

Using Problematicism to de-construct and re-semanticize.

A case study research within the Popular Education¹

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Abstract

This research starts from the importance of Popular Education in the history of Italian schools, which became a fundamental resource for preventing and tackling the widespread phenomena of school dropout. To contrast school failure, in 1995 the European *White Paper on Education and Training* fostered the birth of second chance schools, according to a business paradigm that also seems to underlie the conception of dropout. Reflecting on and overcoming the inequalities due to the rhetoric of success/failure, this study is set within the theoretical framework of Pedagogical Problematicism, looking at a process of de-struction and then re-semanticization of the semantic and lexical sphere of dropout and second chance in terms of social justice. A case study was carried out during the 2020/2021 school year in the “Antonia Vita” Popular School in Monza, focusing on contextual and structural conditions that can prevent hardship and disadvantage in minors at educational risk aged between 14 and 16.

La ricerca muove dall'importanza che l'educazione popolare ha assunto nella storia della scuola italiana, fino a costituire una risorsa fondamentale per prevenire e far fronte ai diffusi fenomeni di dispersione scolastica. Inoltre, per contrastare l'insuccesso scolastico, nel 1995 il *Libro Bianco* europeo sull'istruzione e formazione ha promosso la nascita delle scuole della seconda occasione, secondo un paradigma aziendalistico che sembra essere alla base anche della concezione della dispersione. Così, per riflettere sulle disuguaglianze dovute alla retorica del successo/fallimento e superarle, il presente studio assume la cornice teorica del Problematicismo Pedagogico,

¹ The paper is the result of joint reflections and research work. In formal terms, paragraphs 1 and 2 were written by Luisa Zecca and paragraphs 3 and 4 by Valeria Cotza. The conclusions (par. 5) are attributed to both authors.

guardando a un processo di decostruzione e poi risemantizzazione della sfera semantica e lessicale della dispersione e della seconda opportunità in termini di giustizia sociale. È stata quindi condotta uno studio di caso durante l’anno scolastico 2020/2021 nella Scuola Popolare “Antonia Vita” di Monza, focalizzandosi sulle condizioni contestuali e strutturali che possono prevenire disagi e svantaggi in minori a rischio educativo di età compresa tra i 14 e i 16 anni.

Keywords: Popular Education; second chance; Pedagogical Problematicism; re-semanticization; case study

Parole chiave: Educazione Popolare; seconda opportunità; Problematicismo Pedagogico; risemantizzazione; studio di caso

1. Towards an emancipatory paradigm: The transformative tension of Popular Education

Since the Eighteenth century, starting with Enlightenment, Popular Education has run through the history of Italian and European school systems and reforms advocating the idea of an education open to all, regardless of social group, aiming particularly to overcome the illiteracy of the humblest working classes (Jovine, 1954). In particular, Popular Education intertwined its radical civil and value-based demands with the major social issues that crossed the Italian Twentieth century, contributing to the renewal of schools after the Second World War and animating the battles for democracy with and for different social groups, especially from the 1960s (Maia, 2020, pp. 40-42). This politically-charged education is an alternative to the prevailing neo-liberal system, which provides a radical critique of society by playing a compensatory role, i.e. seeking to redress cultural imbalances caused by an unfair education system and striving to compensate for disadvantage *ab origine* (Secci, 2017, p. 144). In this sense, the term “popular” is linked both to adult education and, more generally, to the aspiration for social emancipation of the poorest workers (typically labourers and peasants) and their children, who were in need of primary education and catching up on learning in order to acquire the basic tools to interpret reality and transform it themselves. In the Italian case, these are the roots of popular experiences such as those of Aldo Capitini and Danilo Dolci, but especially that of Don Milani and the Barbiana School (Gesualdi, 2017; Mayo & Vittoria, 2017, and, in particular, Chapter 5: “Lorenzo Milani e la Scuola di Barbiana: pedagogia critica e giustizia sociale [Lorenzo Milani and the Barbiana School: Critical Pedagogy and social justice]”). School becomes a place of dialogue and contestation at the service of a liberatory and democratic ideal, open to all the community, capable of recreating the link between education and life (Mayo, 2011, pp. 258-263). This perspective also seems to have guided Decree-Law no. 1559 of 17 December 1947, which in the aftermath of the war, for the first time in Italy, set up free popular school courses for adults and young people, in order to receive or update primary education and also to continue higher education:

«In order to fight illiteracy, to complete elementary education and orient the institution of secondary and professional school, a Popular Education is established. School is free of charge for morning and evening school, for young people and adults and it is established into elementary schools, factories, farms, institutions for migrants, barracks, hospitals, jails and within every popular environment, especially in rural areas, whenever needed» (Article 1).

