



ITALIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Editor-in-Chief: Silvio Scanagatta | ISSN 2035-4983

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Article first published online

February 2019

HOW TO CITE

Pitzalis, M., De Feo, A. (2019). Micropolitics of School Innovation: Recruiting, Mobilizing and Converting Teachers. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 11(1), 69-90. doi: 10.14658/pupj-ijse-2019-1-4

Micropolitics of School Innovation: Recruiting, Mobilizing and Converting Teachers

Marco Pitzalis and Antonietta De Feo***

Abstract: Drawing on a mixed method research, this paper deals with teaching and technological innovation policies in the field of education, focusing on the implementation of the “Digital Agenda” in Sardinian schools from 2012 to 2015. Following Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory (1984; 1989) and S. Ball’s micro-political perspectives on the analyses of social processes within schools, this article aims to highlight the mobilization of teachers as *policy actors* i.e. as groups who help to convey and disseminate the meanings and concepts that define the policy and its moral and political objectives. In particular, we should like to emphasize three emerging dimensions of teacher commitment in the digital project: *conversion*, implying the acceptance of an ensemble of beliefs; *mobilisation*, implying the commitment to collective or organizational actions; *materiality*, implying a new material order that conveys a new logic of things.

Keywords: teachers training, digital school, mobilisation, education policies, conversion

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Overture

Over the last twenty years, European politics has played a key role in transforming the social and educational landscape in Italy. The abundance of pilot projects, networks and platforms to share “best practices”, together with policy recommendations, white papers and Council resolutions have helped to mobilize public and private actors within specific political processes. In the field of education, certain devices have created a cognitive and practical consensus around the idea that school as a space should be increasingly integrated with the outside world of economic production. In this space, the mere transmission of subject area knowledge has lost its centrality and has been replaced by new training goals such as the development of personal skills – e.g. self-entrepreneurship, self-efficacy, communication skills – that are required to operate with success within the workplace (Bengtsson, 2011; Brunila & Siivonen, 2016; Dardot & Laval, 2009). This new “pedagogical order” can be seen as an overhaul of traditional school models, whose order was based on the organization of the army, state administrations or the Fordist factory. The verticality of the transmission of knowledge should be replaced by a horizontality in which the knowledge must be co-constructed by the teacher and the students. The essence of being a student in this “new” pedagogical discourse focuses not on reducing inequalities or gaining access to an “*élitist*” and “highbrow culture”; instead it places emphasis on developing an individual’s ability to adapt to new ultra-competitive economic environments.

This new discourse in education is produced by an epistemic community that translates and disseminates knowledge through proficient networks that connect local, national and global dimensions. The upshot is that European organizations have spawned conceptual agendas that redefine the framework of legitimate and shared objectives and concepts (Dutercq & Van Zanten, 2001), resulting in the creation of coherent semiotic spheres. A definition of this given in the title of the special issue of the French review *École et société* (2012) is “Europe, a cognitive re-ordering/revolution”.

An abundant amount of literature has looked at the rise of this form of global governance and the way policies tend to spread out and influence the development of national policies. Martin Lawn and Roland Normand (2015) have examined the role of experts and academics in the establishment of what Ball (1998) has defined as the “new orthodoxy in education”. The construction of “epistemic communities” refers to new models of action where experts and private actors have an essential role (Robert 2012; Normand, 2012; Ozga, 2012). This new, ‘soft’ governance functions through networks that have replaced previous bureaucratic systems of control. The effect has been to produce a cultural hegemony in established educational discourse.

Many scholars have underlined the existence of national and regional variations. For example, Ball asserts that these global agendas have been cobbled together in a makeshift manner. Ozga and Lingard say that more attention must be placed on the “the potential of simultaneous ‘local’ and ‘global’ development” (Ozga & Lingard, 2007, p. 66). The way policies are implemented at national, regional and local level may differ considerably from European expectations; nevertheless, the European frame provides national bureaucracies and regional administrative and political personnel with a conceptual framework, as well as the scientific, moral, economic and political legitimacy to act. At the same time, a formalized framework of action has been put in place (i.e. from regional planning to the elaboration of projects through to the final phase of financial reporting).

Regional/Local bureaucracies are “coerced” into acting because they have the responsibility to use the funds that have been allocated to the regional government for the program in question. Operating within the European system of governance involves acting within an articulated and varied network incorporating a variety of agents and fields:

1. Experts attached to international networks who oversee the implementation of European projects into national or regional projects, and down to school micro-projects.
2. Administrative Staff who take on the project and learn to utilise “European bureaucratic newspeak”.
3. Political actors who become involved in order to legitimate their actions for their own political goals;
4. A professional field built ad hoc and *ab initio* for external consultants and experts in European projects, who will often support traditional bureaucracies to adapt to the new framework.

