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Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica

EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY

5-8 June 2019 Cagliari Italy

VOLUME II

Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology

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EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY

VOLUME II
**Teaching, Learning,
Evaluation and Technology**

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democratica international
Conference

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***Title* Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" - Education and Post-Democracy VOLUME II Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology**

This volume contains papers presented in the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place at the University of Cagliari on 5-8 June 2019. The aim of the Conference was to bring together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate the concepts of "education" in a "post-democracy" era, the latter being a set of conditions under which scholars are called to face and counteract new forms of authoritarian democracy.

Populisms, racisms, discriminations and nationalisms have burst and spread on the international scene, translated and mobilized by sovereigntist political movements. Nourished by neo-liberalism and inflated by technocratic systems of governance these regressive forms of post-democracy are shaping historical challenges to the realms of education and culture: it is on this ground, and not only on the political and economic spheres, that decisive issues are at stake. These challenges are both tangible and intangible, and call into question the modern ideas of justice, equality and democracy, throughout four key dimensions of the educational function, all of which intersected by antinomies and uncertainties: ethical-political socialization, differences, inclusion, innovation.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and inter-disciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners' mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 600 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on researches, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

Premise

Since 1973, with Chile's Dictatorship as a neoliberal 'laboratory', it's more than 45 years that the Global Education Reform Movement has transformed educational systems all around the world through a discourse rooted on epistemic and ideological hegemonies. A new 'truth' of the homo economicus as able to rationally and freely pursue its interest as self-entrepreneur is relentlessly spreading: the Human Capital paradigm then connects individualistic choices and personal skills to impose diverse educational tracks through a Life-Long-Learning investment. Thus, the restructuring of the Education State, thanks to policies of privatization, competition and high stakes accountability, has implied a new ethics challenging social justice ideals.

The massification of educational systems in Europe and worldwide, together with the increasing demand for their democratization, have profoundly challenged traditional teaching models: the lecture, the magister teacher and the specific spatial-temporal devices aimed at disciplining students according to the needs of a Fordist capitalist society and to the reproduction of class inequalities. Starting particularly from the Fifties in schools, and more recently in higher education, new teaching-learning configurations have been explored and developed: situated and participatory didactics aimed at involving students in a reflexive relationship with knowledge and social reality; new ways of hybridizing formal and informal learning; new pedagogies exploiting the possibilities inscribed in new medias and digital technologies. These practices, sometimes radically, reverse theory and practices in order to develop student-centred learning processes. The thematic sessions within this stream explore the challenges, tensions, ambivalences and potentialities of pedagogies and didactics innovations involving school and university teachers, students, as well as their surrounding environments: the physical, architectural, material and technological spaces that constitute a crucial component of situated learning processes.

The relation between education systems and policy making changed in the last decades, consequently to three innovations sharing the common paradigm of evaluation, namely: the establishment of national/international large-scale testing, the diffusion of systems assessing schools' and the raising interest for efficacy and cost-effectiveness of education interventions. These innovations have been highly debated from different and controversial perspectives. The aim of the conference stream is to collect papers focused on actual uses of different forms evaluation, in order to overcome previous ideological oppositions, contributing to move the debate into a more pragmatic and fruitful phase.

Further issue: How is digital technology changing education? Online schools and classes are becoming widely available; backpack of many

high school and college students, instead of physical textbooks, are now carrying iPads and various forms of devices connected to online; teachers now have more ability to personalize lessons, instructions, and projects for each group or student; by using devices and programs to distribute classwork and assignments, they can even personalize lessons and focus on the work of each student; increased opportunities and constraints for students to collaborate together from a variety of places becomes possible; free online classes called "MOOC's" otherwise known as Massive Open Online Courses are becoming widely popular. Finally, a mounting set of variegated pressures to produce pedagogical innovation in teaching and learning is being addressed to teacher and school staffs. Even the governance of school system and school-daily life as a whole is undergoing a wide process of digitalization. But what does the increase in digital technology and approach mean for the current times? Although many advantages come with digitalized learning, there are also disadvantages that researchers, educators, academics and professionals are aware of, including and not limited to minimal to zero face-to-face interaction in the classroom and the lack of ability to work in person with study partners and teachers. Any conversation that does not include the potential dangers of the widespread use of technology would not be complete. Therefore, the stream focuses also on the interplay between learning theories and technologies. Both learning theories and tools are composed of multiple attributes, and they refer to many aspects and facets which render educational technology highly complex. Evolution in both theory and technology reflects no clear successive breaks or discrete developments, rather, waves of growth and accumulation. Evolutions in society and education have influenced the selection and use of learning theories and technologies; learning theories and technologies are situated in a somewhat vague conceptual field; learning theories and technologies are connected and intertwined by information processing and knowledge acquisition; educational technologies shifted learner support from program or instructor control toward more shared and learner control; and learning theories and findings represent a fuzzy mixture of principles and applications.

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The Frame and the Horizon. Pedagogical Thought and the Training of Teachers between Subordination and Emancipation

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Keywords: *Education, Emancipation, History of pedagogical thought, Democracy, Teacher training*

Introduction

The contribution aims to highlight how fundamental teacher training is both to enhance the link between education, democracy and citizenship, and to build a better one between an empowering pedagogical thought and daily educational action. Indeed, the training of teachers is necessary in a one-sided social and cultural environment which seems to be enframed in the single ideological paradigm of neoliberalism. By rediscovering pedagogy as a tool for the emancipation and development of future generations, teachers and their training will no longer be subordinate to the neoliberal hegemony and will regain full respect for their dignity and status in the society.

1. The crossroads

It is often pointed out that the school is at a crossroads: on the one hand, the market constantly fuels competition and takes efficiency as its only benchmark; on the other hand, democratic thinking aims to lead to full human emancipation (Baldacci, 2014). Education is therefore forced to make a choice and the training of teachers will be affected by one path or the other. Certainly, this issue does not concern only schools but society as a whole, which is immersed in a system of thought that makes it very difficult to distinguish the frame from the horizon. For this reason, the starting point must be society.

Several studies (Mirowsky, Plehwe, 2009; Mirowsky, 2013; Stedman Jones, 2012) argue that the flexible nature of neoliberalism has managed to deeply transform the social, ideological and material fabric of society by depriving the word neoliberalism itself of its meaning all over the Western world despite geographical and historical differences (Srnicek, Williams, 2018).

This recalls Gramsci's warning about capitalism being able to base itself upon hegemony, that is on public consensus thereby leading a certain (dominant) group to impose its visions upon others. We only need to understand this aspect to understand how common sense can contribute to establishing a worldview as the universal horizon of an entire society, thus making it difficult to distinguish the thin border between frame and horizon and making citizens subordinate to and dominated by a single ideology.

This form of colonization today is not exercised through coercive methods but rather through the active and passive consent of the public in different ways, not only through the formation of political alliances, but above all through the dissemination of cultural and social values.

History tells us that economic and technological infrastructures have repercussions that can shape and modify human behaviour; in short, hegemony, and the resulting subordination, are not only material but also social forces. These

hegemonic aspects have become so inherent in technology and the material environment that they constitute our everyday world.

For those who want to oppose this thought, this implies to continually resort to counterhegemonic actions that allow to open new windows and imagine new tangible frames. But the construction of these new frames clearly goes against most of today's emancipation efforts which focus on elements of immediate resistance and of daily indignation that certainly ignite significant social issues, but that turn out to be unrealistic and irrelevant against an ideology that has already crept into the deeper layers of our society. Therefore, we remain entangled in this capitalist realism (Fischer, 2009) and the sense of impotence that follows necessarily influences the education system, which is forced to witness its gradual conquest by an all-pervasive force. Indeed, the school is strategic in the construction or deconstruction of a dominant thought.

In fact, school risks reflecting society more and more, given that society itself is made by individuals who build their ideology and their vision of the world within society and in everyday life. And the neoliberal man who builds himself within this vision of the world is a new subject who wants to be a paradigm of the human: the man-enterprise. «Business is therefore not only a model to be imitated, but also a certain attitude to be stimulated in the child and in the student, a potential energy to be stimulated in the worker. By establishing a very close correspondence between self-government and the governance of society, the enterprise defines a new ethic, that is, a certain inner disposition, a certain ethos to embody for self-monitoring that evaluation procedures must strengthen and verify» (Dardot, Laval, 2013: 415).

All the arguments mentioned so far are the result of that neoliberal ideology that has inevitably influenced the field of education. The school reforms that have been implemented in recent years have relentlessly eroded the community of teachers, who stand as a bastion of the democratic and civil dimension of the school institution.

