Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference

of the Journal Scuola Democratica

REINVENTING EDUCATION

VOLUME   III

Pandemic and Post-Pandemic

Space and Time

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REINVENTING EDUCATION

VOLUME III
Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time

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Title **Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" – Reinventing Education VOLUME III Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time**

This volume contains papers presented in the 2nd International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place online on 2-5 June 2021. The Conference was devoted to the needs and prospects of Reinventing Education.

The challenges posed by the contemporary world have long required a rethinking of educational concepts, policies and practices. The question about education 'for what' as well as 'how' and 'for whom' has become unavoidable and yet it largely

remained elusive due to a tenacious attachment to the ideas and routines of the past which are now far off the radical transformations required of educational systems.

Scenarios, reflections and practices fostering the possibility of change towards the reinvention of the educational field as a driver of more general and global changes have been centerstage topics at the Conference. Multidisciplinary approach from experts from different disciplinary communities, including sociology, pedagogy, psychology, economics, architecture, political science has brought together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate constraints and opportunities for reinventing education.

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 800 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on research, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time
A Premise

Papers in this third volume deals with the Covid-19 pandemic which is having an enormous impact on education systems worldwide. Policy makers, teachers, school managers, parents and students have been called to the reinvent their way of 'doing school'. At the same time, the governance of the education system and schools' organizations have been exposed to unprecedented tensions.

Within a short period of time, radical changes had to be introduced, simultaneously, at various levels of the school system. At national and regional level, there has been the need to rethink the way in which teachers are recruited, engaged and managed. National assessment and evaluation systems have been suspended or redefined in their uses by school actors The ways through which institutes were managed and organized had to be rethought, passing in a very short time through an on and off of dematerialization and hyper-normativity of time and space. Within schools, managers and teachers have been called to redefine the role of digital technologies in their didactic, as well as in their relationships with families and students. In some cases, these set of changes led to experience novel and unexpected daily proximities, in other prevailed a context characterized by distance and unsatisfactory relationships. Managers and teachers have been asked to re-invent their professionality to rethink their organizational, didactic and relational competences. Students and families, on their side, have been called to rebuild and reimagine new way of being at school, re-inventing the spaces and time of schooling and the way in which they relate among each other and with teachers.

The pandemic emergency has been a lens revealing intersections and structural tensions among various level and actors of the education system, but also allowing opportunities of changes thanks to the exogenous shock. At the same time, it must be considered that the emergency is interacting on pre-existing inequalities and contradictions. The pandemic clearly revealed the deep disparities of educational opportunities associated to students' life and housing conditions, beyond their access and uses of technological devices. Remote teaching and the enactment of an 'emergency didactic' has exacerbated learning difficulties for underprivileged students (children facing material deprivation, students with migratory background, students with special needs or disable, etc.). The interaction between the pandemic and pre-existing inequalities created different contextual conditions for actors' agency, orienting

toward different directions the pandemic's transformational potential.

Higher education systems have been affected too: in constant evolution due to constant transformations of society and changed functions of knowledge, universities have undergone a structural change along with pandemic times. Simultaneously, the growing relevance of knowledge for the economic development of the capitalistic system has profoundly affected higher education systems, characterized by the neo-liberal approach which his subject of increasing critical analysis.

However, Higher education systems are starting to be affected by other somewhat inevitable changing processes due to the evolution of knowledge and the consequent forms of its transmission. These forms have to be necessarily new both because of the availability of new instruments and the increased need to develop interpretative models of a constant and often unpredictable change. In this juncture the university might assume a renewed central role. At Higher Education System level, the growing use of digital instruments is envisaged in order to cope with the rising of the management rates of the training offer as well as to answer to the growing differentiation of user categories. A feasible consequence could be the increasing of the already pressure for the differentiation among the universities, with the related social implications.

At individual university level, it is foreseeable the demand for university involvement in tackling the problems of society and the economy will increase. And this at global, national and local level. From an organizational point of view the most significant feature is represented by the accumulation of traditional and new tasks that do not seem to be possible to manage. Whatever form the higher education systems will come to take, it remains that a central point to be clarified concerns the management of change. It will be the market that will impose its rules and the universities will organize themselves individually within the invisible enclosures that will guide their policies (with predictable growing social and territorial differences), or instead the State will choose incentive policies to direct its training system. It remains that in a condition of uncertainty and constant change the university's roles multiply and become – at least potentially – more and more central. It can therefore be argued that the university is not only called upon to respond to the demands of society but by elaborating answers and solutions to the problems it progressively affects the functioning of society.

