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

EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY

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VOLUME II

Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology

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

Scuola First
democratica International
Conference

**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA
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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.

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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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Depoliticising educational choice: Homeschooling and virtual universities in Italy

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Introduction

Innovative forms of public regulation emerged in heterogeneous policy sectors since the last decade of the 20th century. Such reforms conveyed values and beliefs peculiar to the roll-out phase of neoliberalism (Peck, Tickell, 2002). This contributed to relevant worldwide transformations in the relationships among public and private actors. The affirmation of the political project of neoliberalism was made possible by governments pursuing processes of depoliticisation as political strategies (Jessop, 2014).

Such changes have been affecting the education field. School choice models are being introduced which are based on recurring concepts in the neoliberal paradigm such as merit, performance, efficiency. Families select among the best performers in the quasi-markets of education (Bartlett, Grand, 1993) through evidence-based assessments (Ozga et al., 2011) founded on performative and commensurative indicators (Espeland, Sauder, 2007), e.g. the average performances of students enrolled in the evaluation tests, the educational offer, the extra-curricular activities offered by schools, etc. As shown by the case of the US educational systems, market-oriented solutions are increasingly legitimised: «private schools, charter schools, and voucher systems as a response to the collapse of quality public education» (Brown, 2006, 704).

1. The concept of depoliticisation

Depoliticisation was first described by Peter Burnham (2001). Further conceptualisations attempted to understand the features, paths and tools of these processes. Colin Hay proposed a model for seizing the sequentiality and duality of the processes of depoliticisation occurring among three different arenas (2007: 79): the public and governmental sphere (1), the public and non-governmental sphere (2), the private sphere (3).

Hence, depoliticisation broadly concerns the transfer of responsibility and the decreasing in political control over social phenomena and practices. In other words, it is about the «transfer of problems of public interest to the private sphere (3), that is, in the context of individual choices» (*ivi*). At the same time, social practices may engage in processes of *politicisation* by first entering the public debate (2) and then reaching political regulation (1).

However, two further aspects related to depoliticisation should be considered: its activation modalities and its types. It is in fact possible to distinguish between *proactive* and *reactive* forms of depoliticisation (d'Albergo, Moini, 2017). The formers are activated directly by public actors, while reactive forms are adopted as a response to pressures from non-political actors. A further analytical

distinction identifies three «types» of depoliticisation (Wood, Flinders, 2014): governmental (government action), societal (responsibility for collective problems) and discursive (values, visions and discourses).

In such processes, the State becomes less influent on different policy areas, while new '*depoliticised spaces*' are opened in which private companies, pressure groups and associations 'own' the debate on issues of collective interest and propose alternative solutions.

2. Aims and methods

The aim of this exploratory research is to investigate into the processes of societal depoliticisation of education happening in Italy in order to shed light on its implications for educational choice both in policy and practice sphere. Two educational options will be addressed: 'out of school' practices (OOSP), as a non-formal pre-primary/primary/secondary educational option; and Italian Virtual Universities (IVUs), as a formal higher lifelong educational option.

A mixed-methods strategy was used to grasp their nuances. With respect to the OOSP case study, we carried out a document analysis on international regulatory sources (HSLDA, 2016) and we explored the practice at a proximal level (Giancola, Viteritti, 2014) through 12 interviews with home-schooling parents and privileged witnesses (filmmakers, spokesman for associations). The IVUs case study was tackled through document analysis (materials by institutions and associations) and statistical analyses on data by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR).

3. The depoliticisation of education in Italy: Out-of-school practices and virtual universities

All levels of Italian formal and non-formal education have been invested by the societal depoliticisation, which had significant implications for institutions, professionals, students and families alike. These processes often widened the range of educational choice. While they sometimes led to the commodification and marketisation of the educational field, they also triggered new bottom-up educational practices.

Law 168/1989 – which guaranteed autonomy to state and non-state universities with respect to teaching activities and scientific, organisational, financial and accounting matters – is a suitable analytical starting point for a brief reconstruction of the depoliticisation of education in Italy. The Decree 275/1999 is the Autonomy of Educational Institutions reform, which, among other things, led to the introduction of the Educational Offer Plan (POF) and to the 'managerialisation' of the Headteacher (Benadusi, Consoli, 2004). The following year, the legal equality between public and private school was established by Law 62/2000.

