THE “WONDER” IN EDUCATIONAL CARE

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ABSTRACT
"Wonder" is a profound sensation that regenerates the body and reactivates the mind. It is well known that Aristotle believed that humans began to philosophize "because of wonder." This article offers education and healthcare professionals reflections and practices on the meaning and significance of "Wonder" as a "dialogical epistemological construct" in educational and caring relationships for oneself, others, and the world.

KEYWORDS
education; health; sustainability; synecology; inclusion.

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Introduction

Perceiving “fleeting moments” of “pure wonder” of the “extraordinary” fills life with joy and creativity, increasing physical well-being and psychological balance[1]. Furthermore, from a synecological and neurodidactic pedagogical perspective, some training activities oriented towards "Earth Harmony and Evolutionary Well-Being" are indicated, through "narrative medicine", the "Wonder of the Landscape" and the practice of Mindfulness, functional to the reduction of professional burnout in the social-health sector and the acquisition of key citizenship skills in the socio-educational sector.

1. The "wonder of healing" and narrative medicine
Author 1

From news articles to the health emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it's clear how crucial public health interventions are to a country's economic and social development and that the health of all depends on the health of each individual.

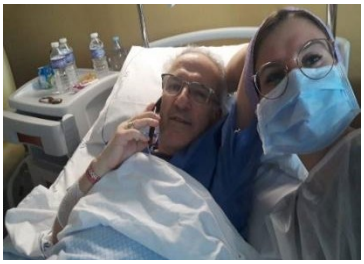


Figure 1 Psychobiological Factors of Care

It has thus become clearer that the "care process," beyond specialized knowledge and practices, is composed of psychobiological, ethical, and relational aspects that are strongly intertwined, in a systemic and process-based vision of the concept of health[2]. Therefore, in the healthcare and social care sector, clinical expertise is integrated with a "narrative competence" that explores the relationship between mind and body in both the caregiver and the patient, identifying the importance of the contribution of multiple disciplines to healthcare theory and practice.

Authors such as J. Bruner, D. Stern, and P. Ricoeur have already identified "narrative structures" in the ways in which humans internalize, understand, and communicate reality, giving it expressive form, meaning, and significance[3].

In particular, the diagnosis of an illness disorients the patient's identity because it disrupts and disrupts the patient's daily routine, disrupts their relationship with their body and the world they live in, and often alters and disrupts professional and family roles. This leads to a profound crisis, both biological, due to physical

[1] See, A. G. Gargani, Wonder and Chance, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 1992.

[2] See, C. D’Alessio, “Pedagogy and Neuroscience: Historical, Critical, and Heuristic Aspects of a New Research Paradigm,” Pensa Ed., Lecce 2019; See M.E. Di Lieto, "Education and Communication in Medicine," in F. Pellegrino, "Psychological Disorders and Physical Pathologies. Psychological Problems in Medicine," Mediserve, Naples, 2004.

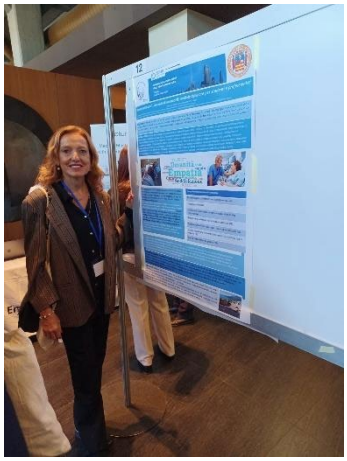
[3] See, S. Barsotti, “Narrative as a training tool, between fairy tale and illustrated book”, in Medical Humanities&Medicina Narrativa, Aracne Roma, 2023.

suffering, and existential, due to the repercussions it has on the individual's lifestyle and plans. This crisis can give rise to anxiety, agitation, anger, avoidance behaviors, or hostility, which should be interpreted as (unconscious and automatic) strategies for coping with the illness.

So, beyond medications, the ability to communicate one's psychological distress and the real changes in one's life structure can positively influence neurotransmitter transmission.

"Talk therapy" acts on many circuits that are activated at a deeper level than the use of many drugs, inducing a veritable "neurotransmitter gymnastics."

"Healing," therefore, especially in extreme conditions of illness, produces "wonder" and "stories of illness" as tools for humanizing medicine.



"Narratology" provides "Narrative Medicine" with the linguistic and technical tools needed to deepen its analysis of the narrative structure of patients' stories, which can be interpreted in the same way that literature analyzes literary texts (Fig.2). Furthermore, "telling stories" generates "wonder" and is among the most ancient educational practices.

