanalysis is concerned with the subject as he or she is currently, with a particular focus on the unconscious or subconscious domain, while pedagogy has the outlook of inviting and helping those being educated to reach their personal maximum level of existential awareness by means of balanced development of their various psychophysical abilities and their capacity for intent. (Bertolini, 1988, p. 284)

These theoretical affinities lead us to the third key aspect of our analysis, that is to say, the operational implications of such theoretical similarities for both educational and psychoanalytical intervention. In her essay *Un’educazione della mente: proposte pedagogiche dalla psicoanalisi*, Egle Becchi pointed out that while pedagogy may draw inspiration from psychoanalysis, psychoanalytical science equally concerns itself with the educational experience of analysands. Not alone this: following the psychoanalytic perspective of P. Fonagy, Becchi suggested that in the course of the adult's work of helping the child to clarify and mentalize the world, in which play is used as the concrete place of encounter, psychoanalysis becomes a “pedagogy of the mind with an emphasis on play” (Becchi, 2006, p. 335). Similarly, she also seemed to imply that pedagogy can learn valuable lessons from psychoanalysis, in terms of interpreting its educational work as the work (on the part of the educator) of facilitating and activating processes of clarification and mentalization of worlds, both internal and external (on the part of the student).

Such considerations call to mind the cooperation between education specialists and psychoanalysts recommended by Bertolini, who invited educators to adopt an “understanding” rather than a “knowing” attitude towards their pupils (Bertolini, 1988, p. 293). For this to come about, a specific awareness and set of professional skills must be brought to bear in delivering educational interventions.

Let us now analyse each of these aspects in greater depth.

Psychoanalysis and pedagogy as sciences of man

The first step in our reflection thus involves teasing out the relationship between psychoanalysis and pedagogy in the work of Piero Bertolini. As already noted, Bertolini himself viewed these disciplines as structurally similar (Bertolini, 1988, p. 280; Bertolini, 2005, p. 123), given that both have a theoretical dimension – psychoanalysis as a psychological science and pedagogy as an educational science – but also a practical dimension – psychoanalysis as a psychotherapeutic method and pedagogy as an educational method. Both, furthermore, are sciences of man and for man (Bertolini, 1988), in that the human person is together the object of their theoretical enquiry and the beneficiary of their praxis. For this very reason, however, Bertolini argued that both disciplines had been required to make a key epistemological change¹, which involved departing from the classical structure of the natural sciences. This move away from the natural sciences may be more clearly understood in light of Bertolini's own critical analysis of the phenomenological perspective of Edmund Husserl.

In his rereading of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, Bertolini dwelt at length on the paradox – identified by Husserl – that is inherent in the “naturalization of the psychic” (Husserl [1954], 1970, p. 221) wrought by psychology. In attempting to acquire the status of an *objective* science, psychology has lost sight of its own specific object of enquiry, that is to say, the human being, whose global being it has fragmented into parts to be studied independently of one another. However, Bertolini argued, this means that psychology,

rather than adopting as its object of enquiry the self that acts and suffers, attributing it with its most specific and essential meaning, has got bogged down in an objectivistic approach aimed at producing a set of empirical rules, which – though undoubtedly of practical use – do not allow us to truly grasp the essence of the mind, at either the individual or the community levels. (Bertolini, 1988, p. 31)

Here Bertolini echoes Husserl's critique of the contemporary sciences, at risk of attributing truth value to what is actually only the product of applying natural science methods. In other words, rather than science being driven by reality because reality is true, science itself determines what is true and therefore what is real. Husserl proposed dealing with this paradox by acknowledging one reality only, that of the *Lebenswelt*, or the point of encounter between intentional subjectivity and the external world (Husserl, 1961, p. 76). Thus, the phenomenological perspective not only offers a *method* of knowing the world, but also an alternative means of identifying the knowing subject and the known object that overcomes the traditional object-subject dualism – rendered by Descartes as the distinction

¹ For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between psychoanalysis and science see also Palombi, 2002.

between *res-cogitans* and *res-extensa* – on which the modern sciences are based. A departure that, arguably, may also be at the basis of Jasperian epistemology (Jaspers, 1978), in that it draws a clear distinction between scientific explanation that seeks to interpret phenomena *from the outside*, and an existential understanding that, in contrast, interprets phenomena *from within*.

