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The Social Justice Education Approach: Towards a New Cultural Model of Education?

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Abstract: This article examines the importance of applying the social justice education approach to contemporary society. In order to achieve this, the starting point is the theoretical framing of the relationship between social justice and praxis; firstly, highlighting the need to place the human being at the centre of the reflections and then analysing some aspects of the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, who can be considered the forerunner of social justice education. Subsequently, the main theoretical references (known to date) and the application of the social justice education approach within the Italian educational system will then be recalled, analysing the sector policies adopted, also through the analysis of international documents issued by the European Union or other bodies such as UNESCO, in order to understand the forms and declinations this approach takes in Italy.

Keywords: Social justice, Praxis, Paulo Freire, Social justice education, Education

Social justice and *praxis*: the centrality of the human being

The crisis (not exclusively economic) that has worsened with the pandemic due to the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus since the end of 2019 has inexorably brought to the fore the need to bring back to the centre of world debates the conjugation between “freedom” and “social justice”, between individual and collective responsibilities (Mangone, 2021), and political responsibilities for overcoming inequalities that have widened their gaps. On the one hand, there is the recognition of the progress made by certain peoples in the struggle for freedom and social justice from modernity to contemporary times; while on the other, the need to develop theoretical proposals that can promote – through their practical application – greater degrees of freedom and social justice of communities and populations (Freire, 1994). This is due to the ideas and social transformations that have developed especially in countries that have sought and are seeking to attain their independence and sovereignty, as well as achieve individual freedoms and social justice, have generally not been adequately valued or have been relegated to the dormancy of humanity’s universal heritage. This entails redesigning a new political and economic order that places the human being at the centre – as already advocated by Maritain (1953) in the last century – through the guarantees of rights and equity (Sen, 2010) with the overcoming of the principle of equality that translates into: a) an equal distribution of resources among different groups (social, ethnic, etc.); b) equal access to resources regardless of the individual’s income; and finally, c) equal access opportunities for equal needs and requirements.

This state of crisis that, by now, seems perennial is no longer the exclusive subject of the natural disciplines or economics since it is configured as an inextricable tangle that, on the one hand, records a bad use of resources, and on the other, the representation of individual and collective well-being. Considering Freire as the main promoter of a theory of educational action aimed at a concrete implementation of social justice (what would later be called social justice education), educational action that takes on the meaning that was attributed to *praxis* by Arendt (1968), that of political action; it is inevitable in today’s society to refer to the capability approach (Sen, 1987; Nussbaum, 2011) understood as that approach to development that is oriented and based on individuals or rather on their capacities. This is because development is presented as the result of the aims, objectives and interactions that individuals experience with each other and with institutions within a well-defined social space (Martini, Picarella & Mangone, 2022). In this type of context, the well-being of the individuals becomes fundamental: “At the risk of oversimplification it can be said that the well-being aspect of a person is important in assessing a person’s *advantage*, whereas the agency aspect is

important in assessing what a person can do in line with his or her conception of *the good*. The ability to do more good need not be to the person's advantage" (Sen, 1985, p. 206). "Capabilities", therefore, as a political and moral space within which individuals and governments can act (social space), focusing on political principles that guarantee a minimum of social justice (Nussbaum, 2003). Both Sen and Nussbaum tend to hold individuals together with their living environments, reading this relationship not in the context of a "crisis of the human species", but rather a crisis concerning a number of elements and factors including "living together with others" in a form of solidarity and social justice (Nussbaum & Sen, 2004). The centrality of what surrounds human beings, or rather what surrounds the "relationship and socio-cultural phenomena" involving individuals, however, assumes substantial relevance for the exercise of an educational praxis (political action aimed at changing conditions).

