

EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT AND ACTIVITIES OF Fr. ALFONSO MARIA FUSCO FOR SOCIALLY NEGLECTED CHILDREN

Myśl i działalność wychowawcza ks. Alfonso Maril Fusco na rzecz dzieci zaniedbanych społecznie

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Received: 3 Jun 2023

Reviewed: 26 Aug 2023

Accepted: 6 Dec 2023

Online First: 13 Dec 2023

Abstract: Educators all over the world face the phenomenon of social neglect of children and young people. This phenomenon gives rise to manifold complex problems related to education and socialization of young people, which call for implementing appropriate remedial strategies. The article presents reflection on the educational activities of Alfonso Maria Fusco, an Italian priest, educator and social activist whose life and educational work bring to the fore his original and timeless idea that inspired him to take various initiatives for the good of children. The article can serve contemporary teachers and educators as an important point of reference in the search for valuable pedagogical practices that can significantly enrich their knowledge and educational competences. Moreover, the article inspires educators to undertake educational and preventive initiatives aimed at making the educational space free from the so-called risky behaviours that may emerge in the lives of children and adolescents.

Keywords: children, youth, upbringing, education, prevention, faith, social exclusion

Abstrakt: Wychowawcy na całym świecie spotykają się ze zjawiskiem zaniedbania społecznego dzieci i młodzieży. Generuje ono w życiu młodych ludzi wiele złożonych problemów o charakterze edukacyjnym i socjalizacyjnym, które domagają się odpowiednich strategii zaradczych. Artykuł prezentuje refleksję nad działalnością wychowawczą Alfonso Marii Fusco, włoskiego duchownego, wychowawcy i społecznika, którego życie i aktywność wychowawcza pozwalają odkryć oryginalny i ponadczasowy zamysł, który inspirował go do podejmowania różnych inicjatyw na rzecz dobra dziecka. Zawarte w artykule treści mogą posłużyć współczesnym nauczycielom i wychowawcom jako ważny punkt odniesienia w poszukiwaniu wartościowych praktyk pedagogicznych, które w sposób istotny mogą wzbogacić ich wiedzę i kompetencje edukacyjne. Ponadto w artykule postuluje się podejmowanie przez pedagogów inicjatyw wychowawczych i profilaktycznych mających na celu czynienie przestrzeni edukacyjnej wolnej od tzw. zachowań ryzykownych, które mogą się pojawić w życiu dzieci i młodzieży.

Słowa kluczowe: dzieci, młodzież, wychowanie, edukacja, profilaktyka, wiara, wykluczenie społeczne



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INTRODUCTION

The child is commonly perceived as an exceptional young person, still untainted by destructive influences of the world, full of hope and trust, sincere, creative, naturally just, and

spontaneous, who is the hope of every society. Integral development of children manifests all the beauty and growth of a new life that overcomes countless obstacles and barriers on the way to its self-fulfilment (Echavarría 2008, 63-69). Children usually do not hide behind a mask, but are true to themselves, and in their selflessness and openness to the world, they can sincerely manifest their amicable attitude towards other people. In adults, children inspire universal love and positive attitudes, higher feelings and the willingness to devote and sacrifice oneself for their good. Children and the childhood period are therefore not just an ordinary phase of a human being's development, but a special, autonomous value per se, the most beautiful phase in every person's life, which should be especially protected (Pomykała 1991, 152).

While observing children in the process of their development and realization of their individual potential, adults begin to understand that it is their task to support this process in both the micro and macro social dimensions. It depends on adults whether children will be provided with proper social, biological and cultural conditions to be able to achieve maturity in all dimensions of their human existence. The very concept of "child", which is defined as "a human being in the period of development, from the moment of birth to the end of the growth process" (Okoń 1998a, 82), reveals the whole truth about children, firstly, that they are human beings (as much as adults); secondly, that they are in a specific phase of life, which is characterised by intense and integral development (Salamucha 2013, 18). Experience, however, shows that a child-human being - a person "is not able to modify his or her «nature» in any other way than with the participation and help of others, which means that children can achieve full development of their personal life only in a community. (...) The birth of a human being, his or her upbringing, growth and achievement of human perfection within the limits available to man are only possible within various forms of social existence" (Krapiec 1998, 289).