The Digital Agenda for Europe is an interesting case study of the system of European governance in the field of education. It is both central and transversal to all others because it combines the twin goals of integrating and deploying digital skills in working life and in everyday social life. Moreover, since ICTs are now viewed as a set of useful devices for reforming education, digital devices in particular are considered to be the best way to build this new “magic” learning environment where it would be possible to establish “disembodied” relationships between school actors. Breaking down the traditional dynamics and structure within all social determinations (i.e. gender, social class, institutional hierarchies, corporal qualities) it would facilitate horizontal (i.e. non-hierarchical) interaction and the co-construction of pedagogical practices that would revolutionise the traditional order inside and outside the school classroom (Jonassen, 1994).

Drawing on mixed method research, our contribution will be focused on the application of teaching and technological innovation policies in the field

of education, focusing on the implementation of the “Digital Agenda” in Sardinian schools from 2012 to 2015. Following Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory (1984; 1989) and S. Ball’s micro-political perspectives on the analyses of social processes within schools (Ball, 2003; Maguire et al., 2015; Ball et al., 2011), this article aims to analyse the process of transformation of the pedagogical *credo* outlined in European guidelines, starting from the epistemic sphere and moving down towards its realisation at the national, regional and local levels. Our focus is on the putting into practice of a comprehensive teacher-training program in Sardinia (as explained in the following sections) undertaken within in the framework of European recommendations and funding (ESF).

In a methodological standpoint, the research draws on a wide range of research methods and data. Direct observations of meetings were conducted at different stages of the implementation of the training teachers’ project. For a period of six months we attended meetings for political and administrative staff and participated in project phases from project design to the administrative acts. We were present at different moments during the implementation of the project and had direct continuous exchanges and contacts with actors situated in different positions as privileged witnesses (administrators, schools’ middle management, experts, tutors and teachers in training). We also conducted direct observation of organizational meetings at different stages of project implementation. We observed a range of events, particularly meetings and conferences dedicated to teacher training. During the training process, we also observed several classes conducted by master teachers (trainers) for learners (teachers in training). Field notes were taken during all observation activities.

At a later stage, when the e-training platform was launched, we undertook a content analysis of the training modules and forums on this digital platform (see par. 3.1). In this case, interactions were registered, coded and made objects of content analysis to develop a typology of interactions. Some of this analysis of the interactions and content of the platform was conducted by M. F. Ghiaccio as part of the “*La scuola digitale nella scuola sarda*” project (Principal Investigator: Marco Pitzalis). Moreover, we conducted in-depth interviews with the experts who developed and wrote the initial project concept as well as schoolteachers involved in the training course in different capacities. All the material collected was coded and analysed using a grounded theory perspective.

Our goal is thus to analyse the development of an education policy at a micro-level, emphasizing the conflicting nature of the policy process itself. It is important to bear in mind that all policies are constructed and pursued against a backdrop of diverse but intermeshing fields (bureaucratic, political, educational), where every field is governed by its own autonomous logic and

characterized by different kinds of rewards and interests. The actual policy content is modified during the very process of its implementation, mainly in its passage from one field to another. The policy's *iter* is affected at every step by the intervention of actors who negotiate their position within the policy framework, imposing and constructing new shared meanings that are consistent with the logic of each one's specific field. Finally, we will show that the real aim of policies is not to be found in their stated goals, but in the simple logic of actions that induce the mobilization of actors. However, these 'mobilized' actors tend to transform and translate the policy details into the logic of the field to which they belong, redefining them within their own specific sector jargons, thereby constructing new-shared meanings.

Throughout the phase of mobilization itself, the political significance of the policy is reaffirmed and disseminated, somehow merging social and political space.

The Case study: the regional implementation of the European Digital Agenda

Among the goals indicated by the EU, the "digital agenda" is....

1. a powerful device that transforms our imagined world and our practices.
2. transversal to other policies, such as social inclusion and technological innovation.
3. designed to connect the various fields of school, state and regional administrations and the market.

The first important factor is that it provides work for a large range of professionals (thus contributing to the further development of the knowledge economy): digital device producers, web designers, content producers and various technical experts are needed by the school. Secondly, it is an indirect means to finance the development of the digital market, since new software and hardware are needed. Third, the spreading of Digital literacy is considered essential for the creation of a modern workforce, and the fostering of social inclusion and modernisation in everyday life.

It is widely acknowledged that the 'Digital Agenda for Europe' is at the very heart of the transformation urgently needed in both the worlds of education and work. Schools need to train students in digital skills required to enter the modern world of work.

ICTs are clearly playing a key role in reforming education. Digital devices are deemed to be the most suitable tool for constructing this new learning environment, where the promises of constructivist pedagogies can be deployed. The new order of discourse that has emerged around ICTs in the field of education is represented in Sardinia by the Digital Plan known as "Digital School – Semid@s.

Carried out thanks to the European Structural Fund, the Plan has had the following objectives:

- Equip each classroom with an interactive whiteboard;
- Train the teachers;
- Equip each student with a tablet;
- Assist teachers in the production of digital content.