All the Popular Education experiences of the last century undoubtedly reflect the pedagogical lesson of Gramsci: educational action, based on a philosophy of praxis understood as critique of pre-existing thought, takes the form of a cultural fight against “common sense”, in order to transform the popular “mentality” (Gramsci, 1975/1948-1951, vol. 2, p. 1330) towards a new emancipatory and transformative conception (Baldacci, 2017, in particular pp. 175-181; Puglielli, 2019). In Italy, such radicalism should have been guaranteed by the unique middle school reform of 1962 (that finally gave voice to Article 34 of the Constitution: «La scuola è aperta a tutti [School is open to everyone]»), but the progressive massification of schooling failed to completely fulfil its constitutional mandate, effectively rejecting the very students for whom it was designed. The category of

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“Popular Education” started to become more and more polysemic and fluid, up to the point of structuring the concept of “popular” no longer on belonging to specific social classes or professions, but rather on the adoption of antinomian categories of interpretation of society (La Rosa, 2021, p. 83). While the mass school failed to make the state school popular per se, struggling to cope with social changes (such as students with migration backgrounds, new poverties or the pressure for hyper-competitiveness), popular schools have progressively lost their character of otherness, increasingly becoming subsidiary to the State school system. Popular Education thus finds itself providing for the shortcomings of public (State) school, representing a very “hotbed of experience” (to borrow an expression from Foucault) that can open up new research fields and transformation processes within public schooling, allowing the concept of “public” to become increasingly closer to that of “popular”. From this perspective, which takes on the infinite both generative and cognitive potential of popular experiences (Potestio, 2021), assuming the theoretical framework of Problematicism can play a fundamental role, acting as a key to understanding and interpreting the pedagogical ideas behind such educational practices.

2. Popular Education and second chances: Re-semantizing the phenomena of school dropout

If, on one hand, mass schooling systems had the merit of guaranteeing free education for all regardless of social status, on the other hand they produced new inequalities and disadvantages over time, often due to the cultural and socio-economic conditions of the family to which the students belong, but also to a number of subjective factors – such as personal aptitude, predisposition to study, level of involvement and motivation, time management skills and sense of self-efficacy (Benvenuto, 2011). So, once the concept of “class selection” had been supplanted (at least formally), a new complex and multi-perspective phenomenon began to emerge, which around the 1980s became known as “dispersione scolastica” (which can be translated with “school dropout”), an expression felt to be sweeter than the one used previously, i.e., “school mortality” (Gattullo, 1989, p. 27). In the Italian context, this phenomenon is defined as the sum of different factors and conditions, such as early school leaving (both during the school year and between one year and the next: MIUR, 2021), repetition rates, interruptions and irregularities of various kinds (MIUR, 2018; Batini, 2016). The vast literature on this subject (see two research reports outlining the state of the art: Cingolani & Premazzi, 2016; Rumberger & Lim, 2008), identifies a multiplicity of causes for school dropout, including factors within the school system in addition to ascribed and personal ones. Indeed, especially from the 2000s, studies began to structure a close correlation between the phenomenon and endogenous variables, such as the teacher training, the pedagogical horizon, the whole organisational design. So, throughout the Country, actions, interventions and programmes for preventing and tackling school dropout multiplied and research was beginning to explore them more and more in depth (Girelli & Bevilacqua, 2018; Colombo, 2015; Frabboni & Baldacci, 2004).