Emphasizing the humanity of children as well as the obligations resting on the community towards them constitute today an important starting point in the sphere of protection and respect for children's rights, but also in the area of concern for the so-called child well-being, which in its essence comes down to guaranteeing children everything that serves their successful development and upbringing (Magier 2013), so that in the future they may realize their personal potential and become what they are supposed to become in accordance with their human nature.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that children's development may be obstructed by manifold adverse factors that they cannot overcome on their own, therefore children require special care and assistance from people who take responsibility for them, including parents and teachers, and in a broader sense, the entire society (Kelm 2000; Salamucha 2013). However, no group can claim the right to dominate or subjugate a human person, much less to limit, manipulate or instrumentalize the process of child's development that takes place in various communities in which such a young person grows, develops and is brought up (Echavarría 2008). Only parents, as those who bestowed on a child the "gift of life", have both the right and the duty to play the main role in the process of development and formation of their child as a person, creating the most favourable conditions for it.

The family, therefore, constitutes the natural environment in which the process of a child's growth and upbringing takes place. It is the family that, regardless of culture, religion, and confessed values, has the greatest impact on a young person. Children growing up surrounded by the loved ones who provide them with support, can develop their disposition and temperament, build their self-esteem and acquire appropriate competences as regards important social roles that they will be able to undertake and fulfil in the future. Nowadays, it can be noticed that the family is experiencing many difficulties related to the ongoing civilization changes. Therefore, there are many situations when children and young people are neglected and cannot be provided with proper care and upbringing from their parents and relatives (Łuczyński 2018). Wherever a family fails to fulfil its role towards its offspring, it may be necessary to place children in foster care. In order to prevent such a solution, more and more attention is paid today to supporting dysfunctional families according to the principle that "by helping the family, we help the child". In this way, families may, with appropriate support, fulfil their parental tasks (Pietruszka 2015). Thus, children living in dysfunctional families are offered various forms of daily support provided by, e.g., community centers, clubs, educational centers, nurseries, etc.

Many outstanding thinkers and social activists pointed out the importance for society to raise young people in a well-functioning family, and in the event of this family failing to fulfil its role, to replace or "supplement" it. Among them was also an Italian priest, educator and

social activist, Alfonso Maria Fusco (1839–1910), who, seeing how many children and youth were marginalized and socially excluded, spared no effort to address their needs and take care of their future. His involvement in helping young people focused on the idea of integral development and upbringing of those under his care and compensating for their educational deficits so that they could get prepared to take on the responsibilities of adult life. Therefore, it is not without reason that he was called Father Bosco of the South of Italy (Tedesco 1994, 23). Against the background of the society of that time, Alfonso M. Fusco stood out for the exceptional depth of his spiritual life and at the same time his understanding of social issues. Fr. Fusco laid particular emphasis on respect for human dignity, including responsible upbringing of children and youth. He was convinced that the spiritual and material good of society could best be achieved by caring for the integral development of the young generation; because it was this generation that was to bear the burden of responsibility for social and religious matters in the future (Ricciardi 2016). Therefore, Fr. Fusco undertook many initiatives just to create optimal conditions for the development and upbringing of the youngest, to whom he ultimately devoted his entire life. Consequently, in order to ensure proper implementation of his educational assumptions, he established a religious congregation of the Sisters of St. John the Baptist, along with a number of care and educational institutions where the sisters fulfilled and still continue to fulfil with great dedication their educational duties (Łącka 2015).

In view of the above, there seems to arise an urgent need for pedagogical reflection on social activities of Alfonso Maria Fusco and a revival of his educational idea, that can provide many contemporary educators with inspiration and a model of integral upbringing and education of the young generation. Taking effective actions in this regard would also aim at adopting and implementing his assumptions regarding the care, upbringing and education of children to the contemporary educational programs, thus strengthening the school's formative foundations. Taking into account the need to protect children and ensure their successful development, it is worth considering Fr. Fusco's educational proposal, which even today may help create favourable conditions for children and young people to facilitate their integral development and upbringing.

1. THE ISSUE OF SOCIALLY NEGLECTED CHILDREN

The numerous threats that can currently be observed in the area of upbringing the young generation prompt reflection on the problem of social neglect of children and youth (Dziewiecki 2003). New ideologies that are emerging today, promote nihilism, ubiquitous subjectivism and cognitive relativism, and in extreme cases also undermine the role of traditional social environments as well as educational and care institutions. The family, which naturally protects the child's well-being, can also become the object of such alarming influences (Łakoma 2014, 20-21). It is not only the structure of the family that has become subject to adverse changes, but also the quality and style of family life, which in turn means that the family today is substantially weakened and, in many cases, unable to effectively fulfil its educational obligations (Pietruszka 2017). The negative phenomena faced by the modern family include poverty, unemployment, addictions, marital conflicts, emigration for work. All those phenomena affect the family's living conditions, thus giving rise to various, often negative, situations affecting the upbringing of the youngest family members (Pietruszka 2015).