To attempting to grasp how this epistemological departure underpins the link between phenomenological pedagogy and psychoanalysis, Umberto Galimberti's study of psychiatry and phenomenology (Galimberti, 2011) may come to our aid. Specifically, Galimberti argues that:

The world cannot be our point of departure for setting out to understand the human being, because this means viewing the person from a natural science perspective as a thing in the world, whereas the human being is not a thing in the world, but one to whom a world unfolds. (Galimberti, 2011, p. 213)

Thus, in relation to the epistemological framework of psychology, Galimberti argues that:

If psychologists, in seeking to emulate science, strip consciousness of the intentionality that is one of its constituent parts, they lose sight of their object; thus, to be truly empirical, and faithful to their object, psychologists should respect the transcendent nature of conscious processes, and their pointing to something beyond themselves, in a word, their meanings for the human person engaging in them. (Galimberti, 2011, p. 112)

When we ask how the principle of transcendence, a key concept within the phenomenological perspective, relates to psychoanalysis and pedagogy, we find further evidence of an affinity between the two sciences. Both view the human person as a complex global entity which, while it may be explained in terms of its parts, can only be truly understood as a unified whole. And precisely because it is possible to explain something without understanding it (Galimberti, 2011), this subtle distinction has often given rise to a sort of *hiatus* between the theoretical constructs and the technical instruments of our two disciplines.

In clarification of this, Galimberti again, in the earlier-cited passage of his essay, observes that the original theoretical framework of Freudian psychoanalysis was informed by a physical perspective, whereas even Freud's own therapeutic practice departed from his theory

in that he himself contemplated his patients in their globality. Thus, psychoanalytical practice is not underpinned by a naturalistic and biological theory but, in the terms of Ludwig Biswanger, by an *anthropological* perspective (Biswanger, 1970). Hence Biswanger argued that existential analysis was the most appropriate theoretical basis for psychoanalytical treatment (*Ibidem*), although further discussion of this point is beyond our scope here.

It appears that this risk of a discrepancy between theoretical framework and therapeutic practice prompted Bertolini's discussion of his interest in psychoanalysis as a "therapeutic technique" (Bertolini, 1988, p. 281). With regard to the epistemology and approach to knowledge underpinning psychoanalysis, I would argue that Bertolini was closer to a Jungian than to a pure Freudian perspective. Indeed, Carl Gustave Jung's method involved keeping strictly to phenomena – making his work of great interest to many proponents of the phenomenological movement – and developing an understanding of the person as encountered in the *psychoanalytical situation* (Jung, 1942). One might therefore say that the person is helped by the *experience of psychoanalysis*, via a process that is, ultimately, formative (Jung, 1947): viewing psychoanalysis in this light means restoring its dual status of theoretical science and therapeutic practice.

In a similar fashion, Bertolini viewed phenomenological pedagogy as offering the potential to be concurrently an *empirical*, *eidetic* and *practical* educational science (Bertolini, 1988) which sees: its object as education, viewed as one aspect of the *Lebenswelt* (Ivi, p. 147); its method as the phenomenological analysis of really occurring human historical events; its aim as identifying the units of meaning that enable it to build up an understanding of its object of enquiry (Ivi, p. 149); its practice as implementing a psychopedagogical method, *Einführung*, that equips the educator to help people educate themselves, which is pedagogy's ultimate task (Ivi, p. 130).

Psychoanalysis and pedagogy as sciences for man

Therefore, psychoanalysis and pedagogy present themselves as sciences *for* the human person, with their own specific vision of how the 'human person' and his or her development process is to be understood.

