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# Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica

**EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY**

5-8 June 2019 Cagliari Italy

**VOLUME I**

**Politics, Citizenship, Diversity and Inclusion**

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and Inclusion**

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**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA  
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***Title* Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" - Education and Post-Democracy  
VOLUME I Politics, Citizenship, Diversity and Inclusion**

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 interdisciplinary 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.

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## Premise

In the European space of liberal democracies, the post-economic crisis era has seen the appearance of populist movements, sometimes anti-democratic (to the extent that they deny citizenship rights, ethical-cultural differences, individual life choices), sometimes anti-scientific and anti-modernist. Those phenomena may erode democratic values and make the pluralistic context slip into the risky and ambiguous territories of post-democracy.

The democratization of basic and higher education stands as a solid defence against populist tendencies. Ethical-political socialization, acquisition and development of civic, social, citizenship and character skills may be a precious resource to hold democratic life on together. Democratic life, political participation and active citizenship needs to be rearticulated, reshaped and reinforced as fundamental educational pivots in our overchanging societies.

Throughout the world, there have been continuous attempts to reform education at all levels. With different causes that are deeply rooted in history, society, and culture, inequalities are difficult to eradicate. Nonetheless, although difficult, education is vital to society's movement forward. It should promote citizenship, identity, equality of opportunity and social inclusion, social cohesion as well as economic growth and employment. Unequal educational outcomes are attributed to several variables, including family of origin, gender, and social class. Achievement, earnings, health status, and political participation also contribute to educational inequality within Western countries as well as or deeper within other world countries. Diversity applies to a number of aspects of student identity, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, and political and religious beliefs. Even if there are no official educational policies aiming at reproducing inequalities, teaching and learning practices are still unable to protect diversity and be effectively inclusive of student identities. This would imply giving thought to the attitudes, beliefs and expectations of students as individuals, and considering how these influences their approaches to learning and their interactions with teachers and with peers in the design of curricula, in the translation of curricula into day-to-day teaching and learning, and in the assessment of learning. Therefore, inequalities in educational opportunity, in educational access, in educational attainments are still the main dilemma nowadays. Several and differentiated tracks of research and conversation are packed into this stream in order to face the multidimensional dynamics of inclusion, integration, equal opportunities a diversity valorisation in both the educational spaces and knowledge society at large.

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## Teaching Gender: A Challenge for Educational Contexts?

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### Premise

The theme of gender education and pedagogy is grafted onto a broader ground, which is that of identity definitions, of the socialisation processes and implications for future life opportunities in which a significant weight is to be attributed to wider gender equality from training to employment and beyond. Public education policies aren't adequately concerned with gender equality issues, a topic that should be included in education pathways as part of the epistemological approach of the teachers and educators and not only as an accessory to the school curriculum (Gamberi et al., 2010) or to the aims of educational services. There are two good reasons for doing so. One of a formal nature, the other substantial: in the first place because the EU has indicated gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue for policies, including educational ones, and therefore at least formally requires the declination of the gender dimension within the actions and reforms addressed to the school. Secondly because gender equality is a cultural theme that must be tackled with cultural tools; both school and others educational contexts are environments in which it can be developed, declined and translated into good practices and concrete actions, supported by a gender sensitive pedagogical stance.

### 1. Gender education: beyond intentional interventions

A focus on the gender dimension should be part of the education referred to new generations and to the professionals that work in the educational field, in schools as well as in the wider not-formal educational system (Ghigi, 2019; Ostrouch-Kamińska, Vieira, 2016).

Unfortunately, the degree of activation and involvement of teachers and educators with respect to these issues is very low, and the institutional initiatives aimed at training for these professionals are modest and non-systematic.

The misalignment between the recommendations coming from gender studies and the educational practices relates to the fact that professionals in education at university aren't sufficiently trained in the relationship between gender and education (Antonelli et al., 2014). Moreover, around gender there are representations, stereotypes and prejudices that are deeply rooted, and which are difficult to tackle.

In this sense, gender cannot be considered as an obvious professional educational tool. The first step is therefore to clarify the difference between gender (intentional) education (Leonelli, 2011) and gender as the outcome of a socialisation process. From a pedagogical point of view this process can be assumed as a kind of informal education (Brambilla, 2016) or social education (Cavaletto, 2017; Tramma, 2019) and, consequently, a formative experience which mainly

has a social nature that contributes to the definition of different and unequal living conditions.