In this framework, the legacy of Popular Education continued to have a decisive influence, offering places – physical and symbolic – able to face youth hardship and restore meaning to a teaching and learning experience which is felt as crystallised in the denial of possibility (De Meo & Fiorucci, 2011; Moreno & Vittoria, 2014). Next to popular schools and courses, in the light of the early school leaving and dropout rates (Eurostat, 2022),

at the initiative of Cresson, the Commissioner for research and development, education and training, the European Commission (1995) presented the *White Paper on education and training*, a document which had the merit of shifting the focus from the *first* to the *second* chance, calling on all European countries to implement projects that could offer a “second chance” to students suffering from social exclusion and marginalization, educational poverty and cultural deprivation. This is how the so-called “second chance schools”, which have been so successful in Italy as well (Brighenti & Bertazzoni, 2009), were born. Now the concept of “second chance” is part of the educational lexicon, often combined with that of Popular Education, with which it shares pedagogical horizons and good practices: active pedagogy methods; practices based on free expression, listening and participatory approach; interventions to develop autonomy, civic sense and critical thinking; community and cooperative design; relationships with the territory. However, this fluidity of definitions and experiences, as well as the multifactorial nature of the dropout phenomenon, seem to make it necessary to reflect on a new theoretical framework that enhances the pragmatic moment of the educational choice – and ensures maximum openness of experiences – without setting aside a transcendental epistemic demand that can give meaning to historical-practical tasks and social processes. Assuming a Problematizing model means moving towards a new *paideia* that is critically characterised and anti-dogmatic (Bertin, 1961, p. 23), informed by an emancipatory, innovative and militant pedagogical point of view (Salmeri, 2015, pp. 105-109). The look of Pedagogical Problematicism encourages the path of interdependence and integration, postulating an epistemological and epistemic device open to the multiplicity of interpretative approaches and in dialogue with the historical, social and political structures (Frabboni, 2012b, p. 13). It is a critical framework that guides pedagogical choices, playing a heuristic function and implying the study and description of the problematic nature of the educational experience (Bertin, 1995/1968, p. 22).

Revealing the complexity (in both a diachronic and synchronic sense) of popular and second chance education means taking on board and investigating the contradictions and dichotomies underlying experiences, considering all needs and purposes in their respective features and mutual connections and distances (Contini, 2006, pp. 57-58). The “second chance” model, in its original formulation, moves away from the universe of values and pedagogical commitment that animated popular experiences. Indeed, the *White Paper* (read even only the Introduction: pp. 1-4) advocates an approach mainly based on the logic of growth/competitiveness/employment, establishing a strong causal link between education/training, on one hand, and economic growth on the other, to avoid the failure of dropping-out students lowering the national GDP by becoming an economic cost for the whole community. Although the document states that «everyone must be able to seize their opportunities for improvement in society and for personal fulfilment irrespective of their social origin and educational background» (European Commission, 1995, p. 3), the framework outlined shows contradictions between the categorical foundations underpinning the proposals for action and the objectives pursued. There seems to be an emerging tendency to assimilate concern for “the last” with that capitalist conformism which now stands out at all levels of social, economic and cultural life. As d’Iribarne states (1996, pp. 24; 31), the proposals suggested in the *White Paper* and their underlying democratic aspirations do not conform to the economic and

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organisational paradigm taken by the document itself, which responds to a kind of myth or natural law of uncritically accepted economic and technical-scientific progress.

The Italian term “dispersione” seems to draw attention both to the socio-cultural dimension of the student and to the system/context in which he/she is absorbed (Salmeri, 2015, pp. 104-105). Nevertheless, on closer inspection, the semantic sphere of the expressions “dispersione scolastica” and “school dropout” refers to a paradigm steeped in conformism and standardization, mainly based on the exploitation of the economic totem pole (Frabboni 2012b, p. 18). Indeed, the dropping-out student is system scrap, i.e., a waste of resources and energy to the detriment of the collectivity, who must be “recovered” and led back on the right track. Not by chance, the phenomenon began to be defined at the same time as the beginning of the mass school crisis (mid-1980s), which paved the way for a business-oriented conception of education: the same word “dropout”, among other things, has an industrial origin and means “slag” from a production process. In this framework, the direction outlined by critical rationalism going back to Banfi (1961) problematicizes every dogmatization of experiences. So, the way forward is through deconstructive commitment to absolute paradigms, unveiling conformism and one-sidedness, and towards a constructive-propositional commitment to a pedagogical model aimed at educating to reason in the historical contingency (Contini, 2006, pp. 59-60). This strong ethical-social commitment is the result of a framework that starts from the assumption that the rational demand is able to overcome the problematic nature of experiences in the direction of the greatest possible integration, without denying or neglecting it (Bertin, 1995/1968, p. 25).