Pedagogy's 'scientific debt' to psychoanalysis lies precisely in this common striving to understand the human person. While pedagogy has successfully won recognition for itself as a science, Bertolini suggested that it might have struggled harder to do so had the psychoanalytic enquiry not brought to light the key role of the subject's formative history in the construction of personality and identity, and the importance of personal relationships and childhood events (Bertolini, 2005, p. 125). Psychoanalysis conceptualizes the individual as a dynamic, personal and unified whole that is continuously evolving, thereby attributing great significance to the role of education – and self-education – throughout the lifetime of a

subject. In *L'esistere pedagogico* (Bertolini, 1988), Bertolini emphasized the unique nature of each individual intentional consciousness with its own peculiar world view. This dimension, which is a key component of the phenomenological perspective, underpins the evident gap between individuals' sense of self and their own actions on the one hand and the meaning attributed to them and their actions by others. We might say that this gap is that which eludes consciousness, which in psychoanalysis is termed the *unconscious*, and which is critical to educational action, giving rise to the distance between the pedagogical intentionality of the person implementing an educational intervention and the expected pedagogical outcome. It should be pointed out here, momentarily leaving aside the phenomenological perspective, that, in education, this *gap* is associated with *latent* dimensions that include not only the subjects acting in the educational situation but also the structural and material conditions characterizing the educational setting. The concept of latency was part of the thinking of Riccardo Massa (1990; 1992), with whom Bertolini conducted an exchange of views of great significance for the history of Italian pedagogy in the late-twentieth century (Bertolini, 2004), and who acknowledged the key role of psychoanalysis and the latent dimensions of education (Riva, 2001). While it is beyond our scope here to discuss this aspect in greater detail, it is important to mention it in preparation for the remainder of our argument.

Adopting a phenomenological perspective in pedagogy necessarily means reviewing our very concept of the human person:

The human person is thus made up of both conscious and unconscious forces which are in close relation with one another, meaning that the traditional Western cultural ideal of the person as pure freedom, responsibility, logic, etc. urgently needs to be revisited, and should give way to an interpretation that makes sufficient allowance for discontinuity, conflict, and shadows but also for intense and fertile vitality, although it is typical of the human person to attempt to rationalize all these factors in order to attribute meaning, and therefore value, both to the self and to the world. (Bertolini, 1988, p. 284)

Thus, while on the one hand, psychoanalysis reveals the key role of formative relationships and their dynamics in the development of subjects, on the other hand pedagogy needs a science such as psychoanalysis to complete its knowledge of the human person. Psychoanalysis offers a complex vision of the human subject and its development which justifies the need for constant pedagogical input:

It is clear to me that this anthropological understanding provides an appropriate framework for education (and therefore the pedagogical dimension of human experience), which, while it is not to be understood as solely a product of the social environment (other-directed education), neither

should it be thought of as the development of the individual's natural potential (self-education), and while it cannot overlook the many and various 'givens' or forms of conditioning present in every human person, neither should it settle for merely adapting to them, forgoing the spiritual aspect of the person I mentioned above² which might be generally described using the expression 'sensitivity to the world of values'. (Bertolini, 2005, p. 126)

Here it almost appears as though Bertolini wished to respond to a critique that is often made of both phenomenological pedagogy and psychoanalysis, and which concerns the risk that these disciplines may fall into the trap of paying attention exclusively to the subject, failing to take into account the historical, social and environmental factors that direct and signify individual behaviour. In reality, however, Bertolini's perspective was underpinned by the awareness that, while it is true that each individual signifies the world following his or her own *personal* process of knowing (De Monticelli, 2000), it is equally true that he or she does so in the context of a world that is other to the self, that is to say, even the personal knowledge development process requires a broader horizon of meaning than that of the individual subject if it is to be comprehensible. The relationship between psychoanalysis and pedagogy thus relies on

our interpretation of the person (as the dialectic union of its corporeal dimension and its intentional consciousness) and [the person's] formation or constitution (via both passive and active development processes in constant mutual interaction with one another). (Bertolini, 1988, p. 284)

This reference to a theory of *personality formation*, by passive or active means, is a crucial passage: while the active process alluded to involves consciously appropriating experiential material previously acquired by the subject, leading to the development of his or her intentional consciousness, the passive process concerns experiential contents that have been acquired unconsciously but which influence the subject's world view. Thus Bertolini is referring to the *extra individual* history (in the family, society, etc.) that acts on the subject even when he or she is not aware of this. In the work just cited, Bertolini spoke of "hereditary brain structure", but elsewhere (Bertolini, 2005, p. 137) he himself explicitly recognized the close similarity of this concept to Jung's "collective unconscious" (1942, p. 58). If therefore, the aim of the educational process is to lead the subject to maximum awareness, this entails bringing into consciousness the extra-individual history that is signifying the process. Not however by merely rationalizing this history, but rather by internalizing and further elaborating it. Far therefore from claiming to be fully explanatory, the perspective proposed

²This passage refers to the role of psychoanalysis, particularly that of Carl Gustav Jung, in highlighting the spiritual dimension of the human being (Bertolini, 2005, p. 126).

by Piero Bertolini acknowledges the value of shadow, because “even our purest and holiest beliefs can be traced to the crudest origins” (Jung, cit. in Bertolini, 2005, p. 143), origins that need to be recognized and explored.