This clarification allows us to have a better understanding of what gender represents in the educational fields. As informal education, gender passes through intentional educational interventions influencing them and acting with or without the practitioner's awareness. In most cases, educational models and practices – in their theoretical and applied dimensions – remain characterised by gender cultures the matrixes of which mainly are invisible, informal and not declared (Brambilla et al., 2017). The educational practices are conditioned by the stereotype of the dominant genre and their effects occurring far beyond the perimeter of the school and the years of training.

School and educational services dedicated to pupils remain places where gender problematic expectations and gender stereotypes are still present (Crivellaro *et. al.*, 2013) in the hidden curriculum. On one side attitudes and expectations of teachers are differentiated according to the sex of pupils. This is the classical example of 'Pygmalion effect' or 'Self-fulfilling prophecy': adult assumptions (and, a fortiori, those of teachers) towards boys and girls and differentiated expectations towards them end up becoming somehow prescriptive and prophetic because they contribute to the formation of students' personal expectations (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Euridyce, 2010). On the other side the scholastic culture conveys a knowledge that is passed off as 'neutral' but that is strongly characterised by the masculine both in the contents and in the modes of transmission.

At the same time, gender as a multidimensional social structure which affects identity, work, power and sexuality (Connell, 2002) contributes to shape, in a different manner, women and men' life experiences, producing different kinds of educational needs, problems and questions. Despite this, in the educational services low attention is paid to the intersection between gender and other multiple dimensions (e.g. class, race, religion) and condition (e.g. disability, addictions, mental health, detention) to which educational services are dedicated. Here gender remains in the most cases a simple variable and not an interpretative tool for a better design of educative interventions.

All these considerations remind us that gender educational interventions don't exist in an educational vacuum – which only needs to be filled – but coexists (in a potentially problematic manner) with other forms of informal education that are more widespread and stronger, since they aren't declared even though systematically present in daily lives. Indeed, unfortunately, this kind of education is affected by sexist, misogynous and homophobic contents (Dello Preite, 2019).

This motivates research that focuses on the contemporary gender complex educative scenario looking at the same time at intentional and not intentional gender education that persists in schools and in educational services; trying to explore obstacles and impediments that the use of a critical gender approach (or a formative proposal aimed to its acquisition) could face in these contexts.

## **2. Challenge for intentional gender education: data from the field**

In this frame the authors present examples drawn from different experiences (academic research project, workshop and intervention on the gender issue in educational contexts with public financing) to explore which kind of obstacles an intentional gender education could encounter (in school and in not formal services).

In particular, these examples borrowed from 1) the preliminary results of a pedagogical research dedicated to the exploration of gender culture that are

implicitly present in thirty informal educational services of Milan and Hinterland (this research – entitled *Gender culture and intervention perspectives in educational services* – is part of a research grant assigned from the Department of Educational Human Sciences of the University of Milan-Bicocca, under the Prof. S. Tramma scientific supervision); 2) a workshop that the authors conducted during the *Festival dell'Educazione* (held in Turin November 22 - December 2, 2019), that involved students and their teachers in a reflection on the theme of gender in the school context; 3) four educational projects: a) two of these fielded by the Councillor for Equality of the Piedmont Region and addressed to high school students on the issues of gender differences and inequalities in education and employment; b) two designed by the Piedmont Region Councillor for Equality on gender equality issues, involving high school students and teachers. In detail, this is the Project *Rights at School 70.0*, aimed at high schools in Piedmont with the objective to counteract gender stereotypes in the family, in the labour market, in careers and in institutions. The second project, named *Stem by Women*, is built on the challenges of the new digital and technological economy and the underuse of women in it, and is proposed as a coordinated action within a public-private partnership. Both projects involve teachers in a training course on these topics.

All these different experiences, aimed at different targets and carried out by different professionals but sharing the gender theme, transformative aims and (without forgetting the specificities of every single context) being situated in the complex and complicated Italian contemporary «gender order» (Connell, 2002: 136) were shown to have common outcomes.