The above-described symptoms of difficulties faced by families also significantly change the quality of family bonds and relationships and cause parents to cease to be role models for children. This situation leads to the disruption or breakdown of the so-called intergenerational transmission, which involves the exchange of important values and moral principles as well as socially accepted behaviours. In a home devoid of an atmosphere of family warmth, relationships become uncertain, and selfishness comes to the fore. Children suffer from acute sense of loneliness and lack of interest on the part of adults. They are often treated as objects and become victims of manipulation, neglect, and violence on the part of their closest family members (Doniec 2011, 30). The family's failure to fulfil its educational and upbringing role not only threatens respect for the "child well-being", but also aggravates the functioning of entire societies. Family dysfunction and pathology inevitably lead to child neglect, creating an opportunity for the emergence of new deviations and disorders in the social functioning of children.

In order to get to the core of the child neglect problem, it should be explained first that "social neglect" itself is a broad term that appears in relation to inappropriate treatment of a

given group of people. However, it is particularly used with reference to children deprived of love and care of their parents (Baron 2014, 13). It is usually applied in a situation when adults harm children which leads to negative mental, physical and social consequences (Łuczyński 2018). In the common understanding, child neglect means lack of responsibility on the part of parents or legal guardians for children as well as for their integral development and upbringing. This exposes children to the feelings of loneliness, deeply experienced stress and frustration, leaving painful and permanent mental scars. As a consequence, such children are often defined as “difficult” by nature, i.e., those who experience difficulties, e.g., in social adaptation (Okoń 1998b, 83). It should also be noted that the issue of child neglect is closely related to the emergence of the phenomenon of social orphanhood, which leads to the need for state intervention in the child’s life. Often, contrary to the truth, neglect and its consequences are attributed to children themselves, as if they were responsible for their situation. Blaming children leads to their being labelled and stigmatized which in turn often prevents them from obtaining adequate assistance.

The consequences of child neglect manifest themselves in all spheres of children’s lives, but they particularly affect their social relationships, which tend to lack certainty and stability. In addition, children may experience difficulties and failures at school and often come into conflict with the law (Wach 2014). They also often manifest lack of discipline and reluctance to cooperate with educators. Such young people feel that they are not needed by anyone and therefore suffer from low self-esteem. A tendency to antisocial behaviour becomes a norm, while attempts to establish relationships or face and solve problems often do not bring results (Bałandynowicz 2009, 85). When discussing problems related to children’s social development, it is necessary to mention the issue of developmental abnormalities. Due to the fact that young people grow up in an environment that is not conducive to integral growth, there is an increased number of those having specific needs. Hyperactive children with attention deficit, dyslexics, behavioural problems, children with autism and other deficiencies require individual care. This makes them feel alienated in the school environment or in the playground (Zaremba 2016, 79-80).

Adverse consequences of child neglect depend largely on children's age, gender, sensitivity and other personality traits. Children who experience pain due to rejection often have an inferiority complex, lack self-confidence, and have no interests or higher needs. Neglected children become passive and apathetic, or, on the contrary, tend to act impulsively, violently and recklessly. These children also tend to escape into the world of imagination and dreams, which makes them seem absent (Sikora 2011). With age, such children may develop, for example, neuroses, addictions, aggression, pessimistic thinking, difficulty concentrating, and various types of failures. They are not capable of systematic work; they get easily bored and fall behind in their studies. Neglect makes young people reluctant to establish appropriate relationships with their peers, and over time they begin to manifest risky behaviours (Wach 2014). It sometimes happens that, being victims of violence, they also use aggression against their colleagues, which is why they have no friends and become alienated. Such children may also develop a syndrome of learned helplessness. They do not worry about life plans, live in the moment and show a lack of understanding as regards the need to abide by moral and social norms (Łuczyński 2018, 198-207).