Psychoanalysis and pedagogy in educational work

Thus, pedagogy and psychoanalysis can work together on the shared task of understanding in order to help the human person in its *being* and *existing*. Bertolini even proposed that educational intervention of any kind should involve the joint work of both disciplines (Bertolini, 1988; 2005), with education striving to bring about continuous enrichment of the subject’s personality by opening up new fields of experience, and psychoanalysis fulfilling a function of ‘supervision’, or evaluation of the *authenticity* of the newly acquired inputs in light of the subject’s network of previously held and acquired meanings (including those deriving from the collective unconscious). Such collaboration, Bertolini argued, paraphrasing Jung, could be of *immense importance* in curing the ills of our day:

the key task of education is to reach and lead the human person to mindful awareness of his or her own humanity, that is to say to make individuals conscious of their own significance and therefore of their value, but also of the limits and risks of downfall to which they are subject: thus, making them aware of their current historical situation, from which inevitably stem the responsibilities that weigh on people and which they somehow need to accept. (Bertolini, 1988, p. 12)

But not alone this: in acknowledging the need for pedagogy to dialogue with psychoanalysis, Bertolini also called on those working in these two disciplines to get to know one another and to cooperate. Overcoming, at least as far as those working in education is concerned, a fear of the dark side of psychoanalysis. And here, in my opinion, we again encounter that constant tending, in the work of Bertolini, towards a way of acting that is not solely action but also a means of deepening understanding.

At the same time, however, it is in terms of practice that we find the main distinctions between psychoanalysis and pedagogy. Bertolini defines educational intervention as

the preparation of opportunities and existential possibilities that are as authentic as possible, and do not impose rigid or predefined solutions on the recipient (i.e., solutions that are not part of his or her subjectivity), but stimulate, or if necessary oblige him or her, to live them out in person and therefore

to attribute them with, or draw from them, meanings and values that are also of subjective worth.

(Bertolini, 1988, p. 5)

This description contains two specific aspects of educational work which, in practical terms, differentiate it from analysis. The first concerns educational action as the preparation of existential opportunities and possibilities. Herein lies the active role of the educator in managing the educational *dispositive* (Massa, 1997) in terms of its material, historical and relational dimensions. Of course, psychoanalysis also takes place within an intentional *dispositive*. However, the key difference is that the classical psychoanalytic tradition advocates a constant setting, so that the analytical room can contain, and provide a space for, that which the patient brings into it; in contrast, the educator acts on experience by modifying the setting and also by proposing action. Clearly, the educator too sets up a context so that the other can bring his or her own meanings and experience into the relationship (just as the analyst prepares the analytical room), but in part (and this is the difference), the educator takes the initiative of introducing changes into the relationship, almost *forcing* the other to experience a distance, albeit tolerable, from what is usual to him or her. In their work *Ragazzi difficili* (1993), Piero Bertolini and Letizia Caronia described this approach on the part of the educator as an *opening up of possibilities*. We cannot further dwell here on this subtle distinction between pedagogy and psychoanalysis, but it is significant for the purposes of our arguments and should be noted.

A second key difference regards the power relations between patient/analyst and educator/subject receiving education. While it is clear that both relationships display power dynamics that are critical to the intervention itself, educational intervention is potentially more coercive: frequently, subjects have not themselves chosen to undertake an educational path, whereas psychoanalysis is a therapy that, from the outset, requires the subject to have opted voluntarily – at least formally speaking – to undergo it. Education on the other hand acts on individuals without them having actively chosen for it to do so. Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that while the subject of education may not have chosen to initiate a particular educational intervention, it is equally true that in education it is not possible to ‘oblige’ anyone be educated. In other words, the ultimate outcome of the intervention depends on the recipient’s intention, as well as on the intentionality of the educator, and this delicate aspect of the practice of education makes it once again akin to psychoanalytical practice.