In the light of the above, the challenge of this research is to try to deconstruct the concept of “dispersione scolastica” – which implies the idea of failure to succeed – in order to look towards a renewed paideia based on a more critical and radical form of social justice, aimed at anti-oppressive, emancipatory and conscientization/awareness practices (Freire, 2018/1968; De Santis, 2019; Romano, 2021). An in-depth analysis of all factors “stifled” in the all-encompassing definition of dropout could be the first step to unravel the issue and frame it within the pedagogy of difference, which affirms the right to equal opportunities for all expressed in terms of intersubjectivity and not of individualism, hierarchies and opposition to others (Contini, 2006, p. 63). Gambling on design for difference means, on one hand, offering the possibility to move from a given to a chosen state, by becoming aware and overcoming the implicit conditioning of identities based on bio-psychological aspects and social categorizations (Venturelli, 2019, pp. 111-114); but it also means, on the other hand, seeking to shape a pedagogical collective intentionality which creates the actual conditions for an education as the “science of the possible” (Baldacci, 2003), focusing especially on the analysis of the relational meta-structure between the educational and the political system (Baldacci, 2019).

By deconstructing all those concepts that – often in a veiled or latent way – continue to preserve an idea of school as device for social reproduction, this research path prefigures a real resemantization of the semantic and lexical sphere related to dropout and second chance, up to the point of envisaging a real process of relexicalization. Thus, this study embraces the utopian tension typical of Problematicism (Frabboni, 2012a) and introduces a case study which develops within the context of Popular Education, namely a context that usually allows a

critical and divergent pedagogical position to be held. Precisely to ensure this, the choice fell on a popular school in close subsidiarity with the public school system, which for exactly this reason presents a higher level of otherness compared to the traditional system than other popular school models. The hope is that the – actual and symbolic – educational peripheries, where the “waste” lives (Contini, 2009), can become places of co-construction of privileged meaning and social and cultural transformation, rich in both theoretical and material implications for school and socio-educational practices.

3. The research context: the Popular School “Antonia Vita” in Monzaⁱ

In the light of the above, the case study was carried out in the Popular School managed by the “Antonia Vita” Association in Monzaⁱⁱ, which, since 1993, has been working to prevent and reduce youth hardship through a range of educational and more strictly school-based services, also aimed at the families of the adolescents in care. Specifically, the Popular School project was created within the Association in 1996, inspired by Don Milani and the Barbiana School model, from which it developed, over time implementing a programme of democratic education hinged on global accompaniment and active listening, sense of civic responsibility and awareness of own role in the community, towards the development of transversal skills that can be used in contexts other than school. The service is aimed at adolescents suffering from severe hardship, often victims of educational poverty or social withdrawal, with a history of failed migration, disillusionment and demotivation. To these students, who can no longer “stay inside” the traditional school system, the Popular School offers an educational service devised around the needs of the subject, in a welcoming place which becomes a reference point, also open in the afternoon. Each year the educational staff works with a class of about 12 students aged between 13 and 16, who attend the lessons mainly in the morning and in agreement with their home schools, with the main aim of obtaining a lower secondary school diploma. The educational team is supported by teachers (often retired) who voluntarily work in the school, and by a number of laboratory leaders, often specialised volunteer teachers or experts from local associations. In fact, the teaching and learning activities are mainly laboratory-based, according to an approach that seeks to harmonise more traditional learning with activities linked to active pedagogical methods, grounded in the stimulation of operational intelligence and the bodily involvement through multiple and more dynamic interactions (electrical engineering, educational robotics, social circus, aesthetics, cooking etc.). The didactic planning is organised in subject-based units, each lasting one month and centred on a topic considered relevant for the students’ personal and intellectual growth; each unit is developed over a certain number of lessons, almost never “frontal”, that seek to cross all branches of knowledge. Despite lockdowns and closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, except for short periods the Popular School managed to ensure face-to-face lessons, as this is a service for students with special educational needs. However, the educational team had to take charge of almost all activities (except for some laboratories), since most of the volunteer teachers were not able to be present. They tried to provide some didactic continuity by delivering some lessons to the whole class using the Google Meet platform or training students online, individually or in small groups, during extracurricular hours.

