

THE PSYCHO-PEDAGOGY OF SCOUTING: A PROPOSAL FOR SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND SOCIALIZATION IN THE LIGHT OF INTEGRAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: *In his report, the author intends to address to the phenomenon of scouting in its educational value, with a particular reference to the psycho-educational aspects (of the teenagers) from an ecological perspective, from that of the peer-education and within a preventive perspective. The starting point is the assumption that one of the fundamental challenges during the development of the youngster, in the school age, is connected to the ability of the educator to accompany him/her in seeking a healthy balance in his/her individual growth and socialization. Furthermore, the author offers some practical reflections based on the scout method in order to promote the teenager's health, through a vision of the person who integrates his/her personal dimension (emotional, social, relational, and spiritual).*

Key words: *scouting, education, value, training, teens.*

1. Introduction

The adult society does not leave much space to young people. It is believed that youth is the future, the real potential of the country and investments are required to shape it. Often these are the over 60 year-old who speak about young people and instead of engaging them as collaborators and protagonists in the construction of the society, they treat the young as children, who have neither an active nor a passive voice, with no decisional capacity. Passing from declarations to concrete actions seems to be the greatest problem of our society. There are only two possible ways of facing it:

- it is necessary to operate in general and structural sense. Usually, the government, the society and other structures are expected to perform on this managerial level but the risk is that we might get old waiting for their actions;
- it is necessary, starting in the early childhood, to get prepared in a valid and thorough way in order to face the reality of the future adult world, being at the same time realistic and idealistic enough to construct a better world for us and the others.

Personally, I consider the second way the best one even if in the end it might be the hardest one. Therefore, I believe that a scout training, on the long term, may be a valid alternative for a teenager to live an active life in today's world and to be realistic and to have a concrete project of life as an adult.

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2. Scouting as a Possibility to Grow and Socialize and not to Feel Discomfort

Scouting, due to its original method, offers a virtuous path to follow in order to reach the goal the founder Robert Baden-Powell so ardently desired for each person: a *happy life* (Baden-Powell, 2003a, p. 354).

This final target and the integrity that characterise the scout method make it a unitary educational system which places emphasis on the development of the major parts of the dimensions within a human being as a whole. Scouting aims at enforcing each part of the unit in order to reach its maximum potential and to master personal skills (Massa, 2001).

Robert Baden-Powell indicates four fundamental points in the scout formation: character, health and physical strength, manual skills, and service to others (Baden-Powell, 2006, p. 39), which are the keywords in scout education. The founder emphasises how scout training encourages boys' physical and emotional development ranging from physical strength, endurance and sensorial abilities to the spirit of altruism, courage and loyalty. According to the Founder, all those elements are necessary in the formation of a good Christian and a good citizen who will be able to contribute to the improving of society (Baden-Powell, 2006). The four fundamental points will be presented as follows:

• Education focused on character

Baden-Powell underlines that *character*², seen as *personality* has a vital importance in the self-accomplishment of the person as an individual but at the same time it also influences the whole community. Character is a fundamental aspect in a man's life, therefore it is necessary to shape it when young.

Baden-Powell was convinced that character is the final product of the environment and of the culture of origin and he presented the following example: "Take two children, they may be twins. Teach them the same school subjects but give them different environments, friends and relatives outside of school. Let the first one be taken care of by a loving mother, who encourages him. Let the child play with his neat and good-natured friends, put trust in his honour and correct behaviour. Then take the second child, let him live in a dirty house, make him interact with his discontent friends, who use vulgar language and commit crimes. Is it probable that these both children will have the same character?" (*ibidem*, p. 55).

Every day, as Baden-Powell affirms, there are thousands of young boys who get confused because they feel passive and demotivated in regard not only to their own existence but also to the community life. If they were offered, at a young age - which is characterised by the capacity to apprehend - the opportunity to live in a healthy environment and were surrounded by positive friendships, they would certainly manage to realize a significant existence, becoming aware of their attitudes and capacities. They would undoubtedly become useful and eager to serve own community. The aim of Scouting is to educate a young man in order to help him discover on his own all that is necessary to shape his personality (Baden-Powell, 2006).