The data collected and the analysis conducted document the presence of different kind of limits and obstacles that a gender intentional education and the practitioners' acquisition of a gender lens encounter at different levels: cultural but also institutional, political, and economic. The first obstacle is the lack of theoretical references to this theme for most of the educational practitioners involved. In the educational contexts explored, we observed poor attention to the topic, (often considered not prominent, sometimes important but always dispensable) an absolute lack of specific training for teachers and educators and a widespread lack of awareness on the part of students and other educational users. These weaknesses are problematically linked to other different aspects that has been found, primarily the presence and the maintenance of stereotypical narratives based on gender, that regards users' (children, adolescents, adult or elderly) and practitioners' (educators and teachers, that in most cases are women) roles and models; stereotypes that are very common among professionals and users. Specular to these aspects is the problematic continuity between the users' and practitioners'/teachers' informal gender culture. This continuity produces an informal and problematic gender pedagogy that in some cases conflicts and/or contradicts the educational intentional mandates declared and that (without professionals' awareness), making them (implicitly) complicit of the social reproduction of gender disadvantage.

However, a gender sensitiveness wasn't completely missing. In *Rights at school 70.0* we highlight the strong interest of teachers in the subject of gender and their agreement on the importance of introducing the gender lens within the various disciplinary fields. In *Stem by Women* there was a strong educational need for teachers regarding tertiary occupational and training scenarios. Not only do teachers highlight a lack of updating on the most recent developments in the post-diploma training offer but also an unrealistic representation of the world of work and of the inequalities that persist in it especially that linked to gender that precludes careers and professions. However, this awareness isn't



automatically supported by an alliance with families, users or (more problematically) political and institutional actors.

Another problematic element has been pointed out by educators interviewed in the research *Gender culture and intervention perspectives in educational services*. As they declared, educational intervention dedicated to the development of a more equitable gender order are constantly contradicted by the current widespread gender culture that doesn't offer a symbolic and material support to gender intentional educational aims. That in consequence risks not appearing credible and feasible for users and removed from reality. Educators reported that, in some cases, they found opposition (explicit or implicit) to funding public bodies to promote proposals that try to introduce a new gender perspective in educational services. It should be noted that in Italy there isn't a public system of incentives planned for ensuring and promoting gender sensitive approach in educational services. These elements confirm that public contracting authorities, as some social policies, don't have enough sensitivity to support this theme and to contrast the attacks against it deriving from the problematic political speech on gender that transformed, in the common sense, the gender studies in an 'ideology' that has to be removed (Pontificio Consiglio per la Famiglia, 2003) and from the gender disadvantages coming from the patriarchal dividend (Volpato, 2013).

All these elements must be seen in conjunction with the scarcity and discontinuity of the economic resources that relate to the Italian educational system and that limit the possibility of recognising and transforming experiments in gender issue in knowledge, competences and shared good practices. In this sense, gender remains an emergency, a supplementary attention but not an interpretative and operational tool which can be applied at every point in the educational pathway.

## Conclusions

The acquisition of a gender lens in school and in socio-educational services could support practitioners at different levels. However, teachers and educators remain rarely oriented towards providing education or introducing the gender dimension into their disciplinary paths and still don't practice an explicit gender education (Bellafronte, 2003; Biemmi, 2010).

A pedagogical attention to the field allows us to explore the *necessity* but also the *fragility* of the interventions towards gender education. Although indispensable, the teachers' and educators' sensitivity to gender questions and their academic training to gender studies aren't enough. Gender is – at the same time – a category of analysis (Scott, 1986), something that we «do» in everyday interaction (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 130) and a social structure (Risman, 2004). In this sense, it seems naïve to consider gender training the solution and the only way to give new generations a gender-intentional education with new, critical and democratically oriented contents. Inside and outside educational services and schools lives another kind of gender education: an informal education – very common but not declared – whose contents often contradict and conflict with the current intentional gender education and whose didactics remain implicit and hidden.

Ignoring the strength of this informal education means ignoring the dimensions linked to it (such as power and pleasure), minimising their role and their problematic relapses and consequences on the intentional interventions on gender and the efficacy of their aims. Instead, taking into consideration this social education offers stimuli and useful indications to a better exploration of

problems, needs and questions of users on gender dimension, helping practitioners to develop more coherent and significant educational methods, strategies and interventions.

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