We are fully aware that each educational experience produces specific results and definitions of teaching-learning practices. The well-established model of the magister teacher, based on a one-to-many transmission of knowledge, is complemented by new configurations of teaching-learning practices. There are

teaching practices that cultivate the ambition to combine the technological innovation with the psychological and pedagogical issues. Educational technologies, such as the Interactive Whiteboard, incorporate a new grammar and pragmatic in which the emphasis is placed on the involvement and the participation of the student, as well as on a "reverse teaching", compared to the traditional one. The diffusion of online educational platforms, based on algorithmic architectures and data-driven approaches, also draws attention to a personalized way of learning and a datafication of teaching. Digital technologies are therefore stimulating a series of transformations in the socio-material order of the class affecting the spatial and temporal configuration of teaching. At the same time, they are embedded in the complexity of the educational contexts that rework their practical and symbolic value.

In the European framework of strengthening the relations between the labour market and education, we also witness the implementation of teaching practices associated with the idea of knowledge as an economic and social investment. Recently, a large field of critical investigation has highlighted how teaching aimed at improving the employment prospects of students is deeply affecting public values in education. At the same time, different points of view in the educational field claim to postpone the transmission of skills related to the labour market to broader educational objectives of social inclusion and civic participation.

The new proxemics imposed by the current pandemic challenge traditional spatial configuration, from the arrangement of desks to the mobile use of chairs, from the forms of communication in virtual environments to the interaction in the classroom. Therefore, this is to register the need to re-elaborate the ecology of the educational practices, starting from the socio-material space of learning.

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University and Active Citizenship. Didactic Practices and Methodological Trajectories for the Development of Creative and Critical Thinking

Active Citizenship in a Transformative Perspective

Claudio Melacarne
University of Siena, claudio.melacarne@unisi.it

ABSTRACT: *We know that the European Union (EU) is a quite complex and dynamical legal and political system. An important point, however, is that people have the right to know exactly what is going on, ad described in Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 42) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 15). The EU space allow people to ask for receiving information about basically everything happening within the Union. People also have the legal right of 'access to documents' of all EU institutions. These possibilities that allow people to take part actively in public debate and institution is formally a right, but it has to be educated for becoming a real process. The Higher Education is not always involved in the debate on active citizenships, directly. How to introduce this task into curricula, as a specific content or an implicit learning outcome of discipline? The idea is to use the category described by Brookfiled, Mezirow and other scholars for underlining the different area of interest that could be used at university. The proposal will show how the emancipatory theory could explore different ways to work in Higher Education with a particular attention to Active Citizenship goals.*

KEYWORDS: *Transformative education, Citizenship, Higher education, Emancipation, Democracy.*

Introduction

We know that the European Union (EU) is a quite complex and dynamical legal and political system. An important point, however, is that people have the right to know exactly what is going on, ad described in Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 42) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 15). The EU space allow people to ask for receiving information about basically everything happening within the Union. People also have the legal right of 'access to documents' of all EU institutions. These possibilities that allow people to take part actively in public debate and institution is formally a right, but it has to be educated for becoming a real process and from EU Commission is clear that we have to choose in which of the five levels we want to promote active citizenship skills: local place, region, country and Europe.

Into this scenario, the proposal will use the Brookfiled's classification of 'assumptions' to describe three methodological ways for developing active citizenship in Higher Education (Giampaolo, Melacarne, 2017). The Higher Education is not always involved in the debate on active citizenships, directly. How to introduce this task into curricula, as a specific content or an implicit learning outcome of discipline? The idea is to use the category described by Brookfield for underlining the different area of interest that could be used at University. Brookfield describes assumptions (Brookfield, 1995) and divides them into three categories: paradigmatic assumptions, 'structural axioms we use to give order to the world' (2); prescriptive assumptions, 'assumptions through which we expect that a certain thing must happen in a particular circumstance' (p. 3); causal assumptions, 'assumptions that help us to understand how the different parts of a system work together and the conditions within which to imagine how to change this process' (4).