² For further reading see: Grządziel, D. (2014). *Educare il carattere. per una pratica educativa teoricamente fondata*. Roma: LAS; Formella Z., & Ricci A. (2013). *Bambini facili o difficili. Dal carattere all'educazione familiare da 0 a 6 anni*. Roma: Anicia; Nucci L., Navarez D., & Krettenauer, T. (2014). *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*. New York: Routledge.

• Education focused on health and physical strength

As far as the second point of his educative concept is concerned, Baden-Powell emphasises that “sound health and physical strength contribute inestimably to the professional success and to a happy life” (*ibidem*, p. 73). Pedagogically speaking, according to the Scouting founder, professional success and happiness in life are far more important than education based only on books. The two above mentioned final goals can be reached if we help the youngsters become responsible for their own well-being by a gradual acquisition of salutary habits such as personal hygiene, respect for one's sleep-wake rhythm, a healthy approach to food, getting used to regularity and to the sense of limit. (Baden-Powell, 2006).

Baden-Powell affirms that physical and mental wellbeing are strictly correlated and that it is also where character forming and physical education intertwine. In regard to this idea, the founder of Scouting wonders if there are any sound and healthy boys who do not consider a huge waste of time having to spend hours sitting in a classroom. One of the main goals of Scouting is to offer young boys a variety of outdoor activities, trips, camps added to adequate nutrition and good rest, all of which reinforce health and physical strength naturally (*ibidem*, p. 75).

The respect for one's own body includes an added value: respect for the whole society, which calls for active members, who will protect it. Human body itself should be considered God's gift and therefore it should be kept healthy and focused on the development of its own potentials (Lorenzini, 1997).

• Education focused on manual skills

The third fundamental point refers to the utility of *manual skills*. “Today, just as in the past there has always been a huge waste of human resources due mostly to a bad education. Boys are not taught love for their work [...], its utility is rarely demonstrated and there has been a total failure in the attempt to arouse keen enthusiasm and the desire to advance” (Baden-Powell, 2006, p. 92).

Scouting offers a range of tools that help boys express themselves and thus helps them become aware of own abilities.

Following the individual pace of personal evolution boys apprehend gradually various techniques that include organizing a summer camp, first aid, sign language, taking pictures and cooking. All this is done by '*active experimentation*' in contrast to the scholastic approach (Bertolini, Pranzini, 2003). In the School of Nature, Scouting reaches the most important educational goals: it teaches courage, self-esteem, the sense of essential, the sense of simplicity and exactly in this environment boys challenge themselves to be creative and to produce (Basadonna, 1996).

Fixing a tent, building a kitchen, making a table, gathering and cutting wood are only some examples of the manual tasks that require exertion and specific abilities. To operate using hands creates a balance between body and mind and it enhances self-esteem. It also strengthens respect towards the world, which is a limit to personal desires on one hand, but on the other hand, it induces us to act with a proper respect towards nature.

Having to work using manual skills awakes boys' skilfulness, making them search for solutions to the big or small problems that they have to face and which must be solved by 'doing together' – which strengthens social skills and the sense of service. In fact, Baden-

Powell encourages (2001, p. 72): “Put your hobbies and your profession to the service of your country, your neighbour, make it your oblation”.

• Education focused on service

The last phrase of the previous paragraph introduces a point that regards services for others, which Baden-Powell describes as follows: “The qualities we have so far examined aim at transforming our boys into courageous, healthy, happy and laborious citizens. These are nevertheless, egoistic qualities, they focus on the individual's benefits. Now, we can proceed to the fourth point, in which a boy acquires a larger vision of the world and starts to care about the others” (Baden-Powell, 2006, p. 102).