All this points towards the need to return to the idea of putting man at the centre, following the fact that the scaffolding of the welfare state has come under severe attack from the neo-liberal parable (Žižek, 2020). The latter based on the "faith" in the free market's capacity for self-regulation have inspired a new public discourse that is strongly critical of the so-called "Keynesian" welfare state, accused of having produced an excess of egalitarianism and paternalism, even if characterised by cuts, cost containment and public spending downsizing. While during the ascendant phase of the parabola of neo-liberal ideas, these had a recognisable institutional impact, a new discourse on the importance of the "social, human and environmental dimension" has been initiated – both at the level of nations as well as at the supranational level – over the last ten years in particular. Social protection is no longer recognised merely as a cost, but also as a productive factor, not inspired solely by the criteria of conflict containment, but also and above all by those of inclusion and social justice, as some scholars (Gramsci, Maritain, Milani and Freire, to name but a few) with their theory of praxis, which, although presenting itself in different forms, had the common objective of promoting a society based on the centrality of the human being free from oppression.

Paulo Freire forerunner of social justice education

There is nothing neutral about education (Freire, 2005) – for it is transformed into action and thus into political action that aims at the reduction of oppression. For Freire, education is political. The latter's intent in the second half of the last century was to build an educational practice (praxis) that would allow the oppressed populations of Latin America to achieve freedom by overcoming what made a stagnant status quo of strong inequality be-

tween classes. Latin America was experiencing a historical moment similar to what Europe had experienced with the advent of totalitarianism (Nazism and Fascism), a situation that had led Gramsci to promote the overcoming of this condition by stating that “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (Gramsci, 1930, *Quaderno 3*, § 34). In designing his educational practice, Freire never neglects two principles: historicity and dialogue, both sides of the same coin. A coin that is represented by *praxis* (which could be understood precisely as a true philosophy of *praxis*) as a process of transformation of society that has as its reference the principles of social justice and liberation. For Freire, this process is valid both at the personal level (for a continuous process of change and growth, “*ser mais*” [to be more]) as well as at the community level (Mayo & Vittoria, 2017) since social justice and the elimination of structures of oppression can only be achieved through historically grounded collective work (past history that must teach us to look to the future while avoiding the same mistakes). For Freire, history – which is not deterministic – can teach human beings how to “be today” in order to design the future (tomorrow). For Freire, action and the world are an inseparable partnership even though for him action is only human when it goes beyond “doing” (mere execution), that is, when it poses the question of “what to do” (reflection). This gives rise to his pedagogy (education) of the oppressed (Freire, 2005), which later turns into the pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1994). A pedagogy that, by abandoning the selfish goals of the oppressors, becomes a “humanistic” and not “humanitarian” pedagogy because it puts man at the centre and becomes liberating for him. There are two salient moments in this educational practice: the first is when the oppressed read reality as it is, discovering the world of oppression and committing themselves to transforming it; the second is when, once the oppressive reality has been transformed, this educational practice no longer belongs to the oppressed, but to mankind. The big problem, for Freire, is how the oppressed (dual and inauthentic beings) who have internalised oppression can participate in the elaboration of an educational practice for their liberation. In reality, it is only when they discover the oppressor and their oppression that they will be able to contribute to the construction of this educational practice, which constitutes precisely the critical discovery: the condition of being oppressed and, therefore, of having oppressors (manifestation of the dehumanisation of the oppressed). Individuals must regain the critical capacity to question in order to overcome the historical model he defined as “‘banking’ concept of education” (Freire, 2005, p. 72), understood as the repository of knowledge. This model is not only dominant, but has also been reinforced by capitalism, pushing individuals into a profound crisis generated by the passive acceptance of a reality impoverished by the lack of interest in other points of view