The question is thus whether it is still possible to imagine a school that is directed towards the full emancipation and the intellectual and moral growth of citizens, a real school of the constitution capable of promoting a full development of the person and a civil and democratic growth of the country (Baldacci, 2014). How many times in the school corridors do we bear witness to conversations between teachers depicting dystopian scenarios and the inevitable decline of the school institution? In the aforementioned context, it is clear that teachers are nothing more than mere executors and transmitters of pre-packaged knowledge, functional to the application of the 'Man-Enterprise' formula in the school environment.

In order to train teachers within the constitutional framework and democratic citizenship, the first step is to endeavour to break this cultural subordination and to regain possession of a different language, rediscovering the strategic link between democracy and education. A different framework is necessary to account for the democratic horizon and pedagogical knowledge as an autonomous science.

2. Rediscovery through the classics

Rediscovering the strategic link between democracy and education is the only way to emancipate schools from their subordination and will allow the new generations to take their destiny into their hands and promote the development of humanity.

I will attempt this breakthrough by shedding light onto the ground-breaking studies of pedagogists which can be the key to imagine, and implement, different scenarios. Rousseau wrote: «The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying 'This is mine', and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: 'Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody'» (2017: 60).

Surely, the question is not so much the abolition of private property, although many elements should lead us to reassess the value of private ownership of the means of production, which today disregards the land and its ecosystems and human relations. Thematizing this is necessary to reassess the question of enterprise, which has become an enemy ground. Knowledge should be reimagined as real common enterprise and the privileged means of personal growth for an individual in which self-realization, material well-being and economic and commercial success are perfectly combined. This may be even more evident today, given the increasingly social and cooperative nature of production, which makes it clear that the right to property cannot coincide with the right to monopolise a good and to individually appropriate decision-making powers. So, the real question to be asked is whether knowledge can still be thought as common ground in schools and whether schools can still be imagined as a common good.

Today, these issues and aspects should be more evident than ever before, given that the networks and means of production continuously shed light on the legitimacy of the individual ownership of the means of production and draw attention to the redistribution of wealth. Bernard of Chartres said that we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants. What metaphor can be more powerful than this to illustrate the importance of knowledge in our schools? We will not be able to look far if we do not dare to explain and put into practice in schools that we must aim to and bet on others, because only together can we dare to change perspective and because changes can certainly start from each of us, but are effective if we make them collective. To be truly effective, teacher training requires a solid background in the history of pedagogy and in particular in those authors who placed democratic thought at the centre of their research.

Dewey wrote *Democracy and Education* (1970) at the beginning of the 20th century precisely in the transition from a rural production system to a mass industrial one, in which workers were forced to adapt to the machine: in some way, it was a period very similar to ours. Throughout his work, Dewey points out that the ultimate goal of education is exactly the collective dimension and the socialization of knowledge, which must be enhanced within and by schools: «Therefore, to say that the validity of the structures, of the curricula, of the methods of the school are measured according to the social spirit by which they are animated, does not mean other than to reaffirm explicitly what we argued in the first chapters about the social function of education. And the great danger that threatens schools is the absence of a social dimension, which is the great enemy of an effective moral training». He continues: «First of all, the school itself must be a community in all its nuances. Social perceptions and interests can only be developed in a truly social environment, where there is an exchange in the construction of a common experience» (Dewey, 1970: 457). Against a different backdrop, Maritain (2007) too stresses in various works the links between democratic and Christian principles which can be translated into educational practice when exploring issues such as the unity of

the human race, the equality of all men, the human and labor dignity and the pursuit of collective goals.

If put into practice, these ideas can widen the scope of education by providing students with empowering tools in a fruitful environment thereby promoting democratic growth, constitutional awareness and critical thought. The alternative is to let today's hegemonic ideas continue to represent the frame and the horizon, and therefore schools and teachers develop according to capitalist principles that risk reducing pedagogical thought and human experience to mere marketing

Conclusions

In conclusion, rediscovering the social dimension of education would change the common sense of future generations, renewing the social and utopian imagination, and paving the way for a better future. Bloch wrote that Marx wanted to act and change the world through the will and therefore did not just wait for certain conditions to occur but thought about how to make them emerge. In the training of future teachers, this could be the most ambitious path to choose.

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