The major defect of today's society is egoism and it manifests itself in various ways: for instance, (in politics) people get used to see a problem only from their own perspective. They oppose vigorously to whom may have another perspective, hiding themselves behind their own position. They feel entitled to commit terrible actions and cover them with pretentious words and values. Similarly, wars between nations were caused by the incapacity to look from the other's point of view. The unique and obsessive thought was the personal interest. Every day in the newspapers and in the streets it is possible to notice examples of egoism.

The aim of scout activities is to help boys get out of the shell of egocentrism and try to maintain this new disposition. Education focused on the service to the others and to their benefit is not only pure theory; quite the opposite; the process is divided into two stages: the first one concentrates on promoting 'good deeds'; the second one consists in creating occasions for boys to perform good actions (*ibidem*, p. 105).

An efficient means to make theory become reality is the 'good turn' practice, one good action a day to serve others and to make concrete the loving spirit. 'Doing good' without regard for the gratitude or satisfaction it brings is an educative tool created in relation to the boys' natural inclination towards good. The practice develops the charitable spirit (*ibidem*, p. 70), through being sensitive towards others' needs, transforming «*estote parati*» (Lc 12, 35) in an every-day commitment.

The major goal of the education focused on the *Service to Others* consists in helping boys acquire a larger vision of reality and the capacity to approach people with empathy and readiness. “The repression of selfish tendencies, along with the development of a loving spirit and the spirit of service to others open our heart to God and change the person totally, giving her authentic joy, transforming her into a completely new creature. At the end the question to which she seeks answer is not what life can give me, but what can I give to my life” (Baden-Powell, 2006, p. 107).

Service to others proposed on such terms becomes a universal law, acceptable by everybody, regardless the religion professed or the culture of origin.

In this part of this article, I intend to underline a concept which Baden-Powell himself wanted to highlight: religion and spirituality are not added notions in scouting, they are not even the most important ones. Religious practice in scout activities does not require a break in order to be performed, it defines the normal dimension of scouting within which the tasks can be performed (Sica, 2002). Baden-Powell (cited in Sica, 2002, p. 37), in reference to the question of how religion came into Scouting, replied: “It does not come in at all. It is already there. It is a fundamental factor underlying Scouting and Guiding”. This concept emphasises that spirituality is to be experienced and not explained.

It is necessary to emphasise how those four points, maintaining their diversity, guard in the intrinsic way the religious foundation as the sacred deposit for passage in life (Baden-Powell, 2006, p. 104): “the body and its health, physical strength and the faculty to procreate, to be used at God's service; the mind with its amazing capacity to reason, to memorize, to judge, that puts the man above the animals' world; and the soul, a piece of God, that is placed in the man's heart; with one word 'love' develops and becomes stronger due to practice and continuous exercises”.

These four teachings, basic for Scouting, can be realized by continuous exercise of all physical and mental attitudes and aim at reaching the boys' maximum potential.

The secret is to encourage the learners to make the best of their intelligence and their decisional abilities in order to continue expressing their originality and singularity.

3. Scouting and Education Focused on Integration

Baden-Powell promotes a model of a person who advances continuously on the basis of a dynamic project of an individual who leads his life according to personal intentions and who is able to choose the right direction to follow.

If Scouting had wanted to educate a well-specified type of people, its success would certainly have been limited, because the validity of the model would not have reached such a popularity over the years (Basadonna et al. 1985).

Scouting can be considered a practical existential approach useful to structure people's lifestyle according to humanism, which trusts in the potential and capacities of each person. This method facilitates reaching satisfaction by rendering the individual and the others happy.

Scouting itself becomes humanism when it makes us aware of the fact that it is not only about practicing techniques, procedures or activities, but its goal is to reveal to boys the sense of their existence through discovering the beauty of the nature and through an authentic religious experience (Cociancich, 2006). The individual and the society are not considered by Baden-Powell as two contrasting entities, but as complementary realities, which would lose their value if separated.