1. A theoretical perspective to understand citizenship

Biesta and Lawy (2006) argue that in recent decades there has been a worldwide resurgence of interest in education and democratic citizenship issues, both from educators and educators and from policy and policy makers (for an overview see, for example, Osler, Starkey, 2006). In democracies new and emerging attention is focused on how education can contribute to the formation of democratic citizens and the promotion of a democratic culture, while in established democracies the focus was on how to cultivate and maintain the interest and the commitment to democratic processes and practices. At stake in these discussions are not only technical questions about the correct form and form of education for democratic citizenship but also more philosophical questions about the nature of democracy and the possible configurations of citizenship within democratic societies.

Two tendencies can be distinguished in discussions of the state of democracy (McLaughlin, 2000). On the one hand there are concerns about the level of political participation and understanding, while on the other there are wider concerns about social cohesion and integration. Within these discussions there are particular anxieties about the role and position of young people. The idea that young people have lower levels of political interest, knowledge and behavior than adults has been well documented. While some argue that this is a normal life cycle phenomenon and that political interest increases with age, there is evidence that suggests a decline in political interest and engagement among young people compared to previous generations – at least, this is, with regards to official politics. In response, some have argued that young people have a different and very distinct political agenda, so that a decline in engagement with mainstream politics does not necessarily imply disengagement from social and political issues more generally.

Others argue, however, that young people do not have their own distinct political agenda. Although the evidence on levels of political interest and participation is inconclusive, young people, seen as «citizens in the making» (Marshall, 1950, 25), have become a prime target of government initiatives aimed at countering the perceived trend of and social alienation. Citizenship education has become the cornerstone of these initiatives. While I don't want to downplay the importance of citizenship education – not least because young people themselves have indicated a lack of knowledge and understanding in this area (see, for example, White *et al.*, 2000) – inclusion of citizenship in the formal curriculum risks masking a deeper problem relating to the citizenship of young people. The point I wish to emphasize in this chapter is that teaching citizenship represents at best a partial response to an alleged 'crisis' of democracy.

This is why for Biesta (2006) we can argue that it is necessary to shift the focus of research, politics and practice from teaching citizenship towards the different ways in which young people 'learn democracy' through their participation in the contexts and practices that make up their daily lives, in school, college and university, and in society at large. The transition from teaching to learning citizenship democracy allows you to overcome the individualistic conception of citizenship that is the basis of many reflections recent regarding citizenship education. The focus on learning about democracy makes it possible to reveal the ways in which such learning is situated in the development of young people's lives and how these lives, in turn, are implicated in broader cultural, social, political and economic orders. Ultimately, it is this broader context that offers young people the opportunity to be democratic citizens – that is, to exercise their citizenship – and to learn from it.

The transition from teaching citizenship to learning about democracy emphasizes, in other words, that democratic citizenship does not have to be understood as an attribute of the individual, but invariably has to do with individuals in the context and individuals in the relationship. From a research point of view this means that it is only by following young people in their participation in different formal and non-formal practices and contexts, and by listening to their voices, that their learning can be properly understood. This, in turn, makes it possible to recognize that the educational responsibility for learning citizenship is not and cannot be confined to schools and teachers, but extends to society at large.

I believe this trend is also evident in recent developments in citizenship education, particularly in the premise that the alleged crisis of democracy can be adequately addressed by (re)educating individuals. I outline the problems associated with such an individualistic approach where the emphasis is on the individual in himself rather than on the individual in context and relationship. In this context, Biesta's research supports an approach to citizenship education that takes its starting point in the learning that takes place in the real life of young people, in school and in society in general. In the concluding section,

2. Citizenship education in a transformative way

The work of teachers, while configured as intentional and conscious, implies knowledge and representations not always validated and negotiated. People use assumptions that allow them to give meaning to their experience. Assumptions are beliefs we have about the world and are so rooted in our way of thinking that they do not need to be explained. Many scholars use different terms to describe these beliefs. Mezirow defines them as 'meaning perspectives' describing them as: a habitual set of expectations that constitutes a frame of reference, which we use in the projection of symbolic models, and which acts as a system of beliefs (almost tacit) to interpret and evaluate the meaning of the experience (Mezirow, Taylor, 2009). Brookfield describes assumptions (Brookfield, 1995) and divides them into three categories:

- paradigmatic assumptions, «structural axioms we use to give order to the world» (ivi, 2);
- prescriptive assumptions, «assumptions through which we expect that a certain thing must happen in a particular circumstance» (ivi, 3);
- causal assumptions, «assumptions that help us to understand how the different parts of a system work together and the conditions within which to imagine how to change this process» (ivi, 4).

Kelly (2004), situating his studies in the research field called constructive alternativist, according to which there are many alternative valid modalities for interpreting reality, proposes the concept of personal constructs. These are mental schemes through which people interpret themselves and the reality around them. Founding his research on Perry's psychological model (1970) and on philosophical research, King and Kitchener (2004) use the constructs view of knowledge and concept of justification. The study by King and Kitchener empirically demonstrates how the way in which the subjects represent knowledge influences the way in which they justify some actions rather than others. The assumptions tell us, for example, how people or students should behave, what should be the educational project to follow in class, what should be the respective duties between teachers and students. The assumptions that we use when we make a learning contract with the students and we expect that this increases their involvement, because we have an agreement with them. Another case is when a person uses a note on the register, thinking that it generates a positive behaviour in the future. All these contributions, while using different terms, agree that there are perspectives that determine the conditions on the basis of which the meaning of an experience is generated. For example, when a young people uses a meaning perspective she/he selectively orders what he would like to facilitate and how the learning occurs in his students. As Mezirow wrote meaning perspectives provide us with criteria for evaluating what is right and wrong, good and evil, beautiful and ugly,

true and false (2003). Meaning perspectives lead us to believe that things are exclusively as we see them and that what we believe to be reality cannot have any alternative interpretation. To be able to act intelligently in the contexts of professional practice there is a need to discuss our assumptions and the way we think about the world. We need to validate our ideas and assumptions to gain the awareness to transform and develop our courses of action. Validation is more a social process than an individual one. It involves not only our experience, in which we find evidences that support personal representations, but also the dialogue within which we use symbols, narratives and words for understanding a phenomenon.

3. Citizenship education in a complex way. The collaborative developmental action inquiry

The Collaborative Developmental Action Inquiry (CDAI) was born into the second wave of studies inspired by transformative learning theory (TLT). This second wave has tried to engage new areas of research interest around TLT, starting from some critical responses to Mezirow's theory emerged over the years (Cranton, 1994; Taylor, 1998). One major element of debate about Mezirow's theory is its emphasis upon rationality (Taylor, 1998) and its individual approach also. Many empirical studies support this contention and «concluded that critical reflection is granted too much importance in a perspective transformation, a process too rationally driven» (Taylor 1998, 33-34). The idea that transformative learning is an «intuitive, creative, emotional process» is beginning to develop in the literature (Grabov 1997, 90) and now it is increased by the idea that transformative learning as to be connected with a more social and organizational theories. The drive of the first study on CDAI (Fisher *et al.,* 2003; Torbert, Associates, 2004) investigated how adult education could support people, organizations and society to better understand the requests of 21st century life (Nicolaides, 2015). In this way CDAI is been considered as a transformational method of inquiry in and on action (Brannick, Coghlan, 2006). Fisher and colleagues (2003) define it as «a method to explore a kind of behavior that is simultaneously inquiring and productive. It is behavior that simultaneously learns about the developing situation, accomplishes whatever task appears to have priority, and invites a redefining often task if necessary» (ivi, 115). Nicolaides describe the CDAI as a method for creating conditions for adults to advance their capacity (complexity of knowing) and competencies (skillful means) to engage paradox, uncertainty, and the ambiguity generated by early 21st century demands in work, life, and society (Nicolaides, 2015). Bill Torbert (2003; 2004) describe CDAI as the only one among the action strategies to simultaneously consider three fundamental questions:

1. how to facilitate people in assuming greater awareness about the connection between why they decided to take a certain action and the effects on the present;
2. how to generate informal micro research communities (among friends, in the family and at work);
3. how to produce strategies and actions that can be adopted in the times of the community rather than in the times of the scientific production of knowledge.