and a future perspective. It is based simply on the accumulation of content and on a form of communication that is one-dimensional and unidirectional in a hierarchical line (from the educator who is judged to be knowledgeable, to the educationist who is judged to be ignorant). This model of the “Banking” vision of education must necessarily be contrasted with an educational praxis (*praxis*) that, on the other hand, is based on the concept of “authentic dialogue”, which constitutes the central node of a social and participatory educational vision. A dialogue between educationist and educating both of which are subjects of knowledge and the real context of concrete facts (lived social reality). In a dialogic cognitive process, the facts of the real or concrete context are analysed, “It involves a shift from the concrete context, which provides objective facts, to the theoretical context, where these facts are analysed in depth, back to the concrete context, where people experience new forms of praxis.” (Freire, 1990, p. 75). This does not mean, according to Freire, that the two roles (educationist/educating) should be confused or one of them abandoned. He makes a clear distinction between authoritarianism and authoritativeness: the former is an imposition of one’s authority without legitimacy and, often, intimidating the educating and placing them in a position of subalternity; the latter, on the other hand, is won through the educationist’s respect for knowledge and disciplinary skills, but also because the educator is open to listening and dialogue. As some scholars have argued, “Paulo Freire considers it equally important that the educator possesses a democratic disposition and thus is always ready to re-learn what he thinks he knows through the confrontation of his own ideas with those of the other members of the group, who may introduce a new perspective on the subject, a reflection of the culture that derives from their specific social location” (Mayo & Vittoria, 2017, p. 79). In this sense, it reminds us a lot of Lorenzo Milani and his social perspective of education. Both (Freire and don Milani) “they believe in freedom as a practice that emancipates subjects through their access to knowledge by means of a reflexive education, which activates, makes them participants; in short, they are standard-bearers of a republican, left-wing educational vision, which places its educational hopes in the broader framework of social transformation” (Lupi, 2021, p. 148). There is no doubt that a democratic educational praxis, as envisaged, can only be realised through an educational experience of a dialogical and critical nature, and certainly not through a “banking” educational praxis. In short, the educational process is not the simple act on the part of the educator of “filling” a container (educating), an action that does not involve any kind of transformation. It must produce transformation and the first transformation must be precisely the overcoming of the educationist/educating dualism,

Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to

the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans-deposits) in the name of liberation. Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. "Problem-posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness – *intentionality* - rejects communiques and embodies communication. It epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness: being *conscious of*, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself [...] (Freire, 2005, p. 79).

The alternative, according to Freire, is therefore constituted by an education that is critical, problematising and dialogical in which dialogue (identified with the word) becomes an existential need so much so as to define it as "dialogical cultural action" that must lead to the "cultural revolution" to form the society that is being reconstructed through the many "what to do" of humanity and not only through "doing". A cultural action at the service of liberation (change of the social structure) and not domination (permanence of the structure) that leads to liberation (Freire, 1998). Only with these processes of popular education, which lead to the "conscientization" [*conscientização*] (Freire, 1979), men overcome the status of "objects" (as oppressed) and assume the status of "subjects" of history. For the Brazilian scholar, therefore, education exercised as an educational practice for the liberation from oppression is a process of "conscientization" that consists of the development of a critical consciousness – on the part of the subject – of its relationship with the world. Learning to read and write is not, therefore, the simple acquisition of this ability but the opportunity to face the world in a problematic manner and, above all, to face reality without denying it by hiding behind superstitious or magical motivations that would not push individuals to "act" for their own liberation. The process of "conscientization" constitutes the passage from naive consciousness (claiming to know everything) to critical consciousness that allows for the discovery, the "unveiling" of the state of oppression and, therefore, the assumption of the awareness that this state must be changed without allowing oneself to give in to the despair of "not acting" (Freire, 1994). According to Freire, therefore, there is a need to educate men and women to the "possibility of hope", which becomes the priority task of all educators through serious and competent political analysis as well as criticism. Here a category of Freire's that has been little analysed and explored comes into play, "untested feasible" [*inédito viável*]. This has specific characteristics that allow the "limit situation" [*situação limite*] to be overcome, that is, the obstacles, the barriers that every

man and woman encounters in their personal and social lives: “the ‘untested feasible’ is an untested thing, an unprecedented thing, something not yet clearly known and experienced, but dreamed of. And when it becomes something ‘detached and perceived’ by those who think utopian wise, then they know that the problem is no longer the sheer seed of a dream. They know the dream can become reality” (Araújo Freire, 1994, p. 206). Freire, of course, does not pretend to think that education alone can transform society, but it certainly constitutes a fundamental process, so much so that it led him to write a work (his last) entitled *Pedagogia da autonomia* [Pedagogy of autonomy] (Freire, 1996) that constitutes a sort of testament/manual for educators on how they should carry out their role, which should not be limited - as he often emphatically affirmed - to the sterile transmission of knowledge, but should build a dialogue and critical awareness of the reality of the contexts in which those being educated live, also in the light of a society that is becoming increasingly globalised and founded on neo-liberal capitalism, and which requires the concrete implementation of processes aimed at social justice and, therefore, at reducing inequalities.