The education promoted by the Scouting model can be considered neither individualistic nor collectivistic, otherwise it would deprive its model of its major characteristic: 'the integral formation of a person' (Bertolini, Pranzini, 2003).

Realizing an integral formation of a person requires constant diligence in implementing a personal lifestyle, which will allow the development of the spirit of being in the other's service.

The personal components of each individual are the demonstrated commitment to reach goals, the constant need to challenge oneself and the capacity to acknowledge and recognize their own limits.

These components gain value when they are enriched by the dimension of 'we', meant as an element of a cohesion, control, and input to the group. When 'we' is realized in an active and stimulating environment, in which every component develops, the group grows (Constantini, Constantini, 1987).

In an era of 'weak' pedagogical models, Scouting promotes a 'strong' pedagogical course in which the person's happiness and well-being is the greatest goal to reach during the advancement of formation from childhood and adolescence to adulthood. Baden-Powell created such a course aiming at educating for a happy life from the very young age: “our

first concern in life is to be happy. This world with all its beauty and the splendour of the sun of the happiness was created for us to enjoy it. When clouds come, with worries and pain, they will show us by contrast, that happiness can be reached and should be appreciated when it arrives” (Baden-Powell, 2003b, p. 75).

To achieve this aim, Baden-Powell, in his suggestions to the scout educators, confirms that there are two main aspects in the programme of his method:

- through the humanism - oriented pedagogy some life-long habits can be established;
- boys are encouraged to have more initiative, self-control, self-confidence and self-management (Baden-Powell, 2006, p. 37).

The first part underlines the importance of the scout training as a suitable environment for the creation of good habits and attitudes (already emphasised in “Scouting for boys”). In the second part, the self-education is discussed (the principal subject in “Rovering to success”).

Both the healthy habits and the self-education require a great commitment from the scout educators' part. As far as the four points of scout method are regarded (character, health and physical strength, manual skills and service to others), teaching is realized by the Leader of the group who, as an elder brother, supports the other scouts in their advancement towards happiness.

Shaping a character means that a Leader practices what he has to teach, without transforming exercises into a military training because scouting education is free, spontaneous, conscious and joyful. Forming a character equals to preparing for making choices and for the possibility of failure, for accepting responsibility, for the joy and knowledge of making projects, for enthusiasm, for obedience to God (Costa, 2006).

Baden-Powell was convinced that nothing could influence one's approach to conditions or to human fragilities as optimism. “Face your difficulties: a walking stick and a smile will bring the things into the right place. A long time ago I discovered the truth contained in this saying. A walking stick and a smile can help you overcome difficulties in this world. Anyway, my recent experience has taught me that in general, you can even try to leave the walking stick at home. When you have to deal with a task that seems impossible to complete, approach it, face it and smile, [...] I bet ten to one that you will manage it triumphantly, and you will be even more satisfied because you know how hard it was” (Baden-Powell, 1981, p. 27).

The sense of humour was defined by the founder as the ability to perceive the funny aspect of an unpleasant or dangerous situation. This capacity is necessary to go through life. Making a habit of seeing the funny part in everything is a perspective that helps when in difficulty, inspires hope and trust in a positive and a contagious way (Baden-Powell, 2004).

The sense of humour, the intelligent optimism, the capacity to make others trust you even in hard moments, are the very of forms of courage to seek for nowadays, especially by leaders and those who accompany others, the young in particular.

Baden-Powell questions the educational methods of his times. He was convinced that either too much or too little value was given to physical activity (Bertolini, Pranzini, 2003). The founder emphasises that the education that develops integrally and in a harmonious way the boys' personalities has an inestimable value. Following this point of view it becomes fundamental to pay particular attention to a person's physical aspect, to his or her good health condition. These notions are considered by Baden-Powell as more important than the knowledge based on books. According to the Founder's opinion,

physical training is almost equally relevant in regard to the shaping of the character (Baden-Powell, 2006).

Scouting does not introduce a new method to physical education, it only takes advantage of all the positive traits that a person has, for their own benefit. The theory of the movement insists on the principle of a harmonious and integral development of the completely human body. Scouting gives importance to “teaching the boys to become responsible for their own health, its acquisition and conservation [...]. Physical strength is strictly combined with mental well-being – that is where forming our character entwines with reaching a good shape” (ibidem, 2006, p. 73). The real point of a boy’s physical education not only aims at reinforcing his physical evolution but it also helps him acquire self-control habits, that will absolutely be of great relevance to the future adult’s well-being (Bertolini, Pranzini, 2003, 55-58).

Physical strength, as Baden-Powell underlines, does not necessarily have to be the result of a hard military-like training. There are various types of possible exercises for the body, which, even if well adapted to our muscular system, provide somehow artificial workout elements that focus on gaining force where it has not been acquired in a natural way. Scouting is opposed to professional sport competitions and exhibition, because both of them take to extreme abnormal body performances. Baden-Powell believes that the real physical education is made of: “outdoor activities, trips, camps added to good nutrition and to a regular rest. In this way boys can be given health and physical strength in a natural, and non-artificial, way” (Baden-Powell, 2006, p. 75).

Technical and manual training in scouting stands out because of its activist character. Scouting is based on a pedagogical approach that promotes inventiveness, initiative and responsibility. Generally, adults do not interfere during activities to prevent boys from the inconvenient consequences of their actions. Manual skills are necessary for the proper psycho-physical development because they make possible the acquisition and control of one's own energies and to coordinate the use of body. Moreover, they reinforce the spirit of initiative, responsibility and self-confidence. They also contribute to the creation of the technical know-how and increase the tendency to precision that is common of scientists (Bertolini, Pranzini, 2003).

Baden-Powell puts a lot of stress on such aspects like precision, construction abilities, artistic activities, the joy of the finishing touches, adding details, repairing ingeniously. He also insists on diligence and patience. All this can be practiced in the youngest scout groups (Beavers and Wolves) through manual exercises which are aimed at answering the children's need of exploration and dealing with concrete objects. In this way, the youngest apprehend in an almost unconscious way. They shape their sense of beauty, order and precision (Piaget, 1967). Manual activities awake the desire to be responsible for the task that one has been given. The accomplishment equals acknowledging one's own competence in the management and resolution of the problems encountered (Erikson, 1955). The youngest scouts are given the chance to express themselves by decorating the union rooms and by doing one 'good deed' a day to the others (Bertolini, Pranzini, 2003, p. 65).

While growing up, teenager boys and girls (Explorers and Guides) learn the art of living in the woods, trying to take advantage of anything in nature useful to build tables, chairs, bridges, hideaways, and ornaments. The pioneer technique implies the use and storage of tools (such as an axe and a saw), the knowledge of knot tying, of junctions, of using ropes. Similarly, to the youngest, elder scouts participate in building their headquarters

and learn the notions of maintenance (replacing bulbs, painting the walls, fixing hinges, etc.) Those tasks are adapted to the scouts' age and can be easily executed. Teenagers become protagonist in the environment they create and maintain (Lorenzini, 1997).

All the above-mentioned activities meet numerous needs typical of the evolution age of the participants through awakening the spirit of adventure, the sense of aesthetics, the physical exuberance needed to perform it. The concrete manipulation of what has been previously projected and the immediate fruition of what has just been accomplished is the highlight, the long-awaited and prestigious moment (Massa, 1977). At this stage, adolescent boys start to apply the hypothetical-deductive, abstract and propositional thinking. Being offered the opportunity to create, design, organize, modify and integrate has an exceptional value because it gives the teenager a concrete possibility to operate using the skills and abilities in all types of combinations (Piaget, 1967).

Growing up, the youngsters refine their own competence offering their service to the others in social projects such as building a house, deforestation, tidying up an aqueduct, intervention in emergency situations. All these actions satisfy the need to test oneself in challenging tasks, experiencing the immediate gratification of having done a good deed to the community's benefit (Massa, 1977).

Therefore, the manual techniques cannot be seen as a final goal in themselves, they should be a means through which to form boys and girls who have reached an adequate balance between their intellectual, moral and physical aspects. This development adapted to one's own personality will make them become men and women capable of offering a prompt answer according to the evangelic ideal (Lc, 12, 35) from which the scout motto was inspired (Bertolini, Pranzini, 2003, p. 65).

“The qualities we have so far examined aim at transforming our boys into courageous, healthy, happy and laborious citizens. These are nevertheless, egoistic qualities, they focus on the individual's benefits. Now, we can proceed to the fourth point, in which a boy acquires a larger vision of the world and starts to care about the others” (Baden-Powell, 2006, p. 102). “*Rovering to success*”, the third most important book edited by Baden-Powell in 1922, offers various key elements to understanding his existential vision of the man and of the world (Janowitz, 1977). Right on the first pages, Baden-Powell specifies that this text is not addressed to people who have a great life experience, but to the young ones who look anxiously ahead, searching for the right direction to follow in their life. It is not accidental that the title contains the word “way”, chosen on purpose to indicate not the intention to wander without knowing the destination but rather to discover one's own life by following beautiful paths with the vision of some definite goal to be reached, facing the difficulties and dangers of one's way. In the title there is also the word “success” but “what is success? A high social class? Richness? Position? Power?” (Baden-Powell, 2000, p. 17).

Baden-Powell answers those questions indicating none of the above, even if they are very common ideas, which appear spontaneously in our minds. Generally, success is seen as the gate to advance at the expense of the others in order to demonstrate one's own qualities and to gain advantages. Baden-Powell's idea of success goes way beyond the common desire to be the first one to finish. The founder claims that: “We have been put to this world of marvellous things being given the capacity to appreciate them, sometimes to feel the joy of collaboration for their growth, and also to help the others instead of leaving them behind. Doing it all we should enjoy life and be happy” (ibidem).

Happiness cannot be reached by waiting for it passively. As we were given arms and

legs, intellect and aspirations, it is through being active that we can achieve it. Often, pleasure is wrongly assimilated to happiness, but they are not the same thing at all. The first one is in most cases a distraction whose thrill lasts only for short moments, the second one accompanies you and fulfils your life forever: “one discovers that Paradise is not only something vague above us, among the clouds, but it is here, in this world, right in our heart” (ibidem, p. 21).

Everybody can be happy, the rich and the poor, as long as one has the good sense of doing two things: the first one is not to take oneself too seriously, taking advantage of any type of situation and considering life as a game and the world as a camp on which to perform it. The second one consists in making love guide our actions and our thoughts. Only through love, one can offer himself to service of the others, which constitutes the most enduring and perfect form of happiness. Success is thus happiness, it is a global and long-lasting condition, it is not related to any particular event or to any specific situation, but it presents itself as a permanent and all-embracing condition which regards person in her totality in every moment of her/his existence (Zanoni, 2008).

4. Conclusion

From the scientific point of view, the scout method should be implemented by complementary educational strategies such as *peer-education*, even if it is already present as one of the basis of Scouting and the promotion of *life skills*, which depends on the development of boys' potential. Getting to know scouting, living it with passion becomes not only a wonderful experience but also a concrete formation that can become useful in various life circumstances. I believe that in today's world, always more frenetic, virtual and less community-oriented, Baden-Powell's educational project, created more than one hundred years ago, remains always actual and valid for young people.

The search for happiness has always been the goal of the man's journey since ancient times, the external and internal journey, a movement usually signed by the encounter with the 'self', with others and with God, able to fulfil and sign the existence. Scouting is particularly well suited as a method and a tool to accomplish the journey and arrive at the destination, becoming fully ourselves, fully men and women of character.

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