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EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY

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VOLUME II

Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology

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**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA
DEMOCRATICA"**

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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 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

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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Convergence between Formal and Informal Learning Practices: State of the Art and Historical Heritage

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Introduction

For a long time, Informal learning suffered a mechanical and simplified definition, as a category opposed to formal learning: it was in fact intended at a space-time level, as a complex of outdoor activities, carried out outside school walls, and outside a certifiable path.

If in the field of vocational training validation systems have been arranged at European level by CEDEFOP (2017) to test and to certificate skills and abilities acquired through individual experience, however, many third sector initiatives, volunteering, personal interests and creative activities usually are more problematic in being identified and formally attested, and require a substantial change of didactics and educational perspectives. In any case a step change is in progress at the moment: recognizing the informal learning formative basis means, in fact, becoming aware of the profound changes technologies have introduced in the educational world, to the point of blurring the borders between informal and non-formal (the structured but not certified) learning paths, and more generally between formal and informal ones.

1. Creating a bridge between formal-informal learning: technology, media and learning activities

In 1960 Marshall McLuhan already theorized the radical learning system transformation triggered by communication media: in *Report on Project in Understanding New Media*, commissioned by the Office of Education, USA, - the first draft of his famous *Understanding Media*, 1964 - he indicated how the media environment - in particular TV - shapes our sensory system, overheating senses, such as hearing and touch, and changing perceptive capacity and living environment. For young people, trained by the new electric media, from cinema to television, a fragmented, mosaic-like perception is 'normal', and no longer the logical-sequential Gutenberg vision of the medium 'book'. Therefore, it is not possible to set the didactics still looking from the rear-view mirror of the old media: «Until we have mastered the multiple grammars of the new non-written media, we shall have no curriculum relevant to the new languages of knowledge and communication which have come into existence in the new media. These new languages are known to most people, but their grammars are not known at all. We have 'read' these new languages in the light of the old. The result has been distortion of their character and blindness to their meaning and effects» (McLuhan, 1960: 1-2).

It is necessary to include the media grammar and language in learning to understand how they work. In *City as Classroom* (1977). McLuhan theorizes the overcoming demarcation between the space-school and the so-called 'external' space, now interacting and integrated in a unique learning environment. He anticipates the wide educational horizons unfolding through the telematics advent, focusing on a productive learning flexibility that overlaps with formal education.

1.1 *Informal learning and transversal skills*

Following McLuhan, not only does technology involves the need of mastering the software and ICT tools up to programming competences, but also implies the capacity of understanding the media language variety, their communication mechanisms, how to re-use them creatively to produce new objects (Bolter, Grusin, 1999). Even when limiting the meaning of informal learning as self-directed, incidental, tacit and deliberative (Eraut, 2004; Schugurensky, 2000) it is crucial to consider how informal digital practices enable those transversal skills to be the training basis, even when in an unorganized manner: the media and information literacy skills (content critical selection to work on media languages); the cognitive skills (problem solving, critical thinking and autonomous learning); and the psychosocial/soft skills (teamwork, objective definition and achievement, ability of listening and self-ruling).

This progressive welding between formal and informal learning over the last decade has opened up new horizons for a hybrid system. Going through the official documents, we notice interesting shifts in the informal learning definition. In 2010 the Council of Europe codified the informal learning according to the daily environment of experiential activities performed by «family, peer group, neighbours, encounters, library, mass media, online media, work, play» (2010: 6-7). In 2011, UNESCO (2012) links this environment to the interests expressed both in individual and group dynamics: on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis. The latest *EU Council Recommendation* insists on the informal learning relevance for transversal skills acquisition «in supporting the development of essential interpersonal, communicative and cognitive skills such as: critical thinking, analytical skills, creativity, problem solving and resilience that facilitate young people's transition to adulthood, active citizenship and working life» (EU, 2018: 3).

These definitions involve two important emphases regarding informal learning role. First of all, active citizenship, planning in the third sector, and constructive exchange between different cultures play a central role in addition to personal interests; a perspective confirmed by the Council of Europe (2018), fostering the citizen formation and the defence of the democratic institutions foundations. Secondly, informal learning may become the opportunity to exercise soft skills, increasingly required even at the entrepreneurial level: since 2010 and in projection up to 2022, the World Economic Forum (2018: 12) has seen the growth of some soft skills in the Top Ten Skills list required by the labour market (as active learning and learning strategies, originality, initiative, leadership and social influence). In addition, informal experience may support the eight basic learning pillars of Lifelong Education (EU, 2018): alongside literacy, multilingual, digital and mathematical, engineering and science competences, personal, social competence and learning to learn competence, citizenship and entrepreneurship competence, cultural awareness and expression competence are particularly underpinned.

1.2 *Matching formal and informal learning*

Formal learning might incorporate the informal one according to a double movement: on the one hand, through a process of informal activities integration

(inclusion learning), which may become foundations for learning communities in the classroom and in networked communities of practice, starting from individual and/or group experiences. On the other hand, through processes of 'exit' from the formal (performing learning) to adhere to social commitment informal projects, such as the territory care, the intervention in degraded environments and all activities of mending the social fabric: common and bottom up projects are to be enhanced through involving the neighbourhood in order to smooth out cohabitation and exclusion conflicts. It is a sort of integrative learning (Bennet, 2012) expanding in the territorial reality and supporting the artistic inclinations.

How to create a formal-informal convergence, giving life to a networking learning? First of all, through learner-centred didactics, encouraging a project-based learning and supporting a community collaborative construction of knowledge objects. Moreover, through a learning practice implementing transversal skills according to digital and multidisciplinary paths for understanding and rebuilding the social tissue.

At this point other questions arise: *when* a contrast between formal and informal learning has actually occurred? And *which* innovative theories and experiences have tried connecting the two learning systems along the twentieth century?

2. Archaeology of the formal-informal dichotomy

The contrast between form and life is the basis of modern education evolution since Rousseau, who in the same year, 1762, published two fundamental books from an educational viewpoint: *Le contrat social* on the respect for norms and civic forms, and *Émile* on the life experiences and inclinations. The work of rationalisation and knowledge transmission, which the school includes among its primary missions, requires an inevitable distance from the 'real' world: the school becomes a place of knowledge 'secondaryisation', and so, of formalization (Damiano, 2013). In the long run, however, this distance tends to undermine the relationship between the individual and the knowledge objects, making the school often scarcely attractive. Regulating this distance in a different way is precisely the strategy activists of the first half of the twentieth-century recommend, starting from experience, from the action on reality: what begins in the limited space of class, through experiments and practices, necessarily ends with questioning the entire organizational structure, and the differences between the two learning approaches.

Many authors have contributed over the years to the curriculum reformulation, probably the most stringent constraint for active practices implementation and dissemination. The didactics inspired by Piaget, for example, based on intellectual research, and implemented above all by Hans Aebli in the Sixties and Seventies, requires an organisational reformulation, because the curriculum should be reduced to some essential subjects, an adequate equipment should be requested and freedom of teaching should be guaranteed. Moreover, this discourse is taken up by Morin according to the seven knowledges necessary for the education of the future (1999), moving towards the metacognitive, holistic, ecological and ethical dimensions.

Greater institutional freedom and lesser presence of curricular limitations have facilitated methodological experimentation in educational contexts such as kindergartens, holiday centres and full-time organisations, providing many concrete examples. The active method experiences are impressive from this point of view, serving as a model for further practices and offering some ideas for

today's debate (Bottero, 2014). They also tried profitably to bridge the gap between form and life, between obligations and freedom of action.

2.1. The 20th Century towards a formal-informal learning convergence

Maria Montessori has founded a pedagogical and didactic method still used today in many schools. She introduced on the one hand 'practical life exercises', and on the other one she modified the traditional school setting by adapting educational spaces to childhood needs.