Furthermore, the term N.B.M. appears as the title of the book "Narrative-Based Medicine" (Greenhalgh-Hurwitz, 1998), which specifies the cognitive and organizational processes through which clinicians make the best decisions. Although fields such as Medical Humanities and Literature and Medicine already existed at the time, in the early 2000s a group of clinicians, humanities scholars, and writers began meeting at Columbia University in New York City to collaborate in an intensive seminar. The seminar's academic findings were published in the volume "Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine."

Narrative Medicine (NM) integrates the NBM paradigm with the EBM model, outlining a clinical-care intervention methodology based on narrative as a specific communication skill.

Therefore, the course, entitled "General and Social Pedagogy" at the University of Salerno, was offered to medical and healthcare students through classroom-based theoretical interactions and written productions, primarily focusing on the narrative representation of the internship experience, assessed using semantic analysis and grounded theory.

The categories revealed by the semantic analysis include:

- Negative emotions, demotivation, discouragement (25)
- Positive emotions (21)
- Motivation, satisfaction, skills acquired in the relational

• field (44)
• Identification of problems and critical issues in the staff (18)
• Emphasis on the importance of empathic communication (31)
• Attention to the needs of different types of patients (gender and age, type of illness) (10)
• Strengths of the team of operators (23). The primary objective is to develop transdisciplinary training models that generate "pedagogical interactions" that help address the most critical elements in the caring professions (especially stress), highlighting both their biopsychosocial correlates and protective elements.



Figure 3 Round Table on Stress, Health, and Sport in 2021

In fact, students' written work recurs with expressions that demonstrate a specific motivation toward the relational aspects of the profession and a predisposition toward empathic communication and authentic caring relationships.
Furthermore, since 2021, the research group's contribution to the theory and practice of the doctor-patient "communicative relationship" has been included in experiential sessions on "Earth Harmony and Evolutionary Well-Being" held in association spaces used by a Third Sector Organization, located on the "Lemon Path" on the Amalfi Coast.

2. "Cultivating Human Horizons and the Practice of Mindfulness" Author 2

"In the current historical horizon, mainly outlined by a digital paideia in which the processes of technological-capitalist hypercomplexity are crossed by a cultural horizon that sees the progressive weakening of all the epistemological, ideological, normative, ethical and laboratory coefficients of "meaning", pedagogical-didactic research should be able to trace strong institutional premises to the already weak formative polycentrism".[4]
As early as 1973, Austrian physicist Heinz von Foester published "On Construction a Realty"[5] and clarified that the education system of the future should conceive of each human being as an autonomous, thinking, and non-trivial entity. It should be the fruit of a society capable of achieving "awareness" of the following three assertions:
1. Education is neither a right nor a privilege, but a "necessity";

[4] M.E. Di Lieto, "Educational Medi@morphosis and Teaching Relationships," Pensa Editore, Lecce, 2011, p. 37.
[5] https://sites.evergreen.edu/arunchandra/wpcontent/uploads/sites/395/2018/05/constructing2.pdf

2. Education is learning to ask "legitimate questions";
3. Education is understanding that "A is better" when "B is better."
From this educational perspective, in 1987, the scientific contributions of F. Varela and H. Maturana were significant. They considered the "biological roots" of human knowledge as "autopoietic systems of meaning" in which "cognition is embodied action.[6]"
This constructivist and hermeneutic approach to knowledge is reflected in E. Morin's metaphor of the "well-made head," which proposes "teaching reform" as a reform of "complex thought" that transcends Aristotelian logic and Hegelian dialectics, toward a dialogical complementarity of viewpoints.
For Morin, classical science was founded on a classical deductive-identitarian paradigm that favors the cognitive processes of reduction, exclusion, and disjunction, and considers "complexity" as "confusion to be dissolved."
Meanwhile, to understand the historical-social phenomena of "post-modernity" such as the human-technology, education-communication, and identity-diversity nexus, it is necessary to employ the dialogical logic of "complementarity" starting from the "unity-diversity" nexus.
"Humanity's treasure lies in its creative diversity, but the source of its creativity lies in its generative unity."[7]
In his theorizing, Morin transcends reductive conceptions of the human being (homo sapiens, homo faber, homo ludens, homo economicus, etc.) that deprive him of biological, subjective, and social identity.



Figure 4 Symptoms of stress

However, the proliferation of scientific and neuroscientific perspectives on the mind-body connection has generated "a thousand attentions, but no cure."[8] (Fig.4).
Furthermore, it's worth noting that etymologically, the verb "guar-ire" comes from the Germanic Latin "gua-ire" = to escape from lament, as in "lone wolves."
From this “epistemological horizon”, in our opinion, in the new millennium, the “pain of living” of the twentieth century has progressively transfigured into a multidisciplinary search for personal “well-being and growth”. From this

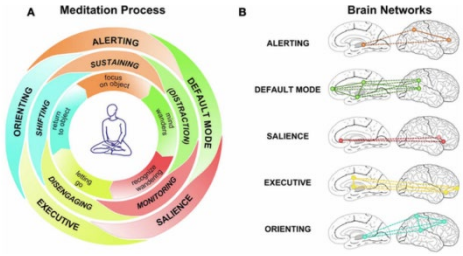
[6] See, H. Maturana, F. Valera, «The Tree of Knowledge», Italian translation, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1987.

[7] E. Morin, The Method 5. Human Identity, trans. it, Raffaello Cortina, Milan, 2002, p. 47. See, “The Well-Made Head,” trans. it, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milan, 1999.

[8] See, V. Lingiardi, Body, human”, Einaudi, Turin, 2024.

"epistemological horizon", in our opinion, in the new millennium, the "pain of living" of the twentieth century has progressively transfigured into a multidisciplinary search for personal "well-being and growth".

Among these studies, Mindfulness practice[9] aims to reduce physical suffering related to an incorrect understanding of reality and is inspired by the Buddhist meditation of Thich Nhat Hanh[10].



In the medical field, studies by American biologist Jon Kabat-Zinn date back to 1979, aiming to describe the connections between physical suffering and mental states. Specifically, through biochemical connections between the brainstem, limbic system, cerebral cortex, and subcortical system, the main neurophysiological effects evident from mindfulness practice concern (Fig.5):

1. Improvements in attentional functioning;
2. Increased cognitive flexibility;
3. Increased thickness of brain regions associated with sensory processing and internal sensations (interoception) and areas involved in attentional circuits;
4. Reduction of depression, anxiety, and stress.



The Mindfulness-Based Therapy (MBSR) protocol can therefore be useful in managing (Fig.6):

1. difficult life transitions (personal, family, or parental crises, illnesses, caring for family members who are ill or have chronic disabilities);
2. psychological distress or dependencies (generalized anxiety, dysfunctional habits, sleep difficulties, irritability);
3. living conditions due to chronic diseases (chronic pain, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, stress-related gastrointestinal disorders);
4. high-stress working conditions (hospitals, emergency departments, companies).

Based on these premises, in addition to the U.N. of the 2030 AGENDA, especially in relation to "reflections and practices for sustainable, synecological, and transformative learning," the "General and Social Pedagogy" research group of the

[9] See J. Kabat-Zinn, R. J. Davidson, Gyatso Tenzin (Dalai Lama) (2015), Meditation as Medicine, Mondadori, Milan.

[10] Vietnamese Buddhist monk (1926-2022) spiritual leader, poet and peace activist.

Faculty of Medicine of the University of Salerno, with an ecosystemic and eco-sustainable perspective on the development of personal well-being, social promotion, and tourism diversification, conducts action-research activities on "education in nature" among the "wonderful" landscapes of the Amalfi Coast.



Since 1997, UNESCO has considered the Amalfi Coast a "World Heritage Site" (Fig.7) because it represents "an extraordinary example of a Mediterranean landscape with exceptional cultural and natural values resulting from its difficult topography and the historical process of compatible adaptation operated by the community, a shining example of intelligent use of resources." The universal value of the Amalfi Coast therefore derives not from what it was, but from how man has "adapted" it.

In particular, "ascending" and "descending" the hundreds of crumbling steps overlooking the sea of the "lemon trail," the A.R.C. "Borgo San Michele" welcomes "care professionals" in the mindfulness practice of stress reduction and trains members in the "environment-mind-body-food connection."



With systemic, systematic, and integrated actions with schools, institutions, and associations, the "General and Social Pedagogy" research group has launched numerous initiatives (Fig.8) in health education, mindfulness practice, narrative medicine, phytotherapeutic, recreational, and herbal workshops, eco-literary reviews, and debates on "inclusive tourism," etc., with the aim of promoting social models based on healthy lifestyles and observing the benefits of practicing these methodologies. Innovative educational and teaching methods for developing disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and citizenship skills (e.g., homeschooling).

The marvelous "Beauty of the World" should be experienced without obstacles by promoting lifelong learning, self-awareness, comfort, accessibility, and acceptance for all.

This was the main theme of the reflection and debate meeting of the network of Campanian associations belonging to the "United Disability Committee" on the occasion of its third anniversary in Naples (Fig.9).

The research, training, and social promotion group included the distinguished participation of Paolo Valerio, Honorary Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Naples Federico II and Honorary President of the University Inclusion Services Center "SInAPSi", President of the National Observatory on Gender Identity (ONIG) and President of the Foundation for Gender Identity and Culture; Don Luigi Castiello, Secretary General of the United Disability Committee; Ecclesiastical Advisor to the President of the Italian Red Cross; Religious Assistant - ASL Napoli 1 Centro. Loreto Mare Hospital. The meeting was enriched by expert contributions from Dr. Sergio Mantile, President of the Association "Sociologists for Social Welfare"; Dr. Antonella Barretta, educationalist and criminologist; Grazia Colaiacolo, Volunteer Association for People with Disabilities and Rare Diseases "Oltre le Mura ODV"; entrepreneur Bruno Cortese of Maddaloni, promoter of the "Villaggio Green" (Green Village), an "inclusive ecosystem, a place where autistic people can develop new emotional, perceptive, and sensorial responses within a natural and protected context, enhancing their abilities and potential"; and Felice Iovino, Rai director and documentary maker of the multifaceted world of disabilities.



Figure 9 C.D.U. Meeting 21 August 2025



Figure 10 Sand & Street Wheelchair of the Municipality of Minori – Amalfi Coast

The debate emphasized the fundamental role of professional training and retraining for social care and healthcare workers and announced the important experiential flipped learning training program for family caregivers (Fig.10), "Towards Independent Living: From Birth to Adulthood, Creating the Foundations for the Independent Living of People with Disabilities" (November 2025 – June 2026), developed by the renowned child neuropsychiatrist Antonella Sapio.

Such multidisciplinary, local, and systemic interventions are essential in the effort to stem and reduce social inequalities and positively influence both local communities and the education of younger generations.

3. Experiences in Environmental Education and Social Agriculture – Author 1 e Author 2

In addition to the "Earth Harmony and Evolutionary Well-Being" training activities through the practice of Mindfulness, the "General and Social Pedagogy" research group at the University of Salerno and the A.R.C. "Borgo San Michele" association have contributed to the creation and promotion of a children's book titled "The Adventures of Oscar the Frog," which includes three short stories and three educational workshops as part of a literary social promotion project aimed at schools.



Figure 11 Presentation of the book "The Adventures of Oscar the Frog" with the mayor of Nocera Inferiore (Sa) - Italy

The literary project is the result of multiple activities carried out over the years by the "La Rana e il Rio" association and the "De Rerum Natura" Study Center in Nocera Inferiore (Fig.11). The book aims to raise community awareness of the need to adopt eco-sustainable development practices, as well as to protect and enhance the natural environment, particularly the area of the Rio Santa Marina River, a tributary of the Sarno River, a waterway crucial to the history, economy, and social life of the Campania region.

Furthermore, the consolidated experience of social gardening (ortoquadrato) by the Salerno-based social cooperative "Capovolti" is significant to the ongoing debate (Fig.12)



Figura 12 Ortoquadrato Horticulture Model - Capovolti Cooperative

Capovolti operates in the field of social agriculture, innovating professional and employment paths for people with intellectual disabilities and/or frailties. Since 2014, Capovolti has been a social cooperative, a community of members who manage the farm and have launched services dedicated to people with intellectual disabilities: in 2016, the "Casa Nadia" residential home was established, in 2018, "Capovolti" established the Multipurpose Social Center, and in 2020, the "Ri-Esco" apartment group; an integrated system of care, support, training, and employment services.

Since 2020, the cooperative has taken over the management of uncultivated land, which it continues to redevelop into a nature eco-park where adults and children can enjoy the

splendid landscape of the Picentini mountains and the tourism and food and wine services made available to them, thanks also to the employment of people with disabilities.

Conclusions

Nature generates wonder and activates caring, educational relationships.
From this perspective, the "General and Social Pedagogy" research group continues to "include" synecological learning in formal, informal, and non-formal educational projects to promote the development of a "well-rounded mind," including ecological behaviors and responsible eco-sustainability.

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