

Research on the concept of "End Education" in Italy: how Italian adolescents face various "endings" and how they can be supported in this difficult challenge.

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I. Introduction

Description and definition of the concept of “end education” in the growth process of adolescents in the Italian context.

The situation of adolescents in Italy is complex and marked by several challenges at educational, social and emotional levels. In fact, in recent years, Italy has witnessed a significant increase in school dropouts, youth unemployment, social isolation, as well as rising rates of anxiety and depression (Della Vedova et al., 2024). Regarding "endings," young people experience many and various ones, such as the transition from one school to another, the end of a romantic or friendship relationship, the death of a close person, the end of childhood and the beginning of a new life phase.

The Italian cultural context values family and social relationships, emphasizing the importance of social support. However, it shows shortcomings in providing support regarding endings. Some psychologists, including Matteo Lancini, refer to pain and death as a true taboo, recognizing that recently Italy has partially freed itself from some of the taboos of the past, becoming a more open society, but now facing a new difficulty. Adults, in fact, struggle to talk to young people about pain, endings and death. As a result, young people mostly end up discussing these topics in psychotherapy, out of fear of hurting, for example, their parents by bringing them up in the family.

In particular, schools and socio-educational services lack educational programs that adequately address these issues. Italian schools, despite being the primary educational agency for adolescents, are not always prepared to fully address the emotional and psychological difficulties connected to these moments of endings (Masillo et al., 2016). Therefore, an integrated approach is essential, involving schools, families and institutions, to compensate for the deficiencies in this area.

II. Types of Endings

The End of School

One type of "ending" that adolescents experience is related to the conclusion of a school cycle, such as the transition from primary school to middle school or from middle school to high school. It has emerged that in Italy, this period sees the highest frequency of school dropouts. These transitional moments can generate uncertainty, fear, anxiety, stress and depressive symptoms (Longobardi et al., 2019). Research suggests that adolescence is particularly sensitive to these transitions, as they are crucial moments for identity formation, and thus require adequate support. Relationships with teachers, which can act as protective factors, are key in this context, promoting academic performance, adaptive behaviors, and psychological well-being (Longobardi et al., 2016).

The End of Childhood and Adolescence

In recent decades, the transition to adulthood has been taking increasingly longer in western societies, and particularly in Italy, one of the countries most affected by this phenomenon. A recent contribution analyzed this situation through an intergenerational approach, highlighting how prolonged cohabitation with parents and delayed marriage are distinctive features of the difficulty in transitioning to adulthood (Carrà et al., 2014). The crucial role of the family in this phenomenon may be explained by the absence of adequate welfare policies, leading to the compensatory support of family relationships. A generative family and society cares for and lets go of the younger generation, could provide a generative context in which young people can find their roles, both within the family, by creating a new one, and in society, being recognized as adults who contribute to social development (Carrà et al., 2014).

The End of Life

In Italy, the topic of death education is addressed by some scholars, psychologists, and educators, but it is not yet a subject systematically integrated into the school system, as it is in other countries. Some researchers have begun to raise awareness about the importance of addressing the topic of death and mourning in the educational field, as these are crucial aspects in the emotional and psychological development of students, particularly during adolescence (Testoni et al., 2019). An interesting example is a study that analyzed the effects of a death education course in high schools. The course aimed to explore death from various philosophical, religious and psychological perspectives, attempting to reduce death anxiety and improve students' existential understanding. This study showed positive results, such as reduction in anxiety and greater spiritual and existential understanding, suggesting

that death education can be an important resource to help adolescents better cope with difficult and traumatic themes related to the end of life (Testoni et al., 2018). The difficulties related to the "taboo" culture surrounding death and educational uncertainties result in this topic being addressed sporadically, despite the growing recognition of its relevance for the psychological and emotional development of students.