Theoretical framework of social justice education

Education therefore plays an important role in the formation of people and the realisation of society. Through education, it is possible to build and generate a society because it constitutes its element of social reproduction and transmission of culture (Connel, 2019). Through educational processes, each person expresses himself and makes use of his abilities, and at the same time builds and refines them. The person as subject is also placed at the centre of the analysis of forms of education by Touraine (1997), who renounces the idea of education for society.

In the UNESCO report, edited by Delors (1999), it is stated that education is a social practice that aims at the improvement of society and that is why attention to this socio-cultural process is necessary. Education and its declination in the school environment, therefore, aims to provide knowledge (to all subjects) and a social language (Touraine, 1997), transmitting the keys to understanding the mechanisms they may experience. In other words, “The culture content of teaching and learning, that it is to say, is embedded in a dynamic social process” (Connel, 2019, p. 136). Keys that are useful to the individual but also to the social system itself, through the development of the individual’s skills. It is possible to state, therefore, that the development of an individual’s personality is the result of the consolidation of personal autonomy and care for others and their attitudes. If education is aimed at the individual and his or her abilities, educational institutions must modify their established systems by projecting educational processes towards the

individual on the basis of three principles (Touraine, 1997): the first principle is to form and strengthen the freedom of the subject, here the reference goes to Freire's (1979) concept of "conscientization" that fosters the development of a critical conscience; the second is the transition to an education that recognises and attaches central importance to diversity (historical and cultural), along with the recognition of the other. It calls for the overcoming of established educational models, those same models that Freire (2005) had defined as a "banking" concept of education; the third, finally, is the necessary correction of the inequality of conditions and opportunities.

Three principles that recognise a process of democratisation of education by working on the individual so that a democratic process and social justice in society can be concretely realised. According to the UNESCO report (Delors, 1999), on the other hand, there are four important pillars that must be considered for an educational process that can effectively achieve the objectives of democracy and justice highlighted above: a) learning to know; b) learning to do; c) learning to live together and with others; d) and, finally, learning to be. These concepts identified and specified by UNESCO recognise not only the learning needs that each individual must be able to see fulfilled, but above all they indicate inviolable universal rights. Aspects that address both the educational process as a process of the development of society and as a process of the development and growth of the individual, concretely representing the application of the principles of social justice such as freedom and equity. A social justice that takes into account the individual and his needs, as well as his rights, as individuals become aware that every condition can be changed for the better if they do not give in to the despair of "not acting" (Freire, 1994) and rely on the "possibility of hope".

A social justice that, as Rawls (1971) also stated, empowers all the main goods of society to be made available to all subjects by satisfying the needs of all, thus making subjects free and conscious. An "idea of all" that contains within itself the recognition of those on the margins. Education is, therefore, a good that must also be subject to redistribution like all other resources, and at the same time it is a process that makes the subject free to be able to express him/herself with the capabilities he/she develops. A process that takes place through the recognition of the merit of each subject, thus breaking down any form of inequality within the educational institutions. Generating well-being for the individual by granting the same opportunities to those who would not be able to access certain goods and services (equal opportunities for all individuals). A social well-being both through the subjects' awareness of their own capabilities as well as through the recognition of the other. Dynamics inherent in social justice processes and which also characterise the so-called *social justice education approach*. If the educational process can be likened to a process of *human educability* (Alessandrini, 2014),

which has as its aim the establishment of empowerment processes such as to allow everyone (no one excluded), according to their needs, to acquire competences and above all awareness of their capabilities (for the capability approach see the previous sections), this is the expression of a social justice education. The recognition of the identity of the subjects and the expression of the manifestation of their capabilities are for the educational processes the depiction of social justice dynamics. It can also be said that social justice education is simultaneously a social, pedagogical and political approach (Gramsci, 1930; Baldacci, 2019; Minello, 2014) of a nation. Education as a political manifestation of a country based on the recognition of rights.