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4. Research questions and methodology

Looking at the transformative goal of constructing an educational project which enhances the dimensions of experience suffering from social mutilation or exclusion (Frabboni, 2012b, p. 18), in October 2020 an intrinsic case study research was undertaken (Yin, 2006), focusing on the Popular School in its complexity, in order to explore and then analyse in-depth a context which stands as an alternative to the traditional school form. The case study extended throughout the 2020/2021 school year and the data was gathered (ended in September 2021) mainly in presence, with the exception of some interviews and meetings with teachers that, because of the pandemic situation, were carried out remotely. The research activities included all those who work, study at or are involved in the Popular School, starting with the students themselves:

Class of the 2020/2021 school year (Lower Secondary School, Third grade)				
Students involved	13: 12 (in the classroom) + 1 (one-to-one tuition, due to a serious health problem) 9 repeating students			
Gender	Female: 4		Male: 9	
Age (at the end of the s.y.)	14 years old: 3	15 years old: 6	16 years old: 3	17 years old: 1
Non-Italian nationality	First generation: 1		Second generation: 3	
SEN	13 (LSD: 2; with diagnosis of disability: 2; undergoing certification: 1)			
In charge of social services	7			

Table 1: Students’ demographic information

In the light of the above, the question that guides the entire research, outlining the horizon of meaning to which to strive, is the following: How to engage in carrying out a process of de-construction of the semantic and lexical sphere of dropout and second chances, envisaging its re-semanticization – and maybe even beyond, towards its re-lexicalization – in terms of rights, social justice and equity? More in detail, the idea which guided the case study was that only a radical transformation of cultural, pedagogical and also institutional perspectives, together with the aim of implementing systemic-structural interventions, will be able to ensure conditions for achieving social justice. Therefore, the main research question is: How to intervene effectively at systemic and structural levels in school and socio-educational contexts to prevent and tackle conditions of disadvantage or hardship in at-risk minors aged between 14 and 16? Furthermore: What methods, strategies and tools (both educational and didactic) are most effective for adolescents? Is it possible to systematize some good practices, overcoming the extemporaneousness which often characterizes some interventions?

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In view of these general research questions, by declining some of their aspects, the case study research was in turn structured into two studies, the first related to the knowledge of the case as a whole and the second on two action-researches. The specific questions that form the background of both these studies are:

- What is the implicit model underlying both educational and teaching practices in a school such as the popular one, which offers alternative learning paths to traditional school?
- What structural interventions can be envisaged in the light of this model?

Going into even greater detail, the first study – which is of a purely fact-finding nature – aims to investigate the perceptions and representations of students, teachers and educators (both within the School and in all related external contexts) on dimensions of the school system and educational and didactic work. On the other hand, the second one consists of an action-research (Kemmis, Mc Taggart, & Retallick, 2004), that in turn was divided into two research paths. The aim of the second study is to explore the possibility of having a structural impact, starting from the analysis of the implementation of two different lines of intervention, one in the humanities and one in science, working on acts and communication forms between peers and between adult(s) and student(s). In this framework, the background question is about the didactic mediation strategies: Which are the most effective in enhancing skills and learning in students at educational risk?

Study 1	Case knowledge	Settling-in period (October-November 2020):
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – documentation gathering; – first mapping of services for preventing and tackling dropout in Monza-Brianza and Milan, at least from 2015 onwards.
		Fact-finding phase (October 2020 - September 2021):
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – participant observations; – 40 non-directive interviews.
Study 2	Action-Research	Professional Development Action-Research path (January - September 2021).
		Intervention-researches (November 2020 - May 2021):
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – creative and collective writing laboratory; – educational robotics laboratory with Coderbot.