Now, many studies are developing the CDAI in many ways and contexts. They have been supported to learn how manage the contradiction of higher education organization and the new challenges of the professionals functions. How to align the ethic with the mission of HE system? How to organize multidisciplinary groups of professionals where the time of work go over the contract?

Conclusion

Into a reflective approach as Transformative Theories or Complex theories, people are aware of the process of sensemaking and they can identify themselves in others' perspective. They know how to manage a dialogue that involves a conscious exploration of the relationship between their own problematic situation and similar problems related to other cultures and set of minds. To develop citizenship, the higher education should support faculties to become empathic and open to other perspectives, facilitating them to meet colleagues prepared to listen and available to reach a common background or a synthesis of all perspectives. This process develops communities where a person can experience a situation in which to access necessary information to solve a cultural problem, where it is possible to reflect critically on personal assumptions. Interaction with other colleagues is a necessary condition to identify and appreciate points of view other than their own. There are, for example, social and organizational cultures that call for excessive reliance on authority or which interpret conflicts and diversity as a disvalue, developing fear and therefore incompetence in the members to face them. There are models of thought in which the desire for unanimity precludes a realistic assessment of possible alternative courses of action. The quality of a decision-making process deteriorates when compliance dominates a group. Compliance includes self-censorship, the illusion of unanimity, and direct pressure on dissenters. Within these climates critical thinking can be replaced by homogeneity that tends to produce irrational actions against those who have a divergent position (Giampaolo, Melacarne, 2017). The exercise of critical reflection (Fabbri, 2007; 2015) assists the groups in using logic and evidence rather than authority, tradition, to the implicit rules. Consensus can be reached through a dialectic that makes possible to justify requests, apologies and decisions. It is the process of critical reflection that generates a

transformative learning that influences the relationships and the organizations in which operate those who live the higher educational system.

How does higher education help adults, organizations, and society meet the demands of twenty-first century work and life? For answer to this big question, we conducted in 2018 an experience involving 30 Master and Ph.D. students at University of Siena. Our assumption was that students need to develop transversal and vertical skills for being employable and developing citizenship competences. Transversal and vertical skills are described by Torbert (2004) theory of leadership. He uses three ways of knowledge: how adults can grow the capacity to change the way they know the word (instrumental), how they adapt and manage their experience (transversal) and develop more complex ways of knowing, doing and being (vertical) (Yorks, Nicolaides, 2013). Horizontal learning or transversal approach refers to the educational process adding of more knowledge, skills, and competencies to solve problems, to communicate more efficiency, to work collaboratively into a group. It is about what you know and how you can do something to improve your performance or effectiveness. In vertical approach, the key word is 'capacity' and it refers to growth, and includes more complex forms of knowing, doing, and being. The learning outcomes of vertical development are more complex ways of knowing, which become more systemic, strategic, and interdependent. It is about how people develop the capacity to be more open to paradox and transform contradictions. Adult learning theories that adhere to the learning demands that complexity triggers include identity formation as described by Illeris (2014), transformative learning as described by Mezirow (1991), generative learning as described by Nicolaides (2015), informal learning as described by Marsick and colleagues (2017), and whole-person learning as described by Yorks and Kasl (2002). Transversal and vertical skills are becoming an interesting area for further research to advance and innovate curricula in higher education, as well as plan training programs for professional development (Yorke, Knight, 2004).

So, our students will be engaged in new challenges into everyday life, workplaces and a knowledge society. The core pedagogical idea of this experience is that to manage the adversities, people need to learn skills that allow them to construct and critically elaborate knowledge but also «intellectual and material—information, intellectual property, experience which can be used to create wealth» (Stewart, 1997, 3).

The relationship between adult learning and complexity requires new approaches to learning that break the knowledge paradigm (Nicolaides, 2015; Torbert, 2003). Nicolaides suggests that the primary role of adult educators is to create the conditions for adult to grow more complex ways of knowing, doing, and being (Nicolaides, 2015; Snowden, Boone, 2007).

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