After cooperating with Montessori, Helen Parkhurst extends her action plan, the so-called Dalton plan. In this case the concept of individualisation plays a crucial role: once fixed an initial commitment through a monthly contract (formal dimension), the pupil is free to organize his study time and modality (informal dimension).

For Ovide Decroly, education arises from the student's needs and previous knowledge. He replaces subjects with pivot ideas, centres of interest developed on three levels (observation, association, expression) and addressed through expressive and performing activities. Teacher does not plan activities but directs and advises the students during the observations.

In Roger Cousinet's *free-group work method*, students become free to select one of the activities prepared by the teacher and to carry it out for as long as they consider necessary. The teacher organises the learning environment and tools. The activities are divided into 'creative works' (manual and artistic activities) and 'knowledge works' (science, history, geography, arithmetic). All activities are based on real needs, which may arise from other executed works. There are no easy or difficult activities, but activities being of interest (and therefore increasing the internal motivation) or of no interest.

William H. Kilpatrick's *project method* extends the field of action compared to Dewey, who only focuses on the development of thinking. Teaching activity always starts from interest and takes the form of a 'project'. Hence the rejection of the rigid didactic organisation by study subjects. A teacher could gradually transform the traditional classroom activities in project works, reserving at least half an hour a day to free work and keeping some activities out of the program. The attempt at balancing formal and informal experience is evident.

For Carleton W. Washburne, another Dewey school exponent, student requirements and interests must be taken into account too, but without forgetting social needs. With the Winnetka schools he divides the curriculum into *ad hoc* projects and developing programs. The former supports common activities programmed for learning essential knowledge and skills and based on the student's previous knowledge and willingness to learn that content. The latter encourages elective activities going beyond personal interests and attitudes and fostering social cooperation and free expression. The choice of elective activities is free, but in any case, they are included in the curriculum (Electives are not Extras). The overall framework is not unitary, with a clear separation between intellectual skills curriculum (individualized and evaluated), and the curriculum for creative and practical skills development (learning from experience, not evaluated). The incompatibility between formal and informal is declined under another formula: the dichotomy control/freedom.

Celestin Freinet's techniques are very significant and still relevant. He does not create opposition between play and work: *work-play* (a series of activities showing a definite aim and tending towards specific, but not constricting results) gradually replaces *play-work* (more suited to vital and social needs). He starts from the educational setting and tools reorganization, giving more space to the laboratory, with indoor and outdoor activities. The teacher is a consultant and facilitator, building an annual didactic plan on which he elaborates individualized

weekly plans. Each pupil has got a wide choice (informal dimension) within the annual plan constraints (formal dimension) and undertakes to carry out the activities on time.

The author cited more than others as methodological inspiration is David Kolb, who has in Jean Piaget, John Dewey and Kurt Lewin his declared theoretical models of reference. A broad set of techniques and methodologies, especially for vocational training, make more or less explicit reference to experiential learning (Kolb, 1984).

More recent is the system of laboratories proposed by Francesco De Bartolomeis, inspired by Dewey's pragmatism. The school should be organized as a laboratory structure through planned use of external social spaces, with the perspective of an integrated training system together with the school spaces. The rigid subjects succession is eliminated, but not the frontal activities, favouring discussion and research, both guided and autonomous, and giving maximum flexibility in the use of the space-time setting and in collaborative activities.

Conclusions

The active method models indicate scenarios of convergent didactic practices going towards the dialogue between school and extra-school reality, in methodological and organizational terms, on a double level, *micro* (in the classroom) and *meso* (in the school). Dialogue also means mutual contamination. These are two extremes that must meet: on the one hand, the formal learning gives shape to the informal one, setting the formal perimeter within which the informal skills develop; on the other hand, the formal learning becomes a form from the informal one, requiring a rethinking of the organizational and evaluative structure.

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