Growing up in a dysfunctional family disturbs the optimal course of socialization of its youngest members. Such children fail to develop valuable skills such as trust, independence and creativity. A neglected person, despite reaching adulthood, often expects support and is unable to function independently. Such people's lives may be dominated by "a syndrome of a sense of temporariness and cultural and axiological indeterminacy, and above all, a loss of life priorities and a lack of self-determination" (Konopczyński 2009, 46). Moreover, in their adult life, they may struggle with the problem of initiating and maintaining interpersonal contacts. As a consequence, they will not be able to create permanent bonds based on feelings. Moreover, they receive a deformed model of family life and may fail in the future in fulfilling their roles as mothers or fathers (Izdebska 2015, 17-18).

The above-presented threats posed by child neglect are just few out of all factors that determine the entire human adult life. It seems of utmost importance to prevent this type of phenomena because it could help young people change their current situation. However, this process usually takes a very long time, because changing the way people think about themselves

and their life priorities requires courage and support from adults (Konopczyński 2009, 51). It is also comforting that children who have experienced neglect may still show a great potential for the so-called normal development in difficult conditions, i.e., the ability to overcome the failures and obstacles they have experienced. Educators who are full of respect, supportive and open, who will try to strengthen children's developmental "imperative", can help break the circulating stereotypes that a bad childhood must always lead to disturbed adulthood.

2. THE CHARACTER AND EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT OF ST. ALFONSO MARIA FUSCO

Among Christian educators, Fr. Alfonso Maria Fusco appears as a man sensitive to every type of human destitution as it was his desire that even his shadow might do good. He was born on March 23, 1839, in the middle-income family of Giuseppina and Aniello Fusco, in the South of Italy, in the small town of Angri. The boy's father owned a large farm which allowed him to support his family, while Alfonso's mother took care of the house and raised the children. The boy's deeply religious parents prepared Alfonso to serve in the Church from an early age (Corsi 2010). The Fusco family, being financially well off, could afford to hire private teachers to educate their children. Religious upbringing and initial education of the children in the Fusco home was handled by their mother, who was very committed to the issue of passing on the faith in the family. Over time, Alfonso additionally took lessons from clergy and in a newly established school (Garofalo 1978).

Undoubtedly, Alfonso was a child provided with great care, and his childhood was the time when the foundations of his future priestly vocation were formed. The boy had the opportunity to develop integrally according to his age, he received his First Holy Communion at the age of 7 and was a role model for his peers. He was a calm, sensitive boy, a bit shy, but determined in pursuing his goals (Gremigni 2010). In 1850, young Alfonso Fusco was sent to the so-called minor seminary, where he began regular education, which provided him with an impulse to pursue his priestly vocation. The years spent in the seminary were a period of acquiring thorough knowledge. As a student, Alfonso distinguished himself with his diligence in completing his assignments, systematic work and above-average piety. Also noteworthy is the fact that he had no conflicts with his peers, on the contrary, he was well-liked and respected by all (Garofalo 1978, 8-18). Moreover, from the beginning of his stay in the seminary, Alfonso

manifested a practical sense of service and activity in the Church. Learning was difficult for him, and he had to put a lot of effort into studying, but due to his diligence, he was always well-prepared. In the seminary, he consistently pursued the goals he set for himself: he wanted to become a priest to save weak and defenceless souls for whom no one cared.

He was ordained a priest in 1863 and took up the pastoral tasks which he was assigned for. However, the young priest saw the need to create institutes that would take care of the upbringing of children and youth living on the streets, often left without care, simply abandoned and forgotten (Tedesco 1994, 18-19). The most important motive for his activities in the field of upbringing and education was a deep spiritual experience (dream), which inspired him to act with great strength. He said: “When I was still a seminarian, I had a dream of Jesus who said to me: «Alfonso, you are chosen to found a congregation of sisters which you will call the Nazareth Sisters and two orphanages, for boys and girls (Garofalo 1978, 149). The ground is already prepared; you only need to build it. As soon as you become a priest, you should do this»” (Garofalo 1978, 23). Father Fusco was constantly looking for opportunities to complete this task. The need to create a place to stay for street children had long been acknowledged in Angri. Father Fusco decided that he would be the first to open his own home and start taking in the neglected and abandoned children he met while passing by the places where they gathered (Tedesco 1994, 22). Fusco cared about their material needs, provided them with a sense of security, respect and love, and gave them the opportunity to acquire knowledge and learn a profession. He had a recurrent thought about establishing a women’s institute, which would certainly bring rapid progress in working with children and youth. Father Fusco, remembering the integral development and upbringing of his charges, organized the so-called “Luigini” oratorio, a place where young people could spend their free time having fun together, playing team games, learning to sing and reading pious texts (Vassalluzzo 2001, 95-96). This work founded by Fr. Fusco did not meet with the approval of the local community. However, the priest was not discouraged from undertaking further educational and social initiatives for the benefit of his charges.

In 1876, continuing to implement his plans, Fr. Fusco with the help of a wealthy widow from Angri, opened an “orphan’s home” where he gathered children deprived of families or

shelter (Tedesco 1994, 28). He was helped in running the house by a certain pious woman, Maddalena Caputo, who wanted to devote her life to serving the poor and sick. They were soon joined by many other women who also wanted to devote themselves to working for socially neglected children (Vassalluzzo 2001, 98-99). Just two years later, Fr. Alfonso founded the Institute of the Sisters of Saint John the Baptist, whose apostolate focused on providing comprehensive care and help to the poorest children and those without parental care. The newly established Institute cared about the integral upbringing of children and their education, and although it was not an easy period in political terms, the work of Fr. Fusco quickly went beyond the borders of Angri and over time began to spread in other countries in Europe and the world (Vassalluzzo 2001, 109). Father Fusco died in the reputation of holiness on February 6, 1910 (Garofalo 1978, 200), making a last request to his spiritual daughters to take care of the development of the congregation and continue to care for poor, abandoned and neglected children (Vassalluzzo 2001, 119). In 2001, Fr. Alfonso Fusco was declared blessed, and in 2016, he was counted among the saints of the Catholic Church.

3. EDUCATIONAL AND CARE ACTIVITIES OF FR. FUSCO

A thorough analysis of conferences, letters, the rule that Fr. Fusco proposed to his spiritual daughters, as well as his homilies and notes reflect the ideas and character of his pedagogical thought (Corsi 2010). Being a practitioner, Fr. Fusco often indicated in his reflection specific points and recommendations that educators should strive for when working with children and youth. According to Fr. Fusco, it was love that should form the real basis of a true educational relationship. He claimed that pupils, if they are to adopt certain values and be able to implement them in their lives, need to feel loved, safe and accepted. Building intimacy was the foundation of his educational concept because it was conducive to building friendly relationships between educators and students. That is why, Fr. Fusco wanted to create a family-like educational environment for his pupils, for the best possible development of the educational bond (Cian 2001, 204-206).

An important issue for Fr. Fusco was religious education. According to his pedagogy, spiritual and mental development should complement each other. In his educational activities,

he did not try to convert anyone, nor did he usurp the right to impose on other people's consciences. Perhaps, that is why, he became an authority for young people who felt his keen interest in their life situation, and at the same time his respect for the freedom and dignity of each of them as a person (Pantano 2016). In contact with his pupils, Fr. Fusco listened more than he spoke, rather served than demanded obedience. At the same time, he taught children that love requires sacrifice, because he himself was able to patiently endure all humiliation and adversity. Guided by the logic of faith, he trusted that God could bring good out of even the most difficult situations (Corsi 2010, 66). Father Fusco assumed that the cause of human poverty lied in people's incompetent use of the resources at their disposal. He repeated many times that a society that does not care about future generations deprives itself of its future. In the name of this concern for young people, he postulated the need to create primary and vocational schools where young people could acquire knowledge and learn a profession appropriate to their talents. In this way, Fr. Alfonso wanted to oppose the growing trend of marginalization and social exclusion of children from poor families, who often had no opportunity to learn (Tytko 2014).

However, the matter of utmost importance was for Fr. Fusco family upbringing. He believed that pedagogical activities are most effective when carried out within a family home and it is where they should originate. He was convinced that education of children should start as early as possible, already in childhood, so that children could internalize "goodness" and "bear good fruit" in the future. According to Fr. Fusco, mothers play a significant role in raising children. He claimed that one of the main tasks of mothers should be to instil in their children the desire to live according to generally accepted social and religious norms (Corsi 2010, 16). Fr. Fusco knew that in the institutes founded by him, family upbringing would depend mainly on the formation of the sisters. Therefore, he carefully prepared future sisters for the role of spiritual mothers and educators. He advised them to pay particular attention to:

- providing care and showing interest to girls as they are most exposed to negative influences of their surroundings;
- imparting sound moral and religious principles to pupils, through testimony and example of their own lives;

- participation of pupils in housework as a special type of training in hard work and a conscious approach to responsibilities (Fusco 2009, 20).

Father Fusco also paid attention to proper upbringing of his pupils, especially girls. Good manners were to be a kind of showcase of the houses he created. For him, propriety constituted this area of development, within which pupils may test whether they could overcome their own limitations. An important message of Fr. Fusco's pedagogical thought consists in propagating the need to develop a certain strategy encompassing the future of pupils. In his idea of upbringing, Fr. Alfonso was a supporter of forward thinking and long-term planning (Pantano 2016). In his opinion, a prudent educator rather than focusing on authoritarian management of children, should concentrate on developing their so-called own resources (personal potential), which will determine their successful future. Besides, Fr. Fusco attached great importance to the quality of teaching and upbringing. He did not tolerate lack of competence or negligence on the part of teachers. He believed that people responsible for shaping future generations should be role models in all areas and have the best possible preparation (Corsi 2010, 29). He himself tried to be an authority and role model for his pupils, always offering them help and advice. As he emphasized, early childhood is the time of the most important preparation for life. The role of adults who are role models and authority for children is of primary importance here (Corsi 2010, 29). Thinking ahead, Fr. Fusco was convinced that every young person, even if he or she experienced great trauma or harm, if properly guided, could and should bear "good fruit." In his reflections, he often emphasized that the conditions in which children live impel them to engage in criminal behaviours: theft, vagrancy, begging. He argued that a greater benefit for society would be to propose a coherent system of supporting "street children" who should be provided with proper care and free education (Ricciardi 2016). The idea that particularly guided his actions was to create a place where pupils could freely and without concern for accommodation or food, learn a profession. In this way, their fate could be changed (Gremigni 2010, 12). Not only did he want to provide his charges with shelter and a peaceful childhood, but he also wanted them to learn to make responsible choices and be able to choose the best possible path in their adult lives.

Multidimensional activity of Fr. Fusco for children can be included in the mainstream of integral education, where a significant role is attached to the promotion of spiritual values, but never in isolation from a holistic view of children's development and needs. That is why, Fr. Fusco always paid attention to building a real image of a human being, both in terms of his or her capabilities and limitations. He recommended that educators should guide children in a way that would allow them to internalize good habits (Fusco 2009). In his pedagogy, he did not want to "mould" his pupils, but believed that children's natural, good tendencies should always be carefully strengthened, and their feelings respected. However, bad features should not be exaggerated, but rather reduced through individual dialogue and kind support offered to children in their work on their character (Gremigni 2010, 89). He also recommended to educators to teach their pupils that every person should realize that all human natural talents must serve the good and the life lived in truth, freedom and respect for other people.

It was the great desire of Fr. Alfonso that his pupils, through integral development, should become adults prepared to make sacrifices, sensitive to human harm and responsible for the goods that will be bestowed on them (Gremigni 2010, 14). He particularly cared about the internal and cultural development of the girls entrusted to his care, as he wanted them to gain education and have the opportunity to acquire knowledge on an equal footing with boys. He often stated that daughters who receive appropriate intellectual and Christian upbringing become a blessing, a source of happiness and peace for their families, while it is dangerous when girls grow up in an atmosphere of neglect and backwardness (Corsi 2010, 76). He also claimed that lack of education and intellectual development are a particularly difficult experience for young women. His position therefore expresses the conviction of the necessity to provide both boys and girls with conditions for integral development and upbringing, as well as protection against egoistic and ideological traps that enslave people and do not allow them to think and act independently. That is why, integral formation of the young generation is this determinant of his pedagogy that can counteract the challenges faced by contemporary societies in the era of rapid civilization changes.

The above considerations on the main assumptions of Fr. Fusco's pedagogy show that he was a prudent educator, and the multitude of initiatives and actions he undertook in his life

make us realize that he was also a man of great courage. His multidimensional activity for neglected children can therefore be included in the trend of integral education, where a great role is attached to the promotion of spiritual values, but never in isolation from a holistic view of children's development and needs (Ricciardi 2016). That is why, Fr. Fusco always paid attention to building a real image of a human being, as regards both human capabilities and limitations. In his educational activities, he wanted to prepare young people to live responsibly in the so-called society of tomorrow, in which technological and civilizational progress will dominate all areas of human life. As an experienced educator and observer of social life, endowed with an intuitive insight into the future, he knew that in his educational activities he could not limit himself to the "here and now", he had to work for the future.

4. THE POTENTIAL OF FR. FUSCO'S PEDAGOGY

Reflection on the fundamental assumptions of Fr. Fusco's pedagogy allow us to conclude that this pedagogy is still relevant today as his system of help and support for socially neglected children and youth contains, in its essence, a Christian, universal and timeless program of reaching out to young people with the message of love. This love is of a formative nature and it, on one hand respects human freedom and dignity and, on the other, is capable of lifting young people from moral and material decline, by providing them with appropriate conditions for their integral development and education. Showing respect to young people and offering them adequate support, which Fr. Fusco always encouraged, seems to be one of the basic needs that should also be safeguarded to the young generation today. In his opinion, young people at every stage of their development need the certainty that they can find "allies" among adults who are always ready to help them. He also emphasized that the awareness of being protected allows them to open up to cooperation and thus helps them achieve their autonomy (Corsi 2010, 19-20).

Another valid message of Fr. Fusco was that guardians should not make any distinctions among children. He firmly opposed any attempts to divide them into good and bad, capable and incapable, i.e., better and worse. He wanted to approach each pupil with the same commitment, in a kind and straightforward manner (Gremigni 2010). Moreover, Fr. Fusco claimed that

children's questions should never be left unanswered, and what is more, children should never be ignored when they try to communicate with and enter the circle people whom they regard as role models. This dialogue between educators and pupils has a very positive impact on their mutual relationships as well as on the development of their emotional bonds. Children grow up in a positive atmosphere, they discover the world and the processes that govern it with the help of someone they trust the most at this stage of their development (Corsi 2010, 20).

In the pedagogy of Fr. Fusco, we can clearly find the preventive and prophylactic traits that can inspire contemporary educators and teachers, as he wanted to protect minors from the negative influence of the social environment often dominated by immoral and pathological behaviours. At the same time, he fully realized that it was not enough. For Fr. Alfonso, taking the children off the streets was only a temporary measure. The long-term goal was to prepare pupils for an honest and responsible life in society (D'Antuoni 1898, 69-81). In achieving this goal, he required his colleagues to respect three important elements that constitute the foundation of effective educational work. The first is faith in man, created in God's image and likeness. The second element necessary in the upbringing process is to look at history as a teacher of life. Thanks to this, educators will not repeat the mistakes of the past and will better use the new resources for the benefit of their pupils. The third and last element is to be the joy experienced in everyday life and full commitment to the pupils (Lecce 1989). This approach to education allowed Fr. Alfonso to create "timeless" foundations for education that take into account the integral development of the person. In his reflections, he came to the conclusion that lack of concern for upbringing and a false, reductionist vision of man can lead to erroneous solutions in the formation of young people. Therefore, he postulated the need for an individualized approach to those under his care to bring out the best in them, for themselves, their families and the community in which they lived. He wanted to shape young people into free, responsible adults, who can think and decide for themselves (Ricciardi 2016).

In his writings and speeches, Fr. Fusco asked all adults for an authentic testimony of living in accordance with ethical and Christian principles. All this was meant to provide children with role models so that they could strive to follow in their footsteps by imitating them. At the same time, he argued that it is always necessary to pay close attention to those entrusted with

the care of the youngest. He particularly emphasized the requirement of personal, moral and social maturity of the educator responsible for children (Fusco 2009). He knew well that young people devoid of a moral backbone and a good example on the part of adults, when fearing rejection from their peers and the world, would be more likely to abandon the idea of leading a righteous life (Corsi 2010, 26). Fr. Fusco once again became a prophet far beyond the scope of his times. A similar trend can also be seen today. Without stable values, people tend to act against themselves and thus harm not only themselves, but also the society in which they live. Father Alfonso claimed that only the experience of wise educational love can protect young people from such a state of affairs (Tytko 2014).

According to the ideas of Fr. Fusco, social and moral education of a person should rest on the belief that all young people, regardless of the time and place in which they live, have a “mission” to accomplish, a mission that has been entrusted to them by Providence. Therefore, in his understanding, education and upbringing of young people means supporting them in discovering and realizing their personal potential (Ricciardi 2016). Therefore, each pedagogical activity should have as its goal teaching and upbringing, both moral and civic, in accordance with the principles of integral development of the person. A realistic approach towards his pupils allowed Fr. Alfonso to create a model of integral pedagogy, valuing the person in every dimension. His pedagogy therefore reflects a desire to enable children’s harmonious development. Therefore, it is a very important issue to compensate for any educational and emotional deficits in children. Additionally, according to Fr. Fusco, children’s free time, should be subject to some organization, maintaining appropriate proportions between rest and learning, recreation and duties. However, the overarching thought that binds all educational activities in Fr. Fusco’s pedagogy is to draw children’s attention to the need to be guided by values and faith in life. Fr. Fusco was sure that Christian formation, i.e., the preparation of believers who are convinced and consistent in striving for their own sanctification, is the element of educational work that should be present in all previous ones. Children’s openness to God is undoubtedly the most difficult requirement, especially in the situation when they experienced abuse and lack of love at home and in their immediate social environment.

The above-presented overview of current challenges and ways of implementing the ideas of Fr. Fusco's pedagogy in the modern world brings to mind two main thoughts. The moral formation program created by the priest, based on the Christian concept, still retains its validity. In order to grow and develop properly, young people should be given an opportunity for a comprehensive development. Starting from basic education, we should strive to build a foundation for cultural and vocational education. In this respect, the most important thing is to discover in the pupils their talents and strengths, bestowed on them by the Creator, which reveal themselves and may bear good fruit. Fr. Fusco's ideas find their implementation in the works of his spiritual daughters – sisters of Saint John the Baptist as well as of many lay people who undertake various initiatives as well as care and educational works for the integral upbringing and education of the most neglected and abandoned children and youth. The charisma that Fr. Fusco propagated in the world, also embraces supporting adults who found themselves in a crisis situation and who often need assistance and a bit of love.

CONCLUSIONS

From the very beginning, the idea of full dedication to poor and abandoned children was the greatest desire of Fr. Fusco. The Apostle of Angri, brought up in the spirit of Christian love of God and man, was searching for innovative, ambitious solutions, based on the principle of accompanying pupils in their integral development and upbringing. According to him, the way out of a difficult situation could only be achieved through social support and the kindness of people endowed with a sense of empathy. Taking care of young people deprived of shelter required determination to oppose social inequalities. Approaching the deprivations faced by orphans with love and attention contributed to emphasizing the important role of the educator in the process of such children's development and upbringing.

Fr. Fusco, as an experienced educator and priest, knew that the presence of adults who were deeply involved in the lives of those under their care was simply necessary. The help he provided to the children he met in his life was also substantive, always aimed at the "good" of young people both in its temporal and supernatural dimensions. He believed that such an approach may limit the educational distance and create a deep bond and intimacy between

educators and pupils, turning them into allies in the common cause of education and upbringing. Father Fusco wanted to be a father to his pupils and was treated as such by them (Corsi 2010, 59-60).

Father of Orphans, as Fr. Fusco was often called, proposed a new model of working with neglected children. It was supposed to rely primarily on the feeling of closeness and understanding of pupils by adults. At the same time, he emphasized that the educator should be a role model. It was the educator who was supposed to be an authority who allowed children to learn appropriate behaviour to grow and integrate more closely with society. As a realist, he knew that in the matter of education one had to reject all determinism. Therefore, he tried to break stereotypes according to which neglected children have no real chance to overcome their shortcomings and deficiencies. At this point, the Father of Orphans addressed especially all people who have in their hearts the desire to dedicate themselves to educational work. He constantly reminded them that they were responsible for the children entrusted to their care. He emphasized that they should take care of every wronged child to infuse hope and comfort into children's life so that they can regain the joy of life and develop successfully (D'Antuoni 1898, 45).

The above reflection on the main ideas of the pedagogy of Fr. Alfonso Maria Fusco shows his great concern for effective educational influence, which in its essence consists in allowing children to realize that they have in their hearts an intrinsic desire for a happy life. Truth, love, freedom and joy are values that protect pupils from reducing their needs and aspirations only to the material sphere, to "having something". Opening to what is good and noble leads to the awakening of higher desires, flowing from the core of the human person where conscience comes to the fore (Lecce 1998, 3). This is a place where "being someone" means working on oneself, undertaking mental and physical effort, and organizing one's aspirations. Simultaneously, individual development of pupils should be accompanied by growth in social relationships. Children, while learning responsible love towards themselves, will also act maturely towards others and avoid attitudes that could hurt other people and, at the same time, block the path to building their own successful future.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Nowadays, it is not the lack of information but its surfeit that presents a problem; therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to skilfully select the information obtained (Google search engine shows 315 million results for *kawaii*; the term is covered in an extensive Wikipedia entry). In order to enhance the examination of pertinent literature, field research utilising visual anthropology (also known as visual

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