Educational institutions can be a great engine for social development since they can bring about a just equity, aimed not only at a social distribution of knowledge (Schütz, 1946) but also at the growth of knowledge as non-unique (knowledge is multiple) and, above all, as the growth of the cultural and social capital of a community.

Cochran-Smith affirms that it is relevant and necessary to apply within the processes of education the objectives set forth by social justice approaches (Cochran-Smith, 2020; Cochran-Smith et al., 2012) that can be summarised as follows: equity in learning opportunities; respect for all social groups; recognition of the issues involved in social justice. A process that requires a general reconsideration of the concept of education itself, which can no longer only be considered pure training but also as a social process that does not directly form behaviour, attitudes or values, but skills for social practice (Connell, 1995) – the *praxis* discussed in the previous pages. According to Connell (2019), there can be three characteristics of the capacity-building process that are relevant for declining the concept of social justice in education. The first, that he considers as fundamental, is the relationship between individual and society as a fully social action and practice; a relationship that already begins in the relationship between educationist and educating – Freire's (1990) concept of “authentic dialogue” – since only in the educational process and in the school is this relational exchange between individual subject and collectivity possible, which allows for the growth and development of one's capacities that will enable the subject to live in society. The second is its historical specificity, i.e., the historical evolutionary process of the concept of education itself and its relationship with the outside world. The third and last is the existence of different dynamics in the formation of capacities that also result in different consequences depending on the social system and the type of social relations and dynamics that individuals experience.

The very idea of social justice may be common to all social organisations but must be applied and introduced differently in response to the context: “Just social relations involve mutual responsibility” (Connell, 2019, p. 136).

There are several elements that have characterised the concept of social justice over the years, and particularly in recent decades those that seem to be taking shape most are the following: the possibility of recognition of social rights for all individuals and the confirmation of the aspects identified as constituting the concept of equity: poverty, gender, ethnicity, disability, rurality, sexuality, migrant status.

The term social justice education, therefore, means a process aimed at recognizing the social value of people's ability to exist and their social life. The mechanisms of fair social equity must be adopted by social policies in order to guarantee an equity based on the recognition of the social value of the subjects and not exclusively on their ability to contribute of an economic nature. The humanistic and egalitarian vision of justice is recognized as already clarified by Rawls (1971): "In justice as fairness society is interpreted as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage" (pp. 73-74). An advantage that can be observed within the social dynamics declined by education. The school is the first place where social relationships of reciprocity take shape and it is in the educational processes that they are realized and strengthened. The school, through the educational processes, must guarantee each subject the right to be able to understand their abilities and feel free not only to acquire them but also to be able to use them in the social system: according to a principle of equity and social recognition.

The social justice education approach, therefore, can be observed and examined in the political plans of the states, in the school and ministerial projects as well as in the structural actions promoted by the governments which also show the commitment and the close relationship between government policies and education. The role of the institutions is to guarantee a mechanism of social justice aimed at equity and the reduction of social inequalities (Sen, 2010), in order to be able to develop policies oriented towards freedom, the development and implementation of capabilities, the happiness, satisfaction of needs and well-being.

The application of social justice education in Italy

Education, as noted in the previous paragraphs, is a social process that concerns both the individual and the social system. Regarding the declinations of social justice education in Italy, it can be analyzed as dynamic and political through the analysis of two orders of issues, namely as an educational approach or as a teaching/learning process. The former sees social justice education in school as a sort of political-cultural application as well as an educational approach in itself, while for the latter, social justice education is a form of the teaching process (cultural proposal). A subdivision

that is found both at the level of the social system as well as at the level of repercussions for individuals within the social system itself.