Clearly, then, for the subjects of education to learn from an educational experience, it is not enough to simply place them in the educational situation: they must have within themselves the space needed to think about and fully live out the experience, a mental disposition and attitude to life without which the educator’s novel offering cannot lead to any germination. This caution in relation to education is very similar to Galimberti’s caution in relation to psychoanalytical practice: “it is not enough for the patient to know, he or she must

live out events with the analyst” (Galimberti, p. 143). In this sense, pedagogy and psychoanalysis are both *formative experiential dispositives*.

Not only this: preparing this space for thinking and feeling demands working on the self at a deep level as foreseen in analysis, because – and this, in my view, is the most precious tenet of all Bertolini’s thinking on this topic – all educational action must be underpinned by full recognition on the part of the subject that he or she is *trying to gain mastery over* the world. Thus, education is a process of emancipation and liberation which requires a deep work of inner analysis, because it must

stimulate those being educated to take ownership, and acquire awareness, of themselves and of the world around them, learning not to ‘allow themselves to live irresponsibly’ but to feel, insofar as possible, directly responsible for their own personal make up and their own destiny. (Bertolini, 2005, p.134)

This leads us back to our earlier discussion of the dispositive, in education and psychoanalytical therapy, in relation to the dynamics between psychoanalyst and patient and the parallel dynamics between educator and those being educated. With regard to the former, Bertolini argued that the patient’s relationship with the analyst was undoubtedly, albeit indirectly, educational in nature (Bertolini, 1998), though he fully recognized and respected the autonomous and specific nature of the patient-analyst relationship. However, of even greater interest is the emphasis placed by psychoanalysis on relational dynamics and the mechanisms that become the instruments of analysis and may also be of great value in interpreting what is going on in education. For example the transference process and the patient’s investment in the analyst, including in terms of projections, are dynamics which also take place between the educator and the recipient of education, and which, if the educator is able to understand and manage them, can become a leading educational tool. As specified in a key passage of *L’esistere pedagogico*, pedagogy and psychoanalysis

share a focus on ‘understanding’, which is essentially dynamic, and differs from the focus on ‘knowledge’ (typical of other sciences). But attempting to understand involves on the one hand being able to access subjects’ unconscious psychological world in order shed light on their current ‘existential modes’ and on the factors behind their psychological conditioning (which is the characteristic task of psychoanalysis); and on the other hand being able to identify their projections into the future and their effective opportunities for ‘object investment of libidinal energy’ and the translocation of libido to new objects and new identifications through which subjects can re-establish suitable degree of equilibrium while modifying their previous distorted ‘view of the world’ (which I believe to be the key task of pedagogy). (Bertolini, 1998, p. 293)

All this relies, however, on the professional's ability to manage their own internal dynamics still before entering into a relationship with a client or patient. This aspect is so important that those intending to practice psychoanalysis are obliged to carry out preparatory work on themselves, and subsequently to continue this work on an ongoing basis, a supervision that not only extends to the analyst's actions in relation to the patient, but also to the latent suspended dimension that is situated beyond consciousness but actually becomes the main site of the psychoanalytical work. Thus, Bertolini's interest in psychoanalysis explains his heartfelt appeal to educators to take responsibility for working on themselves, before working with others, suggesting that this is both a professional and a professional development requirement. On this theme of the "education specialist's own mental health" (Bertolini, 1998, p. 326), Bertolini elsewhere stated that of the educator

it is right to demand not only a strong personal psychological equilibrium, but also and above all the authentic ability (and the firm habit of putting it into practice) to reflect on his or her own professional attitudes and conduct. (Bertolini, 2005, p. 147)

As I interpret his thinking, Bertolini believed that it would be of value for educators to be monitored by psychoanalysts, that is to say, he advocated a psychoanalytical supervision of educational work that would be primarily based on supporting the educators in working on themselves. This was both *humble* and *courageous* on his part.