Two other acts relevant to the path of depoliticisation of educational choice in Italy should be mentioned. They concern *Italian virtual universities*, allowed through DM 03/17/2003, and *istruzione parentale/homeschooling*, as an example of OOSP, regulated by Law Decree 76 (04/15/2005). We are now going to focus on these two cases.

3.1. Out-of-school practices: the depoliticisation and politicisation of home-schooling in Italy

The first empirical case that we will explore concerns 'out of school practices' (OOSP) and, in particular, the Italian case of *istruzione*

parentale/homeschooling (IP). With OOSP, we mean an array of educational options for non-formal pre-primary/primary/secondary education taking place outside the school system and directly involving parents in teaching. Therefore, unschooling, homeschooling and *scuole parentali* (parental schools) – which are founded, organised and managed by parents' associations – can be understood as OOSP (Figure 1). Unschooling, IP and *scuole parentali* can be situated in a *continuum* going from a minimal structuring (unschooling) to a maximum structuring of educational paths (*scuole parentali*).

FIGURE. 1. *The prevailing forms of OOSP*

	Unschooling	Homeschooling	Scuole parentali
<i>Times and spaces of learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Everywhere – Lack of a predetermined timetable – Completely unstructured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mainly at home – Mainly in the morning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Outside the house – More or less determined times – Pretty much structured (school programming + possibility to follow ministerial guidelines)
<i>Curriculum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Happens through the students' curiosity, the parents' stimuli and what goes on at the time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More or less structured (possibility to follow the ministerial guidelines) – More or less planned by the parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Planned by the parents' assembly
<i>Teachers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parents, trusted people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parents, trusted people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parents, professional educators
<i>Learning materials</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Everything (books, plants, tools, etc.) – Self-crafted materials (e.g. lapbooks) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Everything (books, plants, tools, etc.) – Self-crafted materials (e.g. lapbooks) – School textbooks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Everything (books, plants, tools, etc.) – Self-crafted materials (e.g. lapbooks) – School textbooks
<i>Legal requirements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Self-declaration of technical and economic capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Self-declaration of technical and economic capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establishment of associations or other formal bodies

Source: Elaboration from the authors

Istruzione parentale in Italy

The distinction among these OOSP is effectively summarised in the MIUR expression *istruzione parentale*. This term can be found on its analyses on early school leaving in which IP is defined as a «valid motivation» for dropout (2017: 23). The National Register of Students 2017/2018 records 4169 home schoolers in Italy which are mostly found in the northern areas of the country (Di Motoli, 2019).

The interviews we carried out about OOSP revealed a complex pattern. Plurality emerged in motivations, ways of practicing, fluid formative paths shaped as assemblages of heterogeneous experiences. Convergence appeared on the other hand in claims by the parents regarding the refusal of school as a site of standardisation and homologation of teaching and learning which families reject as part of the «forme scolaire» (Vincent et al., 1994). They thus refuse to delegate education and assert their freedom to directly instruct their children. In the narratives proposed by the interviewees, IP thus appears as an instance of disintermediation and assumption of responsibility, whereas public education emerges as a 'spare option'. Parents propose an inversion in the relationship between education and students. The forms of education/learning are thus constantly redefined in a logic of hyper-personalisation.

A double movement: The depoliticisation and politicisation of IP

OOSP are allowed by Article 30 of the Italian Constitution. IP is recognised as one of the options for fulfilling compulsory education (Figure 2), as the Constitution establishes the right (and duty) for parents to educate their children. A depoliticised space is thereby *de facto* open to which parents can refer to

legitimise their OOSP. Further normative instruments regulate particular duties connected with IP: parents must produce a self-declaration of technical and economic capabilities to be presented to the headteacher (Legislative Decree 76/2005), and children have to take annual exams in order to comply with compulsory schooling (Ordinance 90/2001).