The End of a Relationship

The end of an important relationship during adolescence is one of the most common events that triggers strong emotions, such as pain, sadness, frustration, and anger (Della Vedova et al., 2024). Young adolescents, who are experiencing their first love and learning how to manage emotional bonds, face the end of a relationship with difficulty. The breakup of an emotional connection can significantly impact their psychological well-being, leading to a period of identity crisis, emotional confusion, and self-isolating behaviors. In Italy, the topic of relationship endings is addressed in the psychological field, with particular attention to how adolescents learn to manage emotional pain and how they can be supported through socio-emotional education programs (Veltro et al., 2015). Research shows that the inability to process the end of a romantic relationship can increase the risks of developing social anxiety, depression and other psychological issues (Veltro et al., 2015).

III. Italian Context

How the concept of endings is addressed by adolescents is also strongly influenced by the Italian cultural context, which emphasizes values such as family, group, and community. A study revealed that adolescents feel poorly understood by adults, while they find their main sources of support in friendships, as they prefer confiding in friends rather than adults (Longobardi et al., 2016). This highlights the need for improved intergenerational dialogue to manage the psychological and educational challenges faced by young people.

It should also be noted that many adolescents in Italy are first- or second-generation immigrants with very different socio-cultural backgrounds. These differences also have a significant impact on how young people experience and address the concept of "end" and the challenges associated with it. Therefore, it is necessary to find support and training programs that take into account these intercultural differences.

Furthermore, the pandemic period has exacerbated the social and psychological difficulties of young people, with an increase in anxiety and depression (Della Vedova et al., 2024). School pressure, interpersonal problems and anxiety have been identified as significant causes of stress. Many adolescents have also expressed emotional difficulties such as fear of failure, low motivation, and suicidal thoughts in response to relational problems and academic pressure. The results highlight the need for preventive measures and intervention

programs, especially in the school environment, but not only, to promote well-being and prevent emotional and psychological difficulties (Della Vedova et al., 2024).

Currently, some programs have been proposed in Italy to support the emotional and psychological difficulties of young people. For example, it has been observed that a mindfulness-based program significantly reduced internalizing problems (Scafuto et al., 2022). Additionally, other programs providing social and emotional skills have led to increased well-being and psychological health among adolescents. These types of interventions should be expanded and disseminated across the country to promote the well-being of young people (Veltro et al., 2015).

Psychological problems, therefore, associated with compromised psychosocial functioning, are very common among young people in Italy. Despite this, adolescents rarely access mental health care and services, not only due to the still-present stigma associated with psychological problems in Italy but also because of the barriers presented by the Italian community mental health system, which struggles to meet citizens' needs and is often structured based on the needs of adults. The need for a strong, stigma-free, youth-oriented care system has emerged (Monducci et al., 2018).

IV. Conclusions

The concept of "end," not only as death but also as the end of a relationship or a school cycle, is an increasingly relevant topic in the study of the emotional challenges faced by adolescents. These "endings" can trigger a range of psychological, emotional and behavioral reactions that adolescents are not always prepared to face, making it important to examine how they experience these transitions and how institutions can support them. Studies suggest that adequate educational and psychological support can help young people manage these moments of ending, preventing negative emotional consequences and fostering a functional growth path (Masillo et al., 2018).

In Italy, educational and social projects are increasingly being developed, particularly in schools, focusing on adolescents' life skills to help them develop competencies for dealing with the challenges associated with change and growth (Masillo et al., 2018). Furthermore, courses on emotional and affection education, along with psychological support activities, are tools used to address topics such as grief processing and adaptation to change (Testoni et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of specific and structured interventions regarding the theme of "endings" and how to cope with these difficult phases of transition, both in school projects and in individual or private interventions. Teachers, educators and other reference adults often struggle to provide adequate support, as they do not receive sufficient education in this area (Monducci et al., 2018). Therefore, despite the clear urgency of helping adolescents during this transitional phase and the fundamental role of teachers and

educators in the growth of young people, there are currently no specific training courses on these topics in Italy. Offering teachers opportunities for discussion with professional of mental health, along with structuring training interventions, could strengthen the educational role of each professional and provide greater support for the adolescents.

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