

## *Editorial*

### *The meanings of education between integration, diversities and conflicts*

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The idea of an “Italian Sociology of Education” review arose several months ago, during the course of the Italian sociologists’ congress. The sociology of education research group had a meeting on “meanings of education between integration, diversities and conflicts”, and we agreed that our first issue could be a revised collection of the papers presented. Speaking about diversity, conflicts and integration seemed to be a good way to start an international review on education: but this issue is also the result of a collaborative work carried out over two decades by a group of educationalists both working together and separately, but always comparing their ideas and results. We should add that in Italy “educationalists” as a group of scholars working from different but integrated approaches don’t exist: this is one of the reason why Italian sociologists work on a larger amount of subjects than their colleagues.

The terms “integration, diversities and conflicts” together with their associated ideologies constitute the framework within which we examine a number of questions, from the changes in socialisation to the formation of educational leadership, from the reality of students’ lives to “intangible” credentialism. However, the central point is the role and meaning of education in a social context that is more and more, to quote Berger and Luckmann, a social construction. Even if, since Durkheim, sociologists

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agree that we can't speak of education if not embedded in the social context, it is not easy to say if it exists in a post-modern model (or theory) of education. "Postmodernism", as "post fordism" or the like, doesn't indicate the starting of a new model, but the end of the old one, and it defines the model's characteristics in opposition or in negation of the so called traditional characteristics. Postmodern educational politics "are framed as a politics of difference, in which voices from the margins have challenged the hitherto accepted dominance of heroic white western male actors and universal theorising" (Smith, 1995,p.1)

Bernstein (2000, p.81) quoting Durkheim on discourse in the medieval university, says that educational discourse contains within itself a tension, even a contradiction, which provides dynamics for development. He says that "today perhaps there is not so much a contradiction as a crisis, and what is at stake is the very concept of education itself" (p.86), because in the medieval period knowledge was an outer expression of a inner relationship, and the inner relationship was a guarantee of the legitimacy, integrity, worthwileness and value of the knowledge. Once knowledge is separated from the deep structure of the self, "there are two independent markets, one of knowledge and one of potential creators and users of knowledge".

Users of knowledge in the mass school, says François Dubet, could be defined as "pagan" or uncivilised, in opposition to the "believers" of the old model. The idea of a capitalist school, dominating the sociology of education in the Seventies, was an over simplification. The challenges to the school system are deriving from its historical form: that form and that model (the "software") were created in the second half of the XIXth century, by a particular shape of society. The program was based on homogeneous and sacred values; the teacher's characteristic was, like that for a priest, the vocation. The vocational was the legitimizing principle in a sanctuary-like school. The coming of the mass school opened the doors to the "pagans", and in more recent years the modernisation itself became contradictory to the program. The school culture lost its legitimisation, the professional replaced the vocation, the new cultures were much more appealing for the youngsters and the differences took the place of the common model. So, Dubet says, the school has not been destroyed (only) by the globalisation or the liberal ideology: it has collapsed, and its decline has been mainly endogenous. In some way, the sanctuary-school has disappointed its believers, and the liberal ideology could appear as the best

perspective. To avoid the negative consequences of a perspective enhancing the benefits for the middle class and the élites, the task of the sociology of education is to re-define the nature and the aims of a democratic school system.

Luciano Benadusi's analysis, using data from large surveys on university students and graduates, indicates a classical form of difference, i.e. difference in chances to enrol and graduate in higher education. Even in a sample where people from high socio economic status is over represented, he can see that the Italian university reproduces existing inequalities, creates new inequalities and allows an appreciable flux of educational and social inter-generational mobility. The impact of social origin and family cultural capital is still stronger than in other European countries. It influences not only the possibility to graduate – eventually on time and with honours – but even the choosing of the faculty, and as a consequence stratifies educational credentials even horizontally. However, the different types of stratification, together with important convergences, present also some meaningful divergences which contrast, to some extent, the reproduction of social inequalities.

On educational credentials Carlo Catarsi argues that a “certificate of – formal – competencies”, is in reality an “immaterial” or “intangible” asset. He uses the concept of fluid knowledge, referring to Bauman's liquid society: this liquid knowledge arises from events or reflection on events, and it is necessary for exploration of what he calls “contractual objectivisation”. According to that, educational credentials are factors, active resources that contribute to make all investment “sufficiently certain”. Catarsi tests his theory on entrepreneurial roles and skills, where innovation is fundamental, and on a new professional role, as the problem setter.

Elena Besozzi's paper considers the students' research for meaning in a school that could be, à la Bourdieu, an alternative to the every day life. He author enhances the lack of a fixed frame of values, in a society that has moved from a given common sense to a sense constructed in a reflexive and interactive relationship. Both the cultural and social capital of the family and the relevance of schooling are less effective than in the past, as you can see from the international data on assessment, as PISA. The intergenerational exchange is in a deep crisis, but the socioeconomic status still has a strong impact on the youth life courses, and it influences both the decision to invest in education and the possibility to be successful. In post

modern society, as Putnam notes, social capital is eroded, and the possibility to use education for social mobility is weakened: the lower the social status, the stronger the competition.

The so called new millennium learners will live in an educational environment characterised by the spreading of ICT: as Colombo & Landri write, not all the social effects of the “third phase” e-learning are well known. It not only it creates new roles within the knowledge transmission and creation, but the values underlying e-learning will contrast traditional school-centred values. The authors start from the concept of situated construction of technologies and societies to describe the many forms of “networked sociality”, as “digital formations” and emerging forms of society. There is an “e-sociality” materialized in the electronic space through a work of translation. Both negative and positive effects are examined, enhancing three different conflicts: between tradition and innovation, between humanistic and scientific culture, and finally between teaching methods and teaching practices: Fischer in his paper emphasizes the role of methodology and “general” education, against vocational learning. From every point of view, the traditional “frontal” teaching is weakening, if this is not integrated by a deep knowledge of this change of paradigm.

This new paradigm, in Lorenzo Fischer’s opinion, started with the passage from élite to mass schooling, in the Sixties, until to Lisbon Process in 2002: the newcomers in upper secondary education were quite different, both by gender and social class, and these changes have generated a paradox in the school: the more important its role, the more extensive the critiques. Mass education can neither have the same form nor the same meanings as the élite school: for instance, in relationship to the labour market, its main objective is to give to the students the tools for the “.maintenance” of their competencies. Coincidentally in her paper, Censi analyses the consequences of the mass school on the parents/teachers relationship, in a frame characterized by the decline of both the authority and the prevalence of the affective dimension. The model of the system has evolved from the state-monopolistic to more complex forms, with a mix of State and market. Also the teaching/learning process has changed a lot, as the learning sciences have highlighted, and Fischer refers to an interesting typology, from the traditional teacher – pedagogue to the new reflexive practitioner. As a consequence, the sociology of education has to cope with a number of changes, like new inequalities, contrasts between

equity and equality, the new curriculum..., so that “rigid” or deterministic approaches as found in Bourdieu or Boudon do not work, and they need to be integrated by a more complex, multilevel theory.

Not only has the teachers’ role changed, but the role of the headmaster has changed also, perhaps more so, and this change has generated a peculiar formative discourse, the managerial one. In Serpieri’s opinion, in Italy, during the last ten years, headteachers’ formation witnesses the pressures of this ‘new’ managerial discourse, and his paper illustrates how the introduction of managerialism resulted in a strong resistance of the ‘old’ bureaucratic and professional discourses, provoking the emergence of another ‘new’ discourse: the still weak democratic-critical one. The recruitment and training procedures, established in order to design the new headteachers, are discussed following a neo-institutionalist approach. Regulative, normative and cognitive pillars frame this process of formation, showing the contradiction between isomorphic and allomorphic outcomes. Notwithstanding the managerial pressures, the author highlights how bureaucratism and professionalism are still the winners of this ‘war’ of discourses, foreseeing a narrow space of manoeuvre for headteachers’ interpretation of the democratic discourse.

Back to the Censi paper on the other main actor of the school, the family, she underlines that the changes in the school system happened in a period when the family structures have weakened giving way to the “companionship” family, so that the division of tasks was no more defined. Students, on the other hand, seemed to give less importance to the school as socialisation agency, in a learning environment dominated by the ICT. The generational transmission asks for new models, due mainly to the relevance of the “virtual” in the youth experience. On the policy side, the representative structure of the 1970’s, even if clearly inadequate and unable to delegate any responsibility, is still in place, with frustrating consequences. In Censi’s opinion, this new model is an high trust one, enhancing reciprocity both between actors and generations, and it is likely that all of them should need more long life education. Each school could have its own participation plan, including families, peer groups and local networks.

Which image derives from this frame, and which aim emerges for the Italian sociology of education, is not easy to say. The challenge is open: let us wait for the way we will cope with it: perhaps, the conclusion could be found in Graziella Giovannini words, “I believe that there is a need to cast

light, even with sociological tools, on something other than the social relationship and the relation among generations. I think this is a major point in order to reason on issues like personal freedom, the chance of innovation... There is a need for crossing bounds, opening the road and let new stimuli go trough, which also means to turn to other disciplines, to discuss with other people, to debate with physicists, geographers, and not only with social scientists”.