FIGURE 2. *The main Italian legal regulations about IP*

<i>Constitution, Art. 30</i>	It is the duty and right of parents to maintain, instruct and educate their children, even if born out of wedlock. In cases of parents' incapacity, the law ensures that their duties are fulfilled.
<i>Legislative Decree 15/04/2005, 76</i>	Parents, or whoever takes their place, who intend to provide for their children privately or directly [...] must demonstrate that they have the technical or economic capacity and communicate it year by year to the competent authority, which provides the appropriate controls.
<i>Ordinanza Ministeriale 21/05/2001, 90</i>	Pupils who fulfil the obligation with this modality are allowed to sit the exams of qualifications or the exams of license in a state primary school or in an equal (<i>paritaria</i>) primary school, in the circle of territorial competence to the residence of the family.

Source: Elaboration from the authors

By referring to such hierarchy of norms and to the Constitutional right, home-schooling families are able to inhabit and preserve depoliticised spaces. In other words, in the absence of a strict regulation by the governmental sphere, OOSP may develop and grow, sheltered under the private sphere of individual choices (Hay, 2007).

At the same time, politicisation processes might be observed in the field of OOSP. Although families carrying out IP operate in a legal framework, there is no specific law for IP resulting from a public/political debate. This aspect represents one of the challenges for the future of OOSP in Italy. In this sense, *L'Associazione Istruzione Familiare (LAIF)* aims to «promote dialogue with institutions to enhance the existing legislative paths that guarantee families a serene implementation of their own choices, of their commitment, in compliance with State and natural laws» (2019). Such a dialogue could lead to an effective process of depoliticisation of education with the transfer of greater responsibilities to families – or to the opposite, i.e. to the public actor choosing to promote greater State control on these experiences.

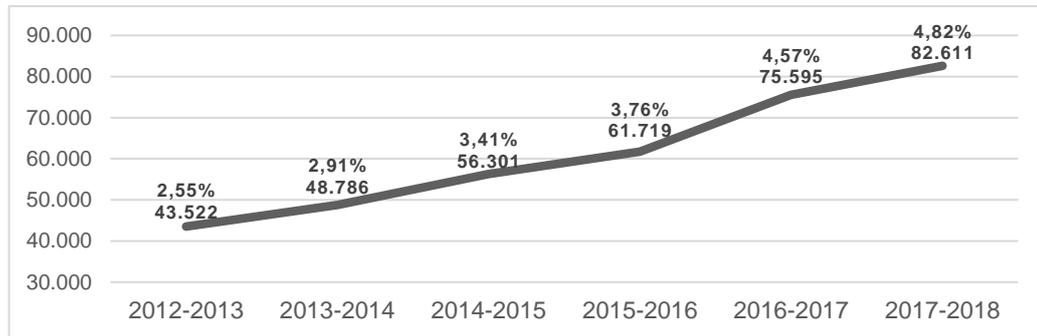
Exploring the case of OOSP thus means to untangle the emergence of a dual movement of depoliticisation/politicisation (Giovannelli, 2019): a reactive process of societal depoliticisation, enabling families to take responsibility for their children's education; and a process of politicisation of social practices promoting the transition of OOSP from the sphere of individual choices to the sphere of debate and public regulation.

3.2. *Italian Virtual Universities: Between tinkering and marketisation*

Italian *Università Telematiche* (IVUs) are non-state subjects operating as providers of formal higher education (HE). In order to do so, they must comply with the legal regulations imposed by the public sector and the criteria and procedures imposed by ANVUR, the Italian agency for evaluation.

Eleven of the 91 Italian universities are categorised by ANVUR as VUs. In the 2017-2018 academic year, IVUs gathered 4.82% of the 1,713,129 students enrolled in Italian universities (Figure 3). While enrolments in offline universities dropped from 1,665,511 in academic year 2012-2013 to 1,630,518 in 2017-2018, enrolments in IVUs almost doubled in the same period – from 43,522 to 82,611 students enrolled.