Humble, because he recognized that pedagogy is not self-sufficient but needs other complementary perspectives if it is to develop to its fullest potential, that is to say, the interdisciplinary approach to education that he so often called for throughout his work. Indeed, Bertolini repeatedly emphasized the necessarily interdisciplinary nature of educational work, and cooperation among a team of professionals from different backgrounds as the only means of ensuring that educational intervention is fully effective and of value. In the very years during which the educational debate was centred on establishing pedagogy as a legitimate science in its own right, Bertolini was advocating the interdisciplinary character of its applied branch.

Again this was courageous, because he invited education specialists to engage in an equal exchange with other professions and disciplines, without fearing to lose their own specific identity, and thereby avoiding the polarization of competences that seeks to divide the 'mental' from the 'pedagogical'. Again, this is evidence of Bertolini's belief in a global, holistic vision of human beings, who may only be viewed in all their authenticity from a combination of different viewpoints. From this aspect of Piero Bertolini's thinking, we might also draw a warning for the contemporary scientific community in the field of the human sciences, which appears to applaud specialization and the dividing out of areas of competence, almost

forgetting that, when abstracted from the unified living subject, all dimensions of enquiry become purely speculative.

Conclusions

Thus, we can no longer put off an exchange between pedagogy and psychoanalysis “on equal terms”, to cite the title of Bertolini’s *Ad armi pari* (Bertolini, 2005), published only the year before his death. A work that has been repeatedly referred to in this paper, and in which the author outlined his reasons for advocating a fruitful relationship between pedagogy and psychoanalysis despite the associated challenges. The obstacles include on the one hand mutual suspicion and the reluctance to recognize one another’s scientific status, as earlier outlined. On the other, educators and education specialists fear facing up to their own dark sides, and their own life experience, which often form the hidden basis for their professional choices and motivation.

The choice of a caring, relational profession such as education, which involves working with subjects who are often fragile or minors, is driven by a multiplicity of factors rooted in the educators’ personal histories. Because education is an *existential* dimension of the human being, an experience which we all share, our educational action towards others is always influenced by our own memories, whether conscious or otherwise, as well as by the educational models that we have experienced or inherited, and the relational systems to which we belong. If educators remain unaware of, or fail to reflect on these experiences, memories, models and systems, their behaviour will be *unthinking*, and this is extremely dangerous (Riva, 1993), because the power dynamics of the educational relationship are such that the educator is invariably in the stronger position. I therefore contend that not only would it be of value for education specialists to undergo a personal inner training process, with input from psychoanalysis, but that their professional training should also prepare them to use psychoanalysis to interpret the dynamics of which they are part and which they observe being acted out around them. In my view, this was why Bertolini so strongly recommended education specialists to ‘have a working knowledge’ of psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysts ‘to have a working knowledge’ of pedagogy. Though 11 years have passed since the publication of *Ad armi pari*, and still longer since the publication of *L’esistere pedagogico*, psychoanalysis continues to be viewed with suspicion by many in the field of education, due to the fact that mutual familiarity between the two disciplines remains poor.

And yet the need for such a mutual exchange is ever more urgent: in our own contemporary historical space, characterized by great tension and episodes of violence at both the personal and collective levels, from personal stories of domestic homicides to collective stories of terrorist attacks, we are all called to make an effort to comprehend and process violence and fear. If we are to be properly equipped for this, I believe that it is of the utmost

urgency for pedagogy and psychoanalysis to come together in constructing ways of sustaining and training people in uncovering their deepest, most unconscious experiences and situating them in the current historical and social context. The scientific mission of pedagogy today has very much to do with educating human beings and humanity as a whole to comprehending and elaborating the complexity of our contemporary world, which is often extremely dark – and in fulfilling this mission, the input of psychoanalysis is more necessary than ever.

And so, in light of recent dramatic events on the international scene, the call for pedagogy to play a *political role* which was a constant in the scientific work of Piero Bertolini remains vibrant and of vital importance. In the introduction to *L'esistere pedagogico*, Bertolini couched this call in the following terms:

It is a question of [...] realising that we cannot put off – or at least the person of culture, defined as one equipped with the necessary instruments for analysing and modifying reality, cannot put off – making every possible effort to significantly change the current cultural tendencies. A growth in awareness which naturally must start with and be founded on the conviction, which is not naive but scientifically based, that it is the nature of human beings to contribute to, if not to determine, the meaning and direction of their own history. (Bertolini, 1988, p. 4)

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