Putting the Digital School Program in Sardinia into practice has involved mobilizing all levels of the governance system:

- Mobilisation within the internal governance system (bureaucratic and political fields);
- Mobilisation of school administrators at different levels (Educational field);
- Mobilisation of teachers in the school field;
- Mobilisation of actors in school classrooms;
- Every step or level has entailed the specific task of negotiating and redistributing symbolic, material and political resources.

Thus, as a result of these series of mobilisations, the European governance system has developed a micro-political rhizome which connects every level to the other in a continuous interplay of negotiation and transformation, embracing every piece of the process within a single system of governance.

Our aim in this article is to analyse the base level, the ultimate goal of a European policy focussing on teacher training. Teachers are the end-target of an action whose aim is to bring about a conversion of the pedagogical paradigm into one that is most valued by EU experts.

The conversion required is not merely a pedagogical one, but embraces all the meta-discourses concerning globalization and the knowledge economy.

The goal is to engage teachers in the “reform”, instructing them in how to adopt the new language, take part in the so-called semiotic sphere and share its meanings. Furthermore, it involves translating discourse into actions and practices and connecting ordinary people to the technocratic sphere. Every form of commitment within an organization is in its nature a form of political engagement and mobilisation that has as its objective the creation of political consensus and social cohesion (Donzelot, 1991).

In particular, we should like to emphasize three emerging dimensions of teacher commitment in the Sardinian digital project:

- *conversion* (all participants must believe in it) as it has to do with the acceptance of an ensemble of beliefs (a cosmogony);
- *mobilisation* (all participants must enrol in the army of good), as it has to do with a commitment to collective or organizational actions;
- *materiality*, a new material order conveys a new logic of things that is exemplified by the introduction of the IWB.

These are the three elements behind an evolving transformation of the school environment and the adoption of new pedagogical beliefs and practices.

Little by little, administrators, teachers, students and parents must nurture an interest and participate in public debates, so that everyone has the opportunity to either make a stand or be pushed into a position. This overall societal mobilization has become one of the forms of contemporary governmentality because it encourages membership and fosters commitment and beliefs.

However, this does not mean that agreement and consensus are automatically achieved in the implementation of education policy and technological innovation.

On the contrary, structural constraints, cultural and professional beliefs and habits produce a variety of obstacles and problems in everyday school life (Pitzalis & De Feo, 2016; Pitzalis et al., 2016).

Teacher training as an effective device for conversion and mobilization

The Digital Agenda for Sardinia has espoused the epistemic *doxa* recommended by international agencies (OECD) and European organisms, which favour the constructivist approach model advocating “flipped classroom teaching”, i.e. teaching based on the interactive exchange between students and teachers rather than traditional frontal lessons (Tagliagambe, 2010; De Feo & Pitzalis, 2014; Pitzalis & De Feo, 2016; Pitzalis, 2016). In public and institutional rhetoric, the project pledged to systematically transform teaching, its timing and spaces, and in particular the role, competences, practices and reference values of the school teacher. For this reason a considerable part of available resources were dedicated to promoting the (re)-training of teachers and their active involvement in the training process itself.

This is all part of the general design of the digital school policy at European and national levels, which attributes fundamental strategic importance to teacher education; indeed, training objectives set down in the project documents go beyond basic technology literacy. Teachers are in fact being persuaded to adopt new learning devices aimed at acquiring not only digital skills in the strict sense, but new approaches and pedagogical outlooks where the ITC skills they have acquired can be exploited in the real pedagogical sense. An extract from the National Plan for the Digital School highlights these (re)-training expectations as follows:

The school staff must be equipped for all the changes required by modernity, and must be put in a position to fully cooperate with rather than resist innovation. Teacher training must be centered on teach-

ing innovation, taking into account digital technologies as a support for the realization of new educational paradigms and the operational planning of activities [...] It is therefore necessary to overcome the challenge of actively involving all teachers in the new paradigm [PNSD, p. 31].

Likewise, in its original version (resolution 52/9 of 2009) the regional project “Digital School - Semid@s” specifies the target of combining the technological revolution with a pedagogical one, integrating teaching through the medium of ICTs with the adoption of a socio-constructivist paradigm, based on a task-based, interactive teaching approach centered on students’ needs (Schmidt & Whyte, 2012; Pitzalis & De Feo 2016). According to the guidelines of the epistemologist Silvano Tagliagambe, the mobilization of teachers – within this project of cultural innovation – must take a “bottom-up” training approach based on the centrality of the needs and resources available within individual school institutions. In practice, school principals have tended to choose one or more candidate teachers – depending on the size of a school staff – judged to be among the most motivated and skilled teachers in the school. Those selected (referred to hereafter as MTs, i.e. Master Teachers) were expected to be “the leading light” of change (p. 59) and the project offered them a training period with qualified technical trainers and expert consultants in computer science as well as experts in the field of digital teaching methodologies. The idea was that at the end of this training period the MTs would be able to train their Sardinian colleagues “both on issues relating to the technology as a whole and on issues relating to the specific use of the IWB as a teaching tool and above all to make the best use of the learning materials produced during the project” [p. 57]. Subsequently, the experts would supervise teachers in creating multimedia and interactive teaching materials and environments (digital texts). Policy designers considered this to be one of the most important and contentious phases of the project. After the installation of IWBs, each MT would then be asked to organize other training courses for other teachers – within their workplace – and also to involve the students in the experimentation process.