FIGURE 3. Time series of students enrolled to IVUs. The percentages indicate the enrolled in IVUs out of the enrolled in Italian universities



Source: Elaboration on MIUR (2019)

The emergence of VUs in Italy

As stressed by the MIUR itself (2013), the hectic normative production and the overlapping of normative sources led to a fragmented and ambiguous regulation on IVUs. Law 168/1989 paved the way for the autonomy of non-state and state universities. Law 341/1990 marked the entrance of Virtual HE as a policy issue, as it allowed universities to set up «distance HE initiatives». However, IVUs acquired a well-defined legal status only when the MIUR converged with the trends outlined by the European Union, which at the beginning of the new millennium was simultaneously working both on eLearning and lifelong learning, along the lines of the Lisbon Strategy. By Decree 04/17/2003, the MIUR adopted criteria and procedures for VUs accreditation. They thus finally emerged as a policy issue, a nexus of educational and organisational practices as well as a formal education/lifelong learning option. All current Italian IVUs sprung from the private market between 2004 and 2006 (Table 1). More specific criteria and procedures have been introduced for VUs with Decrees 987/2016 and 06/2019.

TABLE 1. Italian Università telematiche (IVUs) and number of enrolled students (academic year 2017-2018)

Università telematica (IVU)	Students enrolled (2017-2018)
UniPegaso	25.212
UniCusano	16.624
UniNettuno	11.877
e-Campus	11.437
UniMarconi	9.474
San Raffaele	4.313
UniTelma	2.475
UniFortunato	841
Italian University Line	248
UniDav	110
Uni Mercatorum	(missing)
TOTAL	82.611

Source: Elaboration on MIUR (2019)

IVUs: Tinkering and marketisation

IVUs have implications both as educational phenomena and as socio-political processes. Hybrid learning arrangements are suggested by these 'online' kind of universities in which materialities, spatialities and temporalities are woven together and performed 'otherwise' – beyond the *forme scolaire* (Vincent et al., 1994). They are thus attractive for users looking for a tailor-made

educational offer, such as workers, parents, travellers, disable people, etc. IVUs can be thus examined as an entry point for sociomaterial, sociospatial and socio-temporal practices (Fenwick and Edwards, 2012) through which students tinker with the learning arrangements within which they are entangled.

On the institutional level, a displacement of the responsibility for HE from the public to the private sector can be witnessed with respect to IVUs. As shown, this happened through the state convergence with European dynamics and the construction of a normative apparatus which regulates IVUs. A proactively depoliticised space was thus opened by the public actor – the space of virtual higher education/lifelong learning. This space has soon been populated by IVUs institutions operating towards the marketisation of the Italian virtual higher education arena.

4. Final remarks and ways ahead

In this research an attempt was made to explore the processes of societal depoliticisation of education in Italy in order to observe how they interweave with educational choice. Two different educational options were analysed: OOSP (non-formal pre-primary/primary/secondary educational option), and IVUs (formal higher lifelong educational option). In both cases, 'depoliticised spaces' were observed in which responsibility is being transferred from institutions to new actors (individuals and families) which thereby become education providers. In the case of OOSP, we analysed a double movement of depoliticisation of education and politicisation of practices which are now entering the public debate. In the case of IVUs, the dislocation of the responsibility for HE from the public to the private sector is leading to the marketisation of education and to the emergence of new hybrid learning practices.

The effects of these depoliticisation processes are detectable on diverse fields. In terms of formal and non-formal educational offer, such processes are leading to a pluralisation of the educational options available to the students. In terms of subjective experience, these processes expand the students' possibility to craft and tinker with their own formative path – these educational options can in fact be assembled in heterogeneous ways as they leave room for plural outcomes and exit strategies. However, public power does not disappear in these processes, maintaining a key role in drawing up their possibilities and boundaries.

The issue of societal depoliticisation of education opens up for further reflection and challenges. These may concern, for example, the vulnerabilities that these processes might entail, such as the marketisation of education: what could happen to the idea of education as a common good if the State no longer secure education as its own responsibility? Another important matter concerns equity: who can really inhabit the depoliticised spaces of these educational options? Such issues and others can be addressed by further studies engaging this field.

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