Table 2: Research design: Study 1 and 2 phases and timing

4.1 Study 1. Case knowledge and Grounded Theory

The first study made use of different research tools to begin to probe the implicit model of the Popular School and examine the context in-depth, starting from the “voice” of practitioners and students themselves. Indeed, this research also borrowed from the Student Voice approach (Grion & Cook-Sather, 2013), which considers the students’ ideas and representations as a transformative and emancipatory force able to trigger innovation

processes and bottom-up changes. For all these reasons, the privileged tool was the semi-structured interview (Tusini, 2006). A total of 40 interviews were conducted, aimed at a plurality of actors:

- director, coordinator and educators of the School;
- volunteer teachers and laboratory leaders of the School;
- students of the 2020/2021 school year;
- managers and teachers of the students’ home schools (purposeful sampling);
- head of the Education Service of the Municipality of Monza;
- director of the “Sicomoro I Care” second chance school in Milan.

Interviews were conducted either in presence or remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions (on the Google Meet platform) and entirely audio- or video-recorded (with the consent of the participants); they were then transcribed *verbatim*. The protocol, validated by the research team (Zecca & Cotza, 2020), follows four thematic macro-areas:

- representations of the concepts of “educational fragility” and “inclusion”;
- training path and professional background;
- representations and experiences about networking and social identity;
- future perspectives and needs for own professional growth.

The methodology chosen for analysis is the socio-constructivist Grounded Theory, described according to the principles of critical inquiry (Charmaz, 2014; 2017), using the ATLAS.ti software.

4.2 Study 2. Action-Research and didactic mediation

As stated above, the first part of this second study consisted of a professional development action-research path entirely co-designed with the educational team (coordinator and 2 educators), for a total of 10 video-recorded meetings of about 2 hours each. The intention was to trigger a reflexive hermeneutic process which could highlight differences and re-describe words and actions through social narration, improving self-understanding but, at the same time, also the understanding of others. It is a collective process of de-coding, de-constructing and re-modeling of subjective representations, during which the presence of others’ viewpoints is a key to bringing out the potential resources and reflecting on the construction of professional identity. So, this process is able to create generative relationships, that become capacitating (De Santis, 2019, p. 142). Specifically, this first path was structured into:

- analysis of critical cases and teaching practices, by watching video-recordings or reading classroom observations, followed by personal written re-draftings and group discussion;
- co-construction of tools to equip the School: form in which the Monza home schools recommends the students with the most problematic profiles; student evaluation form, to be filled in by teachers and educators at the end of the first and second term; short questionnaire for students and families, to measure their level of satisfaction;

- collective reflection on the professional identity of single educators and the group, with the aim of drawing up a new declaration of intent which reflects the awareness acquired, in the perspective of a renewed teaching and learning planning.

As regards the second part of this study, the intervention-researches implemented some laboratory actions in order to explore the variables that could play a central role in taking a more systemic and structural perspective against educational risk, i.e. the factors linked to didactic mediation in contexts of high cultural deprivation (Damiano, 2013; Lumbelli, 1992). So, the ongoing analysis focuses on the dialogical patterns between adult and students and then among students themselves, questioning also which mediation strategies by adults are most effective in triggering processes of self-motivation and active participation. In particular, the findings of the writing laboratory can be crucial not only to enter the modes of (oral and written) expression of students who generally employ the restricted code, but also to try to underline which contextual factors and settings foster engagement and free expression. The activities were designed and conducted by the University together with the School coordinator, involving both students (once a week throughout the period) as well as educators and volunteer teachers (with whom 3 meetings were held, in presence and remotely, plus activities to be completed individually). The main focus of these activities was the telling of their own ideas and representations about education, as well as their own *desiderata* and experiences, with particular reference to the specific context of the Popular Schoolⁱⁱⁱ. The entire laboratory was designed according to the idea that narrative and linguistic processes could give voice to experiences and memories, triggering a metacognitive process that could be useful in interpreting reality and producing new meanings, towards the acquisition of the skills needed to cope with situations and the development of a personal and social identity (De Santis, 2019, p. 143). On the other hand, the educational robotics laboratory set out to study in-depth not only the didactic mediation by the adults but also the interaction and mediation strategies implemented by a student when acting as a tutor: indeed, the robotics activities made use of the peer tutoring method, investigating whether it is a good learning strategy for students with special educational needs who live in disadvantaged contexts^{iv}. The laboratory consisted of a total of 7 video-recorded meetings of about 90 minutes each and involved a maximum of 6/7 students at a time, in order to foster small group work; it adopted the theoretical framework of ERA – Educational Robotic Applications (Catlin & Blamires, 2010) and employed Coderbot (a small robot using the Blockly language) as the learning-technological mediator^v. The activities were structured into 5 phases:

- 1) engagement, to collect students' representations and knowledge on some key scientific concepts;
- 2) Game of Science, with robo-ethological approach (Datteri & Zecca, 2016);
- 3) algomotricity or body simulation (Lonati et al., 2015);
- 4) training of 2 tutor students in the Blockly language and some programming problems;
- 5) peer tutoring, in which each tutor-student supports 2/3 tutee-students towards the construction of programming problems and their resolution.

The analysis is ongoing: the video-recordings (for which the consent was signed by the students’ families) are being analyzed through ODIS - Strumento per l’Osservazione delle Funzioni Comunicative in classe (i.e. Tool for Observation of Communicative Functions in the classroom)^{vi}.

5. Conclusions. Towards a new critical and radical perspective

Data analysis is ongoing and is expected to be finished by October 2022. First of all, the emerging findings may allow to devise some moments of feedback to the participants, in order to pave the way to a shared and collective reflection which can guide educational action. One of the first expected outputs is managing to bring to light the implicit model of the “Antonia Vita” Popular School, through a complex narrative process moving from the voices of those who live this school context and from an in-depth analysis of its practice and culture. For this purpose, significant results may come from the research path carried out together with the educational team, from which it is possible to highlight the cultural heritage of the School and the world of values that underpin it, strongly linked to some historic pillars of Popular Education. Especially in this part of the research developed with school educators, assuming the theoretical framework of Pedagogical Problematicism enabled reflection geared towards transformative goals, from the development of new assessment and knowledge-construction tools. During the research activities, this specific pedagogical standpoint also began to reveal the contradictions inherent in the educational process of a school such as the popular one, which can help at-risk students in their training pathway only by taking them away from the public schooling and shaping an alternative environment while maintaining a close working relationship with home schools. Public traditional schools are often unable to take care of at-risk students (effectively expelling them from the system), maybe also due to a idea of schooling that incorporates the business-oriented logic of success/failure, as argued above. So, looking at a radical re-semantization of the cultural paradigm, the challenge of this research is to investigate the structural and contextual conditions of school from a peripheral point of view, that of popular education, reflecting on the topic of the relationship with the pedagogical model underlying traditional schooling. Is it possible to make the public school “popular”, without the weaknesses of the school mainstream leading to the need for other educational contexts, adopting some frameworks, experiences and good practices from Popular Education? How to make the whole school popular?

In conclusion, the perspective is therefore to succeed in initiating a debate on these issues, creating a recursive movement between the educational hinterland and the traditional school system, outlining a new pedagogical-political paradigm geared towards complex interventions that pay attention to the real conditions for achieving social justice and the synergic work between different and complementary skills and expertise.

ⁱ This research is part of a three-year scientific collaboration that the University of Milano-Bicocca signed in June 2020 with the “Antonia Vita” Association.

ⁱⁱ For an overview of the Association, see: www.avitaonlus.org. For the Popular School: www.avitaonlus.org/scuola-popolare

ⁱⁱⁱ The materials and reflections collected will be used to write a book on education published by Fabbrica dei Segni, the Social Cooperative in collaboration with which the laboratory was carried out (fabbricadeisegni.it).

^{iv} In this respect, some preliminary results were presented in Cotza & Roncen (2021).

^v This robotics laboratory was carried out as part of the three-year H2020 Project “Communities for Sciences (C4S) - Towards promoting an inclusive approach in Science Education” (“Science with and for Society”; GA: 872104). This project started in September 2020 and will end in September 2023 (for information, check: <https://www.communities-for-sciences.eu>). The University of Milano-Bicocca is one of the partners of the international Consortium.

^{vi} This qualitative analysis tool was presented by Perucchini, P., Piastra, S., & Zecca, L. (2020) in a contribution during the Seminar “Quali percorsi di ricerca inter- e trans- disciplinare?”, Osservatorio SIRD-DGD - Didattica Generale e Didattiche Disciplinari (Bologna, 30 January 2020). For the reference framework, see: Zecca (2012, in particular pp. 50-94).

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