In Italy, starting from the analysis of the first aspect, it is possible to observe the construction of an educational system based on the political decisions of a normative nature: the constitutional charter, in the first place, and the various reforms of the education and training system. Starting from the primary source which is represented by the Constitution (promulgated in 1948), it can be observed that article 34 reads as follows: “Schools are open to everyone. Primary education, which is imparted for at least eight years, is compulsory and free. Capable and deserving pupils, including those without adequate finances, have the right to attain the highest levels of education. The Republic renders this right effective through scholarships, allowances to families and other benefits, which shall be assigned through competitive examinations” (Costituzione Italiana, Art. 34). A first political recognition in which education is for everyone, guaranteeing it even to those who cannot afford it, thus recognizing the right to study also as an element for inclusion and integration (socialization and a tool for social mobility). Despite this general openness until the 1970s, in Italy, but also in the rest of Europe, there are, in addition to the subdivision of school classes distinct for boys and girls, differential classes both for differences in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979; 1980) for both physical and social condition. The elimination of differential classes, which took place in Italy with the law n. 517 of 1977 (Regulations on the assessment of pupils and on the abolition of remedial exams as well as other regulations modifying the school system), showed the first form of democracy by opening educational paths to socialization without differences, to the exchange and recognition of diversity and inequalities. Subsequently providing with the law n. 104 of 1992 (Framework law for assistance, social integration and the rights of disabled people) the creation of specific projects for the care and development of the different capacities of individuals. At the same time, homogeneous classes are observed as a condition in which the subjects live in interaction sharing cultural processes, while also assimilating the same education and culture. These are the first forms of the recognition of rights and equity, at the basis of social justice education, which Cochran-Smith (2010) calls *recognition*, i.e. the “recognition of everyone”, including those who were potentially marginalized within the education process and socialisation. Other measures have followed in this direction. On the one hand, we recall the implementation of the 2003 reform of the education and training system¹ which provides for Personalized Study Plans (PSP)

¹ The reference is to Law n. 53 of 28 March 2003, “Delega al Governo per la definizione delle norme generali sull’istruzione e dei livelli essenziali delle prestazioni in materia di istruzione e formazione professionale” [Delegation to the Government for the definition of the general rules on education and the essential levels of services in the field of education and

with the aim of preparing educational paths that the school builds for each student starting from the planning of the lesson both through the different learning units and with tests of diversified skills; on the other, the formal recognition in 2012 of Special Educational Needs (SEN) with the ministerial directive “Intervention tools for pupils with Special Educational Needs and territorial organization for school inclusion”. The latter reform provides for study plans applied on the basis of the specific discomfort² of the pupil: the idea is to allow for a fair education for all with the use of different tools. For each of the macro disadvantaged groups identified, a specific study plan is prepared which has the purpose of providing the proposed training and educational path in a different way. The proposed educational process is based on the inclusion and recognition of subjects (with different abilities) within the same community through a change in the way of doing education (Bocci, 2012; 2013). This means being able to guarantee everyone’s right to feel free to be themselves, understanding and demonstrating their capabilities regardless of the starting point. This can be seen also in a concrete way as well as a structural action of the state “school in prison” or school in the social security institutions, and in the *Centri provinciali per l’Istruzione degli Adulti* (CPIA)³ [Provincial Centers for Adult Education]. The “school in prison” can be recognized as the first example of a form of application of the right to education and education for all for the purpose of reintegration into the social system⁴. Adult education, on the other hand, as stated on the Ministry’s website, is promoted by the CPIAs which are a type of autonomous school institution with its own staff, teaching and organizational set-up and constitute a structural intervention by the State towards inclusion, the socio-linguistic integration and requalification of some categories of citizens (Bothes, De Angelis & Pedrana, 2021). They are a way of doing education that aims at the social inclusion of adults, women as well as those who live more on the margins of society (NEETs, women and migrants) precisely because they offer the possibility to create and bring out skills.

vocational training].

² The SEN were divided into three main groups of discomfort: a) specific developmental disorders (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography, dyscalculia and attention deficit); b) disabilities; c) disorders related to socio-economic, linguistic, cultural factors.

³ The centres were established by Decree of the President of the Republic n. 263 of 29 October 2012, “Regolamento recante norme generali per la ridefinizione dell’assetto organizzativo didattico dei Centri d’istruzione per gli adulti, ivi compresi i corsi serali” [Regulation containing general rules for the redefinition of the didactic organizