Michael D. Burroughs   **[pp. 117-134]**
California State University (USA)

Federica Valbusa
University of Verona (Italy)

Tugce B. Arda Tuncdemir
Pennsylvania State University (USA)

Luigina Mortari
University of Verona (Italy)

MelArete and PEECh: two educational approaches to develop ethical and emotional competences

To obtain information or share views on this article, please contact the first author at the following address: Federica Valbusa at the following address: Dipartimento di Scienze Umane - Lungadige Porta Vittoria, 17 37129 Verona (Italy). E-mail: federica.valbusa@univr.it

Abstract

Our current era is characterized, in part, by crises in education. Research reveals high rates of students dropping out of school, disengagement from education, and behaviors that can interfere with school performance and, potentially, with later success in life. Furthermore, among school-age youths, experiences of mental health problems and significant depression are not rare. Responding to these situations requires us to focus on the holistic development of children, promoting experiences in schools that allow children to acquire skills that are necessary for success in life. Several areas of research demonstrate that social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions are effective in addressing interpersonal and intrapersonal growth and development in students. However, the authors believe that social-emotional education, by itself, is not sufficient and that ethics education should be added to SEL initiatives in order to educate the whole child. Starting from these premises, in this paper we present two ethics education and SEL projects: *Philosophical Ethics in Early Childhood* (PEECh), promoted by the Kegley Institute of Ethics (California State University, Bakersfield, USA) and the Rock Ethics Institute (Pennsylvania State University, USA) and implemented in several American Preschool classrooms; and *MelArete*, promoted by CRED (Center of Educational and Didactic Research) of the University of Verona (Italy) in several Italian primary schools**.**

Keywords: Social-emotional learning, Ethics education, PEECh, MelArete.

Estratto

La nostra epoca è attraversata da crisi che interessano diversi ambiti, fra cui quello educativo. A questo proposito, la ricerca evidenzia alti tassi di abbandono scolastico, disimpegno e comportamenti che possono interferire con il rendimento a scuola e, potenzialmente, con la successiva realizzazione personale degli studenti. Fra i giovani in età scolastica, inoltre, non sono rari i casi di disagio psicologico e di depressione. Per far fronte a queste situazioni dobbiamo concentrarci su uno sviluppo olistico dei bambini, promuovendo nelle scuole esperienze che consentano loro di acquisire le competenze necessarie per far fiorire appieno le loro potenzialità esistentive. Da più prospettive è stata dimostrata l'efficacia degli interventi di social-emotional learning (SEL) per promuovere la maturazione e lo sviluppo interpersonale ed intrapersonale degli studenti. Gli autori ritengono, tuttavia, che l'educazione socio-emotiva da sola non sia sufficiente e che le iniziative di social-emotional learning vadano accompagnate dall'educazione etica per favorire uno sviluppo olistico del bambino. Date queste premesse, nell'articolo vengono presentati due progetti di educazione etica ed educazione socio-emotiva: il progetto Philosophical Ethics in Early Childhood (PEECh), promosso dal Kegley Institute of Ethics (California State University, Bakersfield, USA) e dal Rock Ethics Institute (Pennsylvania State University, USA) e attuato in varie sezioni di scuola dell'infanzia americane, e il progetto MelArete, promosso dal CRED (Centro di Ricerca Educativa e Didattica) dell'Università di Verona e attuato in varie scuole primarie italiane.

Parole chiave: Social-emotional learning, Educazione all'etica, PEECh, MelArete.

1. Introduction

Our current era is characterized, in part, by crises in education. Research reveals high rates of students dropping out of school, disengagement from education, and behaviors that can interfere with school performance and, potentially, with later success in life (Dryfoos, 1997; Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Eaton *et al.*, 2008; Klem & Connel, 2004; Lehr *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, among school-age youths, experiences of mental health problems and significant depression are not rare (Coie *et al.*, 2000; Greenberg *et al.*, 2003; Greenberg *et al.*, 2001). Without effective intervention and adequate support these issues can give rise to cumulative difficulties that can have negative outcomes throughout life (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010).

Responding to these situations requires us to focus on the holistic development of children (Darling-Hammond, 2015), promoting experiences in schools that allow children to acquire skills that are necessary for success in life (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010). We think that such holistic development requires the promotion of both social-emotional and moral education. While there is a significant amount of research conducted on social-emotional learning in schools, the equal importance of ethics education is often neglected.

Several areas of research demonstrate that social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions are effective in addressing interpersonal and intrapersonal growth and development in students. While there are many definitions of SEL (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010), the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies the main domains of skills fostered by SEL interventions as *self-awareness*, *self-management*, *social awareness*, *relationship skills*, and *responsible decision-making* (see https:// casel.org/what-is-sel). SEL interventions include two interconnected dimensions: a social dimension that "indicates a concern for fostering positive relationships with others, such as peers, teachers, and family members", and an emotional dimension that "indicates a concern for fostering self-awareness or self-knowledge, especially involving emotions or feelings, but also by implication, the cognitions or thoughts that are connected to our emotions" (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010, p. 6). Related to these dimensions, Zins and Elias (2007) define SEL as "the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others, competencies that are essential for all students" (p. 234). Taken together, SEL programs are aimed to enhance the growth of all children, to help them develop healthy behaviors, and to prevent their engaging in maladaptive and unhealthy behaviors (Zins & Elias, 2007).

However, we believe that social-emotional education, by itself, is not enough and that ethics education should be added to SEL initiatives in order to educate the whole child (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). Currently, research supporting the adoption of SEL programs often lacks a clear conception of and a particular focus on ethical competence. The importance of promoting not only social-emotional education but also ethics education is connected to the fact that these approaches are complementary for student development. As Burroughs and Barkauskas (2017) note, "students will benefit from the skills needed to thrive socially and manage emotions, but also, from the possession of personal convictions and ethical values that help guide the use of social and emotional skills in ethical ways" (p. 226). Ethics education plays an essential role in addressing problematic situations by fostering the development of classroom environments informed by and aware of caring attitudes, where children can receive the necessary SEL support and also develop skills in ethical reasoning, dis-

cussion, and reflection. In such supportive contexts, children have opportunities to develop positive relationships and awareness of critical ethical values that nourish an ethical classroom and community.

To illustrate these possibilities, in this paper we present two different ethics education and SEL projects: *Philosophical Ethics in Early Childhood* (PEECh), promoted by the Kegley Institute of Ethics (California State University, Bakersfield, USA) and the Rock Ethics Institute (Pennsylvania State University, USA) and implemented in several American Preschool classrooms; and *MelArete*, promoted by CRED (Center of Educational and Didactic Research) of the University of Verona (Italy) in several Italian primary schools. We choose to present two projects carried out in different national contexts and with different age children in order to show different examples of the possibility for and the effectiveness of combining ethics and SEL education in schools.

2. The PEECh project

2.1. Theoretical framework

Philosophical Ethics in Early Childhood (PEECh) is a research and education outreach program focusing on dialogue-based education and social-emotional and moral development in early childhood. PEECh is motivated by the belief, based in research, that ethics, social-emotional learning, and philosophical dialogue can and should play critical roles in early childhood education. The work takes inspiration from several pedagogical and research traditions, including *constructivism*, *philosophy for children*, and *social domain theory*.

Constructivist education engages children as active participants in the educational process, utilizing collaborative learning and authentic problem-solving concerning children's interests. This tradition – with historical antecedents in the work of John Dewey (1975; 1997), Jean Piaget (1997), and Maria Montessori (1964), among others – views learning, in part, as the result of authentic problem solving and negotiation between children.

Philosophy for children is a constructivist-informed approach to education that focuses on dialogue as the critical means for engaging children in the learning process (Wartenberg, 2014; Mohr Lone & Burroughs 2016). Philosophy for children methodology centers on viewing the classroom as a *community of inquiry* (Lipman, 1991). A community of inquiry (COI) can be approached in numerous ways but centers on engaging children in philosophical dialogue through games, activities, student-generated questions (or other prompts) toward the end of reasoning, perspective-taking, and intellectual exploration in the classroom. The COI environment is participatory and collaborative; both students and teacher are responsible for the content and progression of the dialogue-based lesson.

Also, PEECh is informed by contemporary research in early childhood moral development, particularly by the tradition of *social domain theory*. Social domain theory reveals that children, from a young age (2-3 years), possess basic understandings of and differentiate between social and moral concepts and actions (Nucci 2001; Smetana *et al.*, 2014; Turiel, 2014). Children, from a young age, possess social and moral concerns that can be addressed in classroom dialogue and made the focus of a student-centered educational process. Some of these concerns include fairness (e.g., regarding rules and sharing in the classroom), harm, and inclusion and exclusion of peers (e.g., in play and the social life of the classroom) (Killen, 2007; Smetana *et al.*, 2014).

2.2. Pedagogy and curriculum

The PEECh curriculum consists of nine lessons, each including warm-up activities, short stories, guiding questions, and extension activities (See Table 1 for an example). Each lesson begins with a warm-up activity for the class and, following that activity, the teacher reads a short story to the class, acting out the parts of the main characters with puppets. Following the story, the teacher facilitates a discussion on the story themes and questions. After reading the story and discussion, children break into smaller groups and participate in an extension activity related to the theme of the story.

These lessons are implemented by the classroom teachers at least once-per-week for 30-45 minutes and focus on one or more of the following ethics-based concepts: *fairness, personal welfare and the welfare of others* (relating to issues of harm), *inclusion and exclusion of peers,* and *empathy and perspective taking*. According to Social Domain Theory, children begin to develop ethical concepts and understanding from their early and continuing experiences of harm and fairness, starting from the age of 2-3 years (Nucci, 2001; Smetana *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, young children face and make decisions about inclusion and exclusion of peers that raise social and ethical issues (Killen, 2007). In addition to these skills, empathy is a central moral developmental skill set that begins to develop in early childhood (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2014; Hoffman, 2001).

These areas of moral development also intersect with crucial areas of social-emotional learning. Ethical and social-emotional development are closely related in early childhood and can be mutually reinforcing in classroom practice. For example, *emotion recognition* (an essential SEL skill set) in childhood is an important building block for ethical development (Smetana *et al.*, 2014). As children learn to recognize and understand the emotions of others, to empathize and perspective-take with their peers, they can better understand when their actions (or the actions of a peer) harm a friend. Developing the ability to recognize and understand emotions (SEL skill sets) is an essential first step in developing concern for others and, in turn, responding with responsible decisions (ethical skills sets).

Stories used to highlight and facilitate discussion on these concepts are written by PEECh researchers except for two already-published works of children's literature: *Rainbow Fish to the Rescue! (*Pfister & James, 1995) and *Hey, Little Ant* (Hoose *et al.*, 1998).

LESSON 4 – "Anya and Michael are Friends"

a. Goals:

1. To introduce a discussion on the themes of/have children consider friendship, empathy, perspective-taking, and emotion recognition.
2. To develop children's prosocial and ethical skills in interactions with peers.
3. To introduce additional PEECh puppets
4. To create a positive atmosphere in which children can discuss these themes together

b. Materials:

1. PEECh puppets ("Anya" and "Michael")
2. A drawing of a dog
3. A large sheet of blank paper
4. Markers and/or crayons

c. Conducting the Lesson:

Warm-up – "I'm Special" [for whole class]

i. Have the whole class sit in a circle. Ask the class to close their eyes and to think of one thing that makes them "special." This could be a statement about interest, skill, ability, or personal quality, among others. You can provide examples to make this clear if needed (e.g., "I'm fast"; "I'm funny"; "I'm smart," etc.).

ii. After the children have had time to think about their "special" trait, have the children go around the room – one-by-one – and say what makes them special out loud to the class (note: children should be encouraged to share, but don't have to if they are not comfortable with doing so). This statement should take the form of: "My name is _____ and I am special because _____."

iii. Encourage the class to listen to as each child shares. After a child has shared, the class can re-peat back the name and special quality. This class statement can take the form of: "_____ is special because _____."

Story and Dialogue – "Anya and Michael are Friends" [for whole class]
i. While the children are still seated in a circle, introduce "Anya" and "Michael" and ask the class if you can read them a story about them. Read the following story:

Anya and Michael are great friends. They like to play together, and they especially like to make drawings and paintings together. Anya works on a drawing all day. After finishing, she asks Michael: "Michael, would you like to see my new drawing?"
"Sure!", says Michael.
Anya shows Michael her drawing. It is a drawing of a little dog.
Anya says: "Do you like my drawing, Michael?"
Michael does not like dogs, and so he does not like Anya's drawing of a little dog. Michael wants to tell the truth to Anya, but he does not want to hurt Anya's feelings.

ii. Discuss the story. Potential questions include:
1. How do you think Anya feels? Why?
2. How do you think Michael feels? Why?
3. Michael doesn't like Anya's drawing because he doesn't like dogs. What should he say to Anya when she asks him if he likes the drawing. Why?
4. What would you say to Anya if she showed you her picture? Why?

Extension Activity [for small groups of 3-4 children] – "Drawing Together"
i. For this activity, children should be divided into groups of 3-4. Groups can rotate through this activity until each group has a turn.

ii. Spread out a large blank piece of paper across a table. The paper should be large enough to provide space for each group of children to draw.

iii. For each group, ask the children to draw their favorite animals (this could be a dog, a cat, a turtle, etc.).
iv. As each group draws, encourage children to look at each other's drawing and to think of one compliment they can say or question they can ask about each of their friend's drawings.

v. Once all the groups have had a turn, hang up the class drawing in the classroom.
Table 1 - Sample PEECh Lessons from Philosophical Ethics in Early Childhood Instructor's Manual (Burroughs and Arda Tuncdemir, unpublished).

A pilot version of the PEECh curriculum was introduced at a university-based pre-school, focusing on introducing ethics, social-emotional learning, and philosophical dialogue in early childhood. Several positive results were secured including participating children's increased ability to respond to ethics-focused questions during interviews (Burroughs & Arda Tuncdemir, 2017). Also, participating children were able to support their answers with justification terms (i.e., use of terms such as 'because' and providing supporting reasons for an answer) to ethical questions in the interviews. Based on researcher and teacher observations, these children also demonstrated additional inclusion of peers in play and showed improved emotion recognition, empathy, and perspective taking skills.

The current version of the PEECh curriculum, which consists of nine lessons, each including warm-up activities, short stories, guiding questions, and extension activities, was introduced to underprivileged 3-5-year-old children at a preschool and kindergarten in rural Pennsylvania, USA (Arda Tuncdemir *et al.*, in preparation). Research results show that children's social-emotional competence increased in the experiment classroom when compared to control groups (those not introduced to the PEECh curriculum during the study period). According to the teachers who implemented the curriculum (during teacher interviews), participating children showed increased emotion recognition and understanding. Moreover, parents of these children (as reported in parent surveys) supported teachers' comments, observing reduced conflict behavior and greater inclusion of peers in their (participating) children. Also, participating children continued to show increased perspective-taking and attentiveness to others' needs even after the PEECh curriculum was completed.

In addition to these outcomes for children, participating teachers demonstrated their satisfaction with the program. Following this project, several of the participating teachers created their activities, games and story puppets related to the themes of the curriculum for use in their classrooms. During follow-up interviews, they also requested additional learning experiences with PEECh, and SEL and ethics education more generally, for their teaching and their students' social and emotional development.
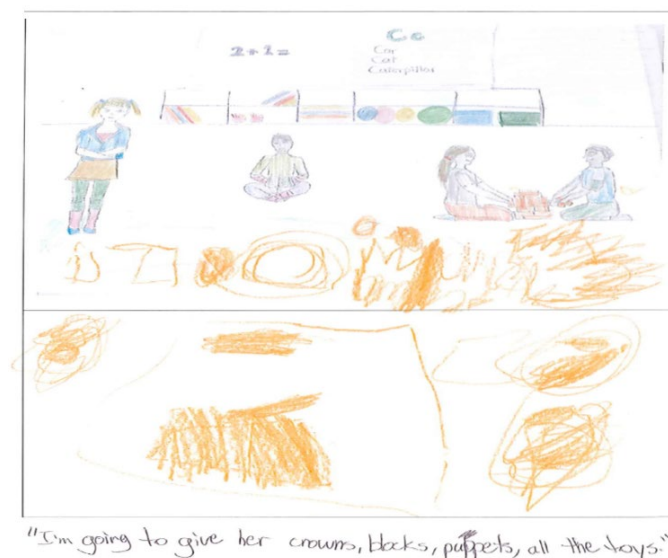

Fig. 1 - *An extension activity example of Lesson 3 "The New Kid in the classroom" (PEECh).*

Fig. 2 - *Extension activity examples of Lesson 7 "Let's Play Together" (PEECh).*

3. The MelArete project

3.1. Theoretical framework

The word "MelArete" combines the Greek terms "*meléte*", which means "care", and "*areté*", which means "virtue". Indeed, the ethics of care and the ethics of virtue are the fundamental reference elements of the ethical theory at the basis of the MelArete project, which is aimed at educating children to virtues in the perspective of the ethics of care. The main theoretical theses are as follows:

- human beings are relational beings and they experience an ontological condition in which living by themselves is not enough; for this reason, they have the necessity of being cared for and of caring for others;
- according to the ethics of care (Bowden, 1997; Fisher & Tronto, 1990; Held, 2006; Kittay & Feder, 2002; Mayeroff, 1990; Mortari, 2006; 2015; Noddings, 1984; 1992; 2002; Slote, 2007; Tronto, 1993), caring for others means searching for the good;
- according to the Aristotelian perspective (*Nicomachean Ethics*), searching for the good is strictly related to acting in accord with virtue;

- in light of these assumptions, we can argue that caring for others implies practicing virtues.

It is possible to define MelArete as a project of ethical education making reference to the conceptualization proposed by Ricoeur (1990), who establishes ethics as a discourse about care for oneself, care for others and care for institutions. Starting from this vision of ethics, it is legitimate to state that ethics is caring. Since the core of caring is made of virtues (Mortari, 2006; Mortari & Saiani, 2014), education to ethics, as related to care, is education to virtue.

And yet, how is it possible to educate to virtue?

In *Protagoras* (320 b) and *Meno* (96 c-d), Socrates doubts that virtue can be taught. However, in the *Apology*, Socrates says, «It is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day» (30 a). This idea, read according to the Socratic educative example, suggests that, in order to live in accord with virtue, it is essential to examine what virtue is. The method of this examination is suggested in the Platonic dialogues, where Socrates, through the maieutic dialogue, encourages his interlocutors to reason about the essence of things.

By contrast, Aristotle thinks that virtues of

character can be learned by practicing them: «If something arises in us by nature, we first have the capacity for it, and later perform the activity. […]. Virtues, by contrast, we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by having first activated them» (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1103a, 27–33). In particular, Aristotle specifies, «We become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions» (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1103b, 1–2).

The MelArete project takes inspiration from both the Socratic and Aristotelian perspectives, because children are encouraged both to examine, also in a dialogical way, the meaning of ethical concepts and to reflect on their own ethical experiences, starting from the assumption that people become virtuous not merely by carrying out virtuous actions but, more precisely, by focussing on them in a reflective manner.

Another ancient philosophical reference for MelArete is Plutarch, who suggests taking into consideration the importance of the emotional dimension in ethical experience: he says, for example, that hate for wickedness and a right indignation can help justice, and that it is not possible to separate affection from friendship, pity from humanity, the involvement in delight and pain from a sincere benevolence (*De virtute et vitio*, 12, 451e). These considerations suggest that ethical education should be considered to be strictly connected to social-emotional learning.

The ethical theory at the basis of MelArete shares the belief that virtues are central in education with the tradition of "character education" (Berkowitz, 2011; Howard *et al.*, 2004; Lickona, 1978; 1993; 2004), but it does not confuse ethical education with mere socialization because it fosters the learning of virtues through eidetic analysis.

Furthermore, it shares the belief that education implies the development of critical, analytical and deliberative thinking with the tradition of "moral reasoning" (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Killen & Smetana, 2008; 2010; Kohlberg, 1981; 1984; Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Nucci & Narvaez, 2008; Smetana, 1995; 2006; Turiel, 1998; 2002; 2010), but it does not foster only intellectual learning as it requires to reason on the experience of virtues[1].

3.2. Pedagogy and curriculum

MelArete can be defined as educative research because it is characterized by two main purposes: an educative one (promoting children's ethical development) and a heuristic one (understanding children's ethical thoughts). Moreover, it can be considered as a "research *for* children" (Mortari, 2009), because it not only aims to collect valid data to increase scientific knowledge about learning but it also aims to offer positive and significant experiences to the children involved. This type of research can also be defined as "transformative" (Mortari, 2007; 2009) because it aims to improve learning environments.

An excellent educative action should be configured as a practice of care and, so, a good educative research study should be oriented by the ethics of care. By emphasizing the importance of searching for the good of others, the ethics of care attaches particular relevance to and attributes an added level of attention regarding the quality of the relationships. Since the research work is conducted in schools, and thus, in a natural context rather than an experimental

---

[1] For a deeper analysis of the relationship between the ethical theory at the basis of MelArete and the traditions of "character education" and "moral reasoning" see Mortari & Ubbiali (2017).

one, its epistemological approach is that of a "naturalistic inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in which the phenomenon under study is investigated in the context in which it appears, and the researcher must be careful not to alter this context. According to the naturalistic inquiry approach, the researcher is the primary instrument of investigation. If we interpret this indication in the light of the ethics of care, we can say that the researcher must be an ethical instrument that is capable of constructing good relationships. Therefore, it is crucial that the researcher also focuses on himself/herself, in order to participate in the relationship in an ethically oriented way.

A study which is inspired by the ethics of care is characterized by the actualization of several, precise ways of being in a relationship (Mortari, 2009). In particular, the researcher should be receptive, in order to allow the other person to reveal himself/herself and manifest his/her way of being; he/she should be responsive, i.e. have the disposition to place the other person at the center of his/her attention, give priority to the other's needs, and act promptly in favor of the other person; he/she should pay attention, i.e. keep his/her gaze wide open on reality and be able to listen to the other's voice; he/she should be non-intrusive and give as much space as possible to other people; he/she should care for the emotional climate, because the experiences of the researcher and of the participants always include an emotional dimension; he/she should have interior quietness and be calm and relaxed, in order to favor the construction of a receptive relationship; and he/she should show feelings of trust, accept the other person and be willing to wait and give him/her the time he/she needs.

The instruments used in MelArete are as follows:
- listening to narratives, which help children learn how to interpret ethical concepts and virtues;
- building narratives, which help children construct their views on virtues;
- reflecting on vignettes, which stimulate a debate on ethical dilemmas;
- playing games, which are useful to deepen children's reflections on virtues;
- carrying out Socratic conversations, which allow children to analyze ethical concepts within the class intersubjective context taking advantage of the richness of many perspectives;
- writing a "diary of virtues" which allows children to learn to reflect on their own ways to practice virtues.

In line with the educative qualification of the research, all these instruments have a heuristic significance (collecting interesting data about children's ethical thinking) but also an educative one (promoting children's reflection on ethical concepts).

The MelArete curriculum consists of twelve meetings between the researcher and the class. In general, meetings last about 60-90 minutes and are scheduled once every two weeks. The educative pathway is focused on the ethical concepts of good, care and virtues, and on the specific virtues of courage, generosity, respect, and justice. The educative pathway is structured as summarized in Table 2.

Meetings	Activities[2]	
I	Initial activity	The reading of a story is used as a stimulus to promote in the class a Socratic conversation about good and care.
II – III	Exploratory activities	A game is used to introduce children to the general concept of virtue and stimulate an initial reflection on the specific virtues of courage, generosity, respect and justice, which children are required to define individually in writing. A story is used to foster children's reflections, starting from the following questions: what are virtues? (an eidetic question, that is a question that – in a Socratic perspective – looks at the essence of things) (Plato, *Complete works*) how can virtues be learned? (a practical question, that is a question that – in an Aristotelian perspective – improves the reflection on one's experience) (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*). Children are required to answer individually in writing.
IV – V	Activities about courage	Activities about courage, generosity, respect and justice follow the same frame. A story about courage/generosity/respect/justice is used as a stimulus to reflect, first individually in writing and then all together in the class, about the following elements: an act of courage/generosity/respect/justice, the thoughts by which it is oriented, the effects that it produced and the emotions felt by its author. A game is used to deepen children's reflection about courage/generosity/respect/justice; as an alternative, vignettes are used to stimulate children's reflection about what should be done in a situation that requires an act of courage/generosity/respect/justice.
VI – VII	Activities about generosity	
VIII – IX	Activities about respect	
X – XI	Activities about justice	
XII	Conclusive activity	A story is used to stimulate final reflections on the same themes of the exploratory activities, with the aim to understand if and how children's thoughts have changed along the educative pathway. Children are required: to define individually, in writing, the virtues of courage, generosity, respect and justice; to answer individually, in writing, the following questions: "What are virtues?" and "How can virtues be learned?".

Tab. 2 - *The MelArete educative pathway.*

Starting from the assumption that ethical education can be connected to social-emotional learning, activities are developed in order to stimulate ethical reflections, which also include considering the feelings connected to the virtuous action, from the point of view of both the author and the receiver of the action itself. For example, in the story read during the first meeting, the gesture of care is motivated by the intention to alle-

---

[2]   All the activities, including stories, are invented by the research team. The characters of the stories are animals living in the Wood of virtues; the characters of vignettes are fictional.

viate the sadness of the other. In the stories about specific virtues, the feelings of the characters are made explicit and, after reading the story, children are specifically required to examine the emotions felt by the character who carried out the virtuous action; the vignettes are drawn with the intent of highlighting the facial emotional expressions of people who act in various situations. All the activities are designed to stimulate an emphatic identification with the characters, starting from the assumption that ethical acting implies empathy.

After the third meeting and during the rest of the educative pathway, children are invited to keep a diary in which they narrate a virtuous action they have done or they have witnessed. The request is to write in the diary at least once a week. The virtues considered suitable for the diary are those on which the educative pathway focuses, i.e., courage, generosity, respect, and justice. Whenever children do a virtuous action, they attach a leaf on the "tree of virtues" that is drawn at the beginning of their copybook. The leaves have different colors, based on the different virtues they represent (yellow for courage, red for generosity, blue for respect, purple for justice).

Furthermore, whenever children narrate a virtuous action in their diary and stick the leaf of the related virtue on the tree in their copybook, they also stick another leaf, identical to the first one, on the "tree of the trees" that is located in the classroom. This additional activity allows children to share their intrasubjective and reflective experiences with the whole class.
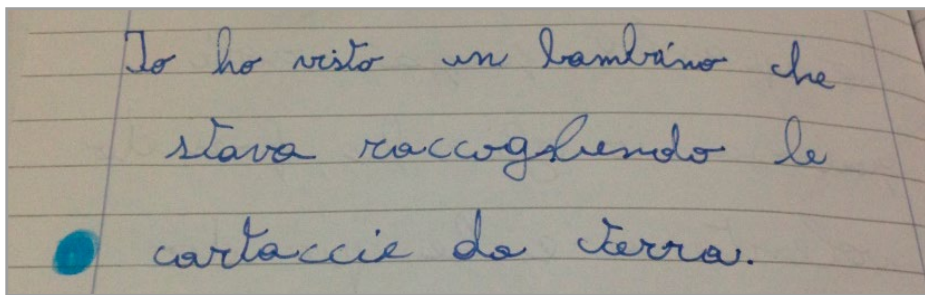

Fig. 3 - *An example of a page of diary narrating an action of respect:*
"I saw a child who was picking up litter from the ground".

Fig. 4 - *A "tree of virtues".*

Fig. 5 - *A "tree of the trees".*

This version of the MelArete project was carried out with 8 to 10-year-old children of six fourth-grade classes of primary schools located in the North and the Centre of Italy[3]. Each activity had its heuristic value. Therefore, findings were collected for each meeting along the educative pathway (Mortari & Valbusa, 2017; Valbusa, Ubbiali & Silva, 2018; Mortari, 2019). However, it is also possible to offer a general overview of the outcomes of the project by analyzing, through a phenomenological method aimed at identifying the essence of the thoughts of children, the answers that children gave at the end of the pathway to the following questions: "What have you learned from the pathway?" and "What has remained in your heart and in your mind?". Indeed, children reported learning outcomes when answering both questions.

Cognitive and behavioral outcomes may be considered. As far as cognitive outcomes are concerned, children learned the ethical lexicon, especially in relation to the concept of virtue that they did not know before the project, the meaning of the specific virtues on which the educative pathway was focused, and the different declinations of the same virtue. As for behavioral outcomes, children have been introduced to and engaged in learning to be more virtuous in everyday life. It is an essential area of learning because virtuous actions nourish relationships with the capacity to care for others. In their answers, some children reveal a better understanding of the importance of virtues for life in general. These outcomes show the ability of children to reflect on and understand their own experience starting from the project.

As regards the relationship between the project and the experience of children, it is also important to focus on the results that emerged from the diaries. The fact of writing a diary helped children activate a profound reflection on their ethical experience, that, in some cases, was also described in terms of the emotional dimension of the people involved and of the relational implication of virtuous actions. A longitudinal analysis carried out on 100 diaries revealed that the reflective ability of many children had grown during the project. In several cases, over time the description has become richer and included elements such as motivations and outcomes, also of an emotional type, of virtuous actions. Some children learned to see the complexity of an ethical gesture with all its nuances. Eventually, a number of diaries testify to the ability of children to reinterpret the contents of the MelArete project in a personal way and refer to their own experience.

4. Conclusions

Starting from the assumption that there is a benefit in combining ethics education and SEL to develop the whole child, in this paper, we have presented two different examples of SEL-informed, ethics education projects. The importance of focusing on ethical competence is linked to the necessity to develop caring and supportive classroom contexts in which children can also engage in ethical reasoning and dialogue. Furthermore, the necessity of ethics education is linked to the importance of educating people from early childhood to care for others, themselves, and their communities.

The two projects are different in their the-

---

[3] A similar version of the project was carried out with 4 and 5 y.o. children in kindergartens located in the North and in the Centre of Italy. The difference compared with the educative pathway proposed to primary schools consisted in the implementation of a number of modified instruments and activities in kindergartens which did not require writing.

oretical frameworks: PEECh is rooted in constructivist education, philosophy for children and social domain theory, while MelArete is rooted in ancient philosophy, virtue ethics and care ethics. Despite this difference at the theoretical level, both the projects are developed coherently with the educative aim to give children the possibility to reflect on ethical dimensions of their experience. Instruments used in the two experiences are similar: both PEECh and MelArete recognize the effectiveness to use stories (also containing ethical dilemmas) and to ask children guiding questions starting from the stories, in order to stimulate their ethical thinking. The projects presented in this paper are developed to address both SEL and ethics education outcomes, as discussed above. The outcomes show the effectiveness of both these projects in contributing to the SEL and ethical development of young children. Both PEECh and MelArete are designed to encourage ethical reflection that takes into consideration the SEL dimensions of the classroom and peer relationships. However, these projects also have different points of focus: PEECh focuses directly on both ethical and emotional concepts, requiring children to reason on fairness, personal and other's welfare, inclusion and exclusion of peers, empathy and perspective taking; instead, MelArete focuses directly on ethical concepts, i.e. good, care, virtue, courage, generosity, respect and justice, and focuses indirectly on emotional aspects as elements that children consider in their ethical reasoning and reflection (guided by the researcher, who asks a specific question after reading the stories, or spontaneously in the diaries, as our findings show).

The outcomes of the research carried out in these projects show the effectiveness of the developed instruments, that appear to have both a heuristic and an educative valence: indeed, they allow the researchers to collect data that disclose essential elements of children's thinking and, at the same time, they promote children's reflection on their experience. They also show the importance of supporting ethics and SEL in school. We conclude hoping that teachers interested in the whole development of children can find insights in and ground for reflection on their own classroom practices as inspired by the projects presented in this paper.

References

Arda Tuncdemir, T. B., Burroughs, M. D. & Moore, G. Philosophical ethics in early childhood in Lewistown Sample (in preparation for submission to *Journal of Moral Education)*.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (2nd ed.). Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999.

Berkowitz, M. W. (2011). *Understanding effective character education*. The Center for Spiritual and Ethical Education. CSEE Connections. Retrieved June 25, 2017, from http://www.character.org/wp-ontent/uploads/2011/12/Understanding-EffectiveCharacter-Education.pdf

Bowden, P. (1997). *Caring*. London and New York: Routledge.

Burroughs, M. D., & Barkauskas, N. J. (2017). Educating the whole child: social-emotional learning and ethics education. *Ethics and Education*, *12*(2), pp. 218-232.

Burroughs, M. D., & Arda Tuncdemir, T. B. (2017). Philosophical ethics in early childhood: A pilot study. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, *4*(1), pp. 74-101.

Burroughs, M.D., & Arda Tuncdemir, T. B. (2016). Philosophical ethics in early childhood: Instructor Manual. Unpublished manuscript.

Coie, J. D., Miller-Johnson, S., & Bagwell, C. (2000). Prevention science. In A.J. Sameroff, M. Lewis, & S.M. Miller (Eds.). *Handbook of developmental psychopathology* (pp. 93-108). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

Colby, A., & Kohlberg, L. (1987). *The measurement of moral judgment. Vol 1: Theoretical foundations and research validation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Critical skills for building healthy schools. . In J.A. Durlak, C.E. Domitrovich, R.P. Weissberg, T.P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning. Research an practice* (pp. xi-xiii). New York: The Guilford Press.

Dewey, J. (1975) *Philosophy of education: (problems of men)*. New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams and Co.

Dewey, J. (1997). *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan. New York: Simon & Schuster, Reprint edition

Dryfoos, J. G. (1997). The prevalence of problem behaviors: Implications for programs. In R. P. Weissberg, T. P. Gullotta, R. L. Hampton, B. A. Ryan, & G. R. Adams (Eds.), *Healthy children 2010: Enhancing children's Wellness* (pp. 17-46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child development*, *82*(1), pp. 405-432.

Eaton, D. K., Kann, L., Kinchen, S., Shanklin, S., Ross, J., Hawkins, J., *et al.* (2008). Youth risk behavior surveillance – United States, 2007. *MMWR Surveillance Summaries*, 57(SS04), pp. 1-131.

Eisenberg, N., & Miller, P. A. (1987). The relation of empathy to prosocial and related behaviors. *Psychological bulletin*, *101*(1), 91-119.

Eisenberg, N., Spinrad, T. L., & Morris, A. (2014). Empathy-related responding in children. In Killen & J. G. Smetana (Eds.) *Handbook of Moral Development* (2nd ed., pp. 184-207). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Fisher, B. & Tronto, J. C. (1990). *Toward a Feminist Theory of Care*. In Abel, E. K. & Nelson, M. K. (Eds.), *Circles of Care*. *Work and Identity in Women's Lives* (pp. 35-62). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M. J. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *American psychologist*, *58*(6-7), pp. 466-474.

Greenberg, M. T., Domitrovich, C., & Bumbarger, B. (2001). The prevention of mental disorders in school-aged children: Current state of the field. *Prevention & treatment*, *4*, NP.

Held, V. (2006). *The Ethics of Care. Personal, Political, and Global*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press.

Hoffman, M. L. (2001). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge University Press.

Hoose, P., Hoose, H., & Tilley, D. (1998). *Hey, little ant*. Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press.

Howard, R. W., Berkowitz, M. W., & Schaeffer, E. (2004). Politics of character education. *Educational Policy, 18*(1), pp. 188-215.

Killen, M. (2007). Children's social and moral reasoning about exclusion. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *16*(1), pp. 32-36.

Killen, M., & Smetana, J. (2008). Moral judgment and moral neuroscience: Intersections, definitions, and issues. *Child Developmental Perspectives, 2*, pp. 1–6.

Killen, M., & Smetana, J. (2010). Future directions: social development in the context of social justice. *Social Development, 19*, pp. 642–657.

Kittay, E. F. & Feder, E. K. (Eds.) (2002). *The Subject of Care. Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*. Lanham (Md): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of school health*, *74*(7), pp. 262-273.

Kohlberg, L. (1981). *Essays on moral development, Vol. I: The philosophy of moral development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Kohlberg, L. (1984). *Essays in moral development, Vol. II: The psychology of moral development*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Lehr, C. A., Hansen, A., Sinclair, M. F., & Christenson, S. L. (2003). Moving Beyond Dropout Towards School Completion: An Integrative Review of Data-Based Interventions. *School Psychology Review*, *32*(3).

Lickona, T. (1978). Helping teachers become moral educators. *Theory into Practice, 17*(3), pp. 258-266.

Lickona, T. (1993). The return of character education. *Educational Leadership, 51*(3), pp. 6-11.

Lickona, T. (2004). *Character matters*. New York: Touchstone.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park (CA): Sage.

Lipman, M. (1991). *Thinking in education.* New York, NY, US: Cambridge University Press.

Mayeroff, M. (1990). *On Caring*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Merrell, K. W., & Gueldner, B. A. (2010). *Social and emotional learning in the classroom: Promoting mental health and academic success*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Mohr Lone, J. and Burroughs, M. D. (2016). *Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools.* Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Montessori, M. (1964). *The Montessori method.* New York: Schocken Books.

Mortari, L. (2006). *La pratica dell'aver cura*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori.

Mortari, L. (2007). *Cultura della ricerca e pedagogia. Prospettive epistemologiche*. Roma: Carocci.

Mortari, L. (Ed.) (2009). *La ricerca per i bambini*. Milano: Mondadori.

Mortari, L. & Saiani, L. (Eds.) (2014). *Gestures and thoughts of caring*. New York-Boston: McGraw-Hill Education.

Mortari, L. (2015). *Filosofia della cura*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore.

Mortari, L., & Ubbiali, M. (2017). The "MelArete" Project: Educating children to the ethics of virtue and of care. *European Journal of Educational Research, 6*(3), 269-278.

Mortari, L. & Valbusa, F. (2017). *Sentieri di educazione etica*. Verona: Edizioni Libreria Cortina.

Mortari, L. (Ed.) (2019). *MelArete. Ricerca e pratica dell'etica delle virtù*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring. A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The Challenge to Care in Schools. An Alternative Approach to Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2002). *Starting at Home. Caring and Social Policy*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Nucci, L. (1981). The development of personal concepts: a domain distinct from moral and social concepts. *Child Development, 52*, pp. 114–121.

Nucci, L. P. (2001). *Education in the moral domain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nucci, L., & Narvaez, D. (Eds.) (2008). *Handbook of moral development and character education*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.

Nucci, L., & Nucci, M. (1982). Children's social interactions in the context of moral and conventional transgressions. *Child Development, 53*, pp. 403–412

Pfister, M. (1995). *Rainbow fish to the rescue*. (J. Alison James, Trans.). New York, NY: North-South Books.

Piaget, J. (1997). *The moral judgment of the child*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Plato. *Complete work*s. Edited by J. M. Cooper. Associate editor D. S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Plutarco. *De virtute et vitio*. In *Moralia I*, Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1989.

Ricoeur, P. (1990). Ethique et morale. *Revue de l'Institut catholique de Paris*, *34*, avril-juin, pp. 131-142.

Slote, M. (2007). *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*. London and New York: Routledge.

Smetana, J. (1995). *Morality in context: abstractions, ambiguities, and applications*. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Annals of child development*, Vol. 10 (pp. 83-139). London: Jessica Kingsley.

Smetana, J. (2006). *Social-cognitive domain theory: consistencies and variations in children's moral and social judgments*. In M. Killen & J. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development* (pp. 119-153). Mahwah,NJ: Erbaum.

Smetana, J. G., Jambon, M, & Ball, C. (2014). The social domain approach to children's moral and social judgments. In Killen & J. G. Smetana (Eds.) *Handbook of Moral Development* (2nd ed., pp. 23-45). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral Boundaries*. London: Routledge.

Tuncdemir, T. B. A., Burroughs, M. D., & Moore, G. (2019). The impact of the philosophical ethics in early childhood program on social-emotional learning. Manuscript in preparation.

Turiel, E. (1998). *The development of morality*. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & N. Eisenberg (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology. Vol. 3: Social, emotional, and personality development* (pp. 863-932). New York: John Wiley.

Turiel, E. (2002). *The culture of morality: Social development, context, and conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turiel, E. (2010). Domain specificity in social interactions, social thought, and social development. *Child Development*, *81*, pp. 720-726.

Turiel, E. (2014). Morality: Epistemology, development, and social opposition. In Killen & J. G. Smetana (Eds.) *Handbook of Moral Development* (2nd ed., pp. 3-22). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Valbusa, F., Ubbiali, M., & Silva, R. (2018). "Il bene nel pensiero dei bambini. Una ricerca educativa nella scuola dell'infanzia e primaria". *Encyclopaideia*, 22 (50).

Wartenberg, T. E. (2009). Big ideas for little kids: Teaching philosophy through children's literature. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Zins, J. E., & Elias, M. J. (2007). Social and emotional learning: Promoting the development of all students. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *17*(2-3), pp. 233-255.