In sum, the project’s original purpose was to directly involve teachers in the field, “led” by experts in the experimentation of pedagogical and digital innovation and the production of “learning objects”. It also strongly advocated a change away from the logic of vertical government towards one of horizontal governance, which was to become the essence and distinctive feature in the discourse imagery around the Sardinian Digital school. Ideally, it was hoped that a change from the centralism of the public actor to greater decentralization, would confer on schools a wider margin of action in financial and pedagogical matters (Van Zanten, 2004). From the initial purchase of the IWBs to the production of digital didactic materials, together with efforts

to organise teacher training, the path desired by the original SD project was therefore that of directly involving the schools in a collective effort to make the project work.

The *initial attempt to get the «Digital School» project underway* was *tout court* largely thwarted during its implementation phase. The range of contrasting economic, political and bureaucratic interests that emerged (Capano & Terenzi, 2014) resulted in coercive action by lobbyists and conflict among political actors and administrators intent on manipulating the way the project would pan out, in order to favour one or another stakeholder. For example, traditional publishers of educational materials used to enjoying leading positions (and often market monopolies) in the lucrative market of an assortment of editions of schoolbooks, were firmly opposed to the idea of learning content being produced by the teachers themselves. For this reason, the project was initially altered and a private company was asked to provide digital content. The decision to do this was legally contested and the subsequent court ruling completely halted the development of this part of the project.

Moreover, the practical application of the “guiding principles” of the project and the interpretation of some of the governmental resolutions caused friction in the negotiation of contrasting interests and the logic of action associated with different actors from the various fields involved: schools, the bureaucratic machine, politicians and the educational technologies market. The initial “philosophy” of the project was to say the least, frustrated.

The teacher training as a political object

From a Bourdieusian perspective, the processes involved in finding the political will to revolutionise teacher training has been analysed from the viewpoint that social agents hold specific point of views according to their position within the field and they consistently take a stand in line with the (material and symbolic) interests connected to their position (Bourdieu, 1984). Moreover, policy actions involving several different agents will inevitably affect a policy field where a number of different actors will struggle to define their roles and impose their interpretation of the situation, all of which implies a distribution of material and symbolic resources.

As we stated in the previous chapter, the planning of the project initially envisaged a horizontal model where the participation of schools and teachers within the various phases of its implementation was carried forward by exploiting and developing the existing expertise among school teachers. This initial plan was abruptly dismissed as market interests emerged and lobbying pressure on political actors brought about radical changes in the orientation of the political cadres (who controlled the Regional government in the time). This led to the resignation of the project’s chief director and

upset the balance of power between the group of technical experts and the administrative and political 'staff'. The first consequence of this change was that the administration staff no longer had a global vision of the project itself, since the various areas of the project became disconnected and were carried forward separately. Some were totally abandoned. The second was that the administration staff struggled to find new solutions to develop the remaining strands of the project, one of which was of course the key area of teacher training.

"Teacher training" consequently became a policy dilemma for the administration staff, who began to contact and remonstrate with the Regional Office for Schools (USR: *Ufficio Scolastico Regionale*, the local office of the Ministry of Education - MIUR).

The whole panorama of perspectives had changed; the USR was not originally supposed to play a central role in the policy process during the initial phase of the policy design, but it subsequently *de facto* became a central actor in the development of the project as a result of the crisis of confidence that had come about between the project's chief director and the political staff/cadres. The crisis caused a weakening of the political leadership in the project, which then opened the door for other actors to step in (such as USR and INDIRE).

With regard to teacher training specifically, the USR assumed the role of "experts" integrating the regional project to the national one that had already been implemented by the Ministry in partnership with INDIRE (a governmental agency for research in education). It was a deal that provided the administration staff with a blanket solution to the "policy dilemma". INDIRE was thus able to create an experimented "package" for teacher training, which more or less met with immediate consensus because it was connected to the National Digital School Agenda.

A further consequence of the new agreement was that what was supposed to be a decentralized project of regional educational policy, reverted to a centralized one. The agreement of July 2012 with the MIUR marks the moment in which the Region entrusted the control room to the Ministry (with the mediation of Sardinia SRB-USR) and regional representatives practically lost control and power over the project. The agreement focussed on two main points: the realization of a "data centre" with the status of a national pilot project and the teacher-training project. As regards the latter, while the Region undertook to reformulate the Semid@s project with the aim of integrating it with the Digital National Plan, the MIUR undertook to:

[...] guarantee the training actions of teaching staff, school managers and ATA staff through the Regional Office for Schools in Sardinia for all aspects of organization connected with the Regional government. To this end, it is the aforementioned USR that invites the Region to

act as a coordinator of training activities and to assist in the choice of experts with proven experience in the sector. The USR will also make use of INDIRE's scientific collaboration for all training activities for trainers and for the integration of the regional plan with international digital innovation initiatives. [Program agreement, p. 4].

The implementation of the training under the new agreement somewhat complicated the process previously conceived in the original project:

- In the first phase, the USR would now select a group of teachers expert in innovation and teacher training (called Meta-Master Teachers, MMT); this selected group received two training modules from a group of teachers made available by the Ministry of Education, University and Research under a special agreement with the National Institute of documentation for innovation and educational research (INDIRE);
- In the second phase, the task of MMTs was to train 1,000 teachers in the regional school system (the so-called Master Teachers - MT) who had been selected by their principals (as in the first phase of the original project);
- In the third phase, the newly trained Master Teachers from phase 2 would now train teachers in every school of the Region (this part of the project was not fully defined and was provisionally put on hold).

In phase 1, MMTs were chosen on the basis of their active participation in previous projects run by INDIRE and the USR in Sardinia. In so doing, the group selected comprised those most active in the school, chosen because of their commitment and adhesion to the institutional values enshrined in the project. However, this particular decision tended to exclude other expert teachers, something which later gave rise to conflict and protest.

Phase 2 involved the formation of school networks (groups of schools organized for this purpose) and the selection of 1000 MTs within these networks. In some cases, experts excluded in phase 1 were included in phase 2.

INDIRE organized the training of MMTs in two parts: the first was a three-day seminar addressed only to MMTs organized in Sassari in May 2013; the second was computer-based training mediated by a platform provided by INDIRE.

We were able to directly observe a meeting organized for phase 1. The meeting's agenda was to set up a national "epistemic community" (Van Zanten, 2004; Levin, 1998), consisting of INDIRE experts and selected school teachers whose task was to disseminate knowledge of and promote the categories, principles and solutions of the digital school. Another chief aim of these meetings was to publicise the objectives of the project and the wider cultural policy that underlies it, while legitimating the need for managerial intervention by the actors in national administrations (Ministries and their agencies). One of the most important features to be highlighted was the link

between digital innovation and the recognition/reception of the EU's cultural and political bodies, from which the project funds have come. Thanks to the active involvement of 'INDIRE', the MIUR would then ensure the project was reliable and consistent with how "European" projects ought to be run, due largely to its experience in international collaborations. As one of the INDIRE directors pointed out, anything specifically relating to local issues and concerns (for example, promoting Sardinian culture and Language) was placed in the background in order to make the project "less insular and more focussed on international cultural cooperation".

Another key aspect to bear in mind is that these training seminars acted as channels of ritual "investiture" for the selected minority of teachers (i.e. the MMTs) who were recruited to kick-start the "conversion" of their colleagues to digital innovation.

The recruitment of MMTs has taken place within the framework of established relations between INDIRE and USR, so those recruited were already recognised as potential trainers and effective mentors of innovation. They were all teachers with managerial experience in previous innovation projects such as the regional projects M@rte, Project C@mpus or the national project Digitscuola and the National Plan for Digital Schools).

As a result of their experience in teacher training, the selected group of teachers had all held organizational roles within schools, worked as middle managers (within the framework of developing autonomy) or been assigned the academic function of disseminating, applying and recoding the fundamental pedagogical principles and the technological innovation needed in schools.

All the members of staff recruited to form the MMT group were also notably heterogeneous in terms of their professional, technological and teaching skills, which facilitated the building of an overall framework that obtained the consensus of participants.

The following excerpt from an interview with an INDIRE manager, brings out this transformative vision of the function of teachers as "evangelizers".

[...] it is the teacher who builds the school, not the Ministry or INDIRE, who have merely to create the conditions for triggering the processes of innovation, which then develop autonomously, with autonomous speed. [...] The school is a great inertial system, the largest company in the country is inertial, tends to reproduce, to have pockets of resistance. The important thing is to have utopian forces, schools and to convince teachers how far you can go, what you can achieve.

This extract reveals the Manichean vision of school innovation processes (Bourdieu, 1984), in which the progressive-minded innovators meet with resistance from schools (and general administrations) because they have gen-

erally been “resistant to change”, populated by «conservative» social actors unable to see their own real interests.

The school is depicted as a large, lifeless body that only the intervention and action of motivated and enlightened actors can revive, shake it from its torpor and carry it forward towards the right objectives.

The teacher training project and the mobilization of teachers

As a result of the changing nature of ‘school space’, social actors are adapting and applying different strategies which are ultimately aimed at conserving or obtaining suitable conditions of work, i.e. their own positions within formal or informal hierarchies in the professional field. The novelty and changes that the teacher training project has entailed have been a challenge for the teachers who have had a lifetime commitment to a different kind of “career”.

Consistent with current literature on this topic, we see the teaching profession as being internally differentiated and we have observed that teachers’ commitment may vary depending on the type of tasks they perform or the type of reward sought (Argentin, 2018; Colombo, 2017; Serpieri, 2012; Cavalli, 2000; Cavalli & Argentin, 2010; Pitzalis, 2006).

Moreover, as we see it, teachers tend to pursue one of five main kinds of careers, which will lead to different kinds of material or symbolic rewards:

1. A “traditional” teaching career, where the teacher carries out most of his/her activities within the classroom and with their students;
2. An organizational career with overall organizational responsibilities within the school, designed to achieve general objectives (for example, school guidance activities) or specific projects;
3. An administrative career within the staff of Local, Regional or National school administrative agencies (i.e. the USR);
4. A professional (intellectual) career where they are responsible for various kinds of activities such as content production, teaching and tutoring within university training courses for teachers, as well as developing expertise in pedagogical or technological innovation;
5. A political career in the general field syndicalism.

Teachers may be committed and subscribe to one or more of these careers and it is often the case that certain types of careers bring recognition (social capital status) that may then be exploited in other areas within the field. The digital school project that we are examining here has significantly altered the professional arena of teaching and is causing a *de facto* redistribution of formal and symbolic rewards (for example, by giving formal recognition to teachers as experts), thus creating a ranking system

for teachers that was previously considered problematical by a number of school actors operating in the system.

As illustrated above, the teacher training project put into action by INDIRE consisted of three consecutive phases. Now, in each one of these phases or steps, an arbitrary distinction was created among teachers, which was felt by many to be an act of symbolic violence, because it created a hierarchy in a world where none ought to exist.

Let us now examine the process conducted by Sardinia's Regional government, the Regional Schools Office and INDIRE.

In 2013, INDIRE selected 63 MMTs from primary and secondary schools for the first phase of the training project in Sardinia. As mentioned above, the main criterion for choosing MMT teachers was their previous experience as tutors in government training initiatives rather than their proven level of expertise in the use of teaching technologies. Indeed, approximately 30% of them declared they had little or no experience in using the IWBs. The selection criteria was clearly a deliberate political strategy, because the MMTs had already espoused the new order of discourse, and had already manifested their adhesion to the principles of educational change in previous training experiences. Being already converted, they were seen as eligible to "persuade" their colleagues of the expediency of new perspectives and courses of action. The training action was carried out mainly online [interspersed with three meetings requiring physical attendance] on a *digital platform* that replicated the one used in a previous training experience (relating to the IWB National Plan). As those involved confirmed, the technical aspects and the content made available were basically analogous.

The platform became the central focus for all phases of the project. In all these phases of negotiation between the USR and the regional administrative staff, the platform provided ready-made solutions and, moreover, was the device that legitimized the expertise of the ministry (INDIRE in this case) as being the only one capable of providing overall supervision of required actions, e.g. ensuring the circulation of key written texts, establishing the main precepts and operational methods among different teachers and their diverse school contexts. Therefore, the platform was akin to a "policy instrument" (Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007, p. 3) with a two-fold function: on the one hand, it has given substance, structure and the logic of governance to the innovation processes, while on the other it has produced written documents creating and defining conditions to give legitimacy to certain outcomes and not others (Wajcman, 2015). Moreover, the platform has also established a link between the school and political fields, thereby creating a sort of mutual dependency; it has provided a functional system giving a "closed" solution for all the actors (regional and school administrations) which could not have been simply replaced by other devices in

such a short time. Moreover, because of its political and institutional legitimacy – gained through previous experience – the model was accepted without question. In this sense, it was an “epistemic instrument” stamping its theoretical and methodological mark on the interventions of school actors. In both cases, it worked as a black box concealing all the “arbitrary” political and epistemic choices that produced it. In this way, the platform is a device producing a material order conveying a specific logic of things.

As stated, the on-line training experience consisted of two modules devised on the basis of previous teacher training programs. The first module can be labelled “instrumental” as it dealt with transferring basic skills concerning the use and functions of the IWB and its software. The second module was “methodological” and was designed to create two pedagogical experiences using the IWB, according to specific formats. The final part included the sharing of a “trainer’s agenda”, to be completed during the training of the Master Teachers. The platform offered a range of pedagogical tools: including a “synchronous laboratory”, or a teaching space designed to transmit lessons via audio and/or videoconferencing; a forum space, where teachers could debate the information and guidance received, compare their opinions, communicate their desired choices and propose their own solutions (Calidoni & Ghiaccio, 2015). The tools and materials recommended during this first training phase were replicated in the two following steps: one was the formation of 1000 MTs while the end-aim of the second phase was to train the entire teacher population. We also had the opportunity to observe the training process of MMTs. In particular, the analyses of the content of the forums on the platform allowed us to reconstruct a detailed picture of the dynamics of interaction unfolding, i.e. the negotiations and conflicts that characterized the social dynamic within different working groups and the relationship between actors (MMTs and INDIRE tutors).

Observing the interactions within the platform has shown that considerable space exists for free interpretation and negotiation, which enables tutors to have some measure of control over on-line interactions. In fact, the form that teachers’ mobilization takes “within” and “with” the platform does not arise from any organic plans of action designed by tutors, but is instead the product of “improvisation” in the sense meant by Weick (1998; 2001), i.e. it generates a process that defines itself as a way forward. The platform has created new space that is being variously exploited by agents operating within their own professional *habitus*, employing the specific professional and technical resources that they are able to mobilize. What has clearly emerged from an analysis of the forum discussions, set within a rigid structure of the imposed formats, is that the real interactive dynamics (between “learners” and between tutors and “learners”) and the practical

strategies of actors tend to generate complex scenarios, as we shall show below. It exemplifies how the peer culture of Italian teachers is borne out and replicated by these very interactions.

The learning process in the first module focused on technical skills and was a phase in which INDIRE tutors showed a great amount of flexibility by first employing a frontal teaching approach, that supported the participants in their acquisition / understanding of content or procedure, to more horizontal communication strategies aimed at providing various forms of motivational support (Calidoni & Ghiaccio 2015). The outcome of the training experience in this phase was directly affected by a pre-set condition: The IWB up-loads a specific software (Oliboard) which defines a specific framework of pedagogical actions. As one MMT specified:

This training took place using only one type of software. Some colleagues felt this did not correspond to the real working conditions within schools, where teachers also use other software, for example, Promethean or others...

The software that comes with an IWB can have very different technical characteristics. In fact, every technical option is a dilemma that calls into question teaching practices and the conditions of use of technology (De Feo & Pitzalis, 2014).

This question and the latent conflict caused by the limited choice of technology and training strategies came to the fore again when MMTs assumed the role of tutors for the 1000 MTs. Both “learners” and “tutors” began to demand the intervention and negotiation of the Regional administrative staff and the organization of a series of meetings with the coordinators of the projects. Given the limited technological framework chosen by the training project, teachers contested its validity in enabling them to gain concrete experience and expertise, pointing out that in real school environments there was a much wider choice of technological solutions and alternatives. Both MMTs and MTs lamented the fact that they were now forced to resolve the issue themselves by using their own time to acquire the skills needed to use other software or to invest further time and effort doing group work with teachers using different devices.¹

At every step of the project, teachers-tutors and teachers-learners (with their changing roles) adopted strategies to save face and to obtain recognition of – or affirm – their own professionalism and expertise. There were recurrent instances of negotiation and conflict during many of the activities.

¹ 100 Networks of schools were created to purchase IWBs. The Regional government directly funded each network, which proceeded with the tender on the electronic purchasing platform (MePA).

It is interesting to note how the difficulties that emerged during the project highlighted different professional strategies and attitudes towards the platform and the training project in general. While adhering to the goals of the digital school, some teachers demanded organizational and strategic autonomy. They maintain their stance on the nature of the teacher's work whose lie roots in the tension between autonomy and heteronomy of the school field vis-à-vis the political and bureaucratic organisms. These are teachers who stand by the logic of professionalism – based on collegiality and decision-making autonomy – and refute the new logic of public managerialism (Evetts, 2011; Fournier, 1999).

We can label this group of teachers as being “expert polemicists” or those who complain about technical problems but also take issue with the educational and communicative choices of the training devices, which on some occasions has led to the creation of parallel communities/ platforms. Other teachers, however, take a more pragmatic approach by applying combined logic to work out best strategies, i.e. they don't see their professional investment as a means to strengthen their position within in their school but as something that is part of a wider strategy to obtain external recognition, whether it be political, academic, economic or social. They never question the form and content of the training program but put themselves forward as “solvers”, always available to resolve technical issues and to provide additional information whenever necessary.

Another basic difference that distinguished how the MMTs mobilised depended on which level of the school system they worked in. In the first module, the working groups were clearly divided into primary and secondary teachers. The groups formed by primary school teachers were more open to collaborating, sharing and communicating openly. Secondary school teachers limited themselves to a basic exchange of information concerning the training path and the different tasks connected to it, which consisted of a succession of short questions and answers.

This difference also emerged in the MT classes, as illustrated in the following extract from one of the MMTs consulted:

Primary school teachers took to the use of the new technology more readily and seemed more able to grasp ideas; they were also more aware of the importance of play. I think that playing is a winning educational strategy, because it's an engaging and motivating learning strategy. In primary schools, this notion is better understood and all the instruments around the IWB are utilised to this effect. In secondary schools, there appear to be more difficulties in collaborative-interactive activities, more linked to the subject area of study itself,, rather than the traditional learning dimension; the rest is perceived seen as a disturbance, as a noise that interrupts communication.

This notable difference between primary and secondary level can be attributed to their diverse professional cultures. In primary schools, the cultural education of teachers focuses more on pedagogical rather than curriculum culture (Italian, mathematics, etc.), whereas the professional identity of secondary school teachers (lower and upper levels) is more focused on their field of study and the objectives of knowledge transmission. Therefore, there is a less rooted tradition of focussing attention on educational methodologies and practical teaching methods.

Depending on the different phases of the project they were involved in, teachers tended to adopt diverse strategies to deal with the dictates of a general mobilization that obliged them to accept an external definition of the correct pedagogical beliefs and practices to pursue.

The project required teachers to adopt a strategy of “placement” or “re-placement” in both the school and professional fields. Schoolteachers selected by the RSB-USR offices as MMTs and schoolteachers selected by principals as potential MTs were required to demonstrate their worth to the other schoolteachers.

A newly enforced hierarchy of expertise did not sit well with traditional peer culture among teachers, who had a knee-jerk reaction against it. Both tutors (MMTs and MT) and learners (ordinary teachers) tended to ignore or deny that the imposed hierarchy had created asymmetry among staff in the training process. This explains why strategies to redress imbalances both in the training of MMTs and of MTs emerged (we are among peers!) in order to re-establish the importance of horizontal participation. Another outcome was that some of the teachers selected in the first and second group opted for an exit strategy and abandoned their assigned role altogether. It was often the case that they were slow to acknowledge their competences were not sufficient to be an effective training tutor, compounded by the difficulty in assuming a “preminent” role among peers in the whole training experience.

Confrontation, negotiation, protest and divergences were all common practices in teachers’ strategies of mobilisation within the dominant policy framework (Pitzalis, 2016). In the same manner as is the case for practices of participation and commitment, demonstrating resistance can generate symbolic capital to be invested and exploited as a career furthering strategy. In short, teachers’ willingness to ‘play the game’ and to participate in the implementation of the policy was motivated by prospects of an economic return, symbolic gains and social recognition. Being forms of social and organizational capital, the latter two elements could be exploited in subsequent strategies and applied to different “strands” of their careers (professional, administrative or political).

Conclusions

Technological innovation in schools has created a sort of euphoria and optimism for the future and has brought about the political mobilization of social, institutional and organizational actors.

The fact that the new technological devices have revolutionised the classroom means we have a new set of social and technical implications to deal with. This poses specific problems for the researcher; principally because it calls for a greater attention to the redistribution of power and to the theme of social, economic and cultural domination.

The article underlines two key aspects:

1. the introduction of a “policy dispositif” has connected school actors to a vast network of actors and ties them to other related fields that operate according to different logics (primarily the political and bureaucratic fields);
2. It is a dispositif that has mobilised school actors around slogans and targets emanating from European institutions and adopted by national and regional ones. In reality this “adoption” does not instantly reproduce a perfect homology but is rather a process of translation taking place within institutional constraints, various systems of classification, hierarchies and against the backdrop of all the stakes involved in the fields of politics, administration and education.

From a micro-political perspective, teacher training is a decidedly interesting object of policy-making in the educational field.

Provided that policy actions can connect and draw the political-administrative fields together at European, National and Regional levels, they will consolidate connections between the three fields thus enabling all the school actors (principals, administrative staffs, students and their families), to become directly involved in a project that creates a tangible connection with the European Union, the State and the Region. Moreover, it engages all concerned in the policy action (in a political sense) and transforms them into policy actors and in certain cases into political actors as well, in cases where political or trade union mobilization is needed. Thus, policy implementation engenders and sparks the development of political commitment (e.g. either adhesion or opposition to a political action). Furthermore, the European Union itself becomes more concrete and “real” as a result of engagement, consensus to and reception of its vocabulary, goals and bureaucratic practices.

In this article, we have focussed on the mobilization of teachers as policy actors and we have used the notion of a policy actor to define those groups or individuals who contribute by their actions to the realization of a policy.

In other words, they help to convey and disseminate the meanings and concepts that define the policy and its moral and political objectives.

Persuading and engaging teachers throughout the policy process will lead them to adopt new pedagogical beliefs and combine this with political and moral adhesion. The expectations of change brought about by the training are the product of a social universe – that of teachers – characterized by a professional culture that is an amalgam of egalitarianism and individualism.

The teacher training project we have described above challenged the entrenched “peer culture” of teachers since it entailed creating a ranking system among teachers.

However, as long as the training project eventually challenges the prevailing academic and professional cultures (in different levels of education and subject areas), it will not be without effect. At least, it secures the mobilization of the actors, the engagement of activists in view of upcoming mobilizations and co-opts them into the administrative apparatus.

We have analysed elsewhere the impact of the introduction of ICT in classrooms and in the everyday life of the school as well as in teachers’ work and their social representations. We showed that when a “device” is introduced in the classroom it produces a performative effect even if it is not used at all by teachers, producing a socio-material reconfiguration of the class (De Feo & Pitzalis, 2014; Pitzalis, 2016; Pitzalis and De Feo, 2016; Pitzalis et al., 2016).

Finally, it is not the transformative effect of the policy with respect to the “educational” objectives that is crucial, but the effect of mobilization around policies, and its ability to create consensus and recruit activists. In this way, political and institutional actors (at European, national and regional levels) gain consensus as legitimate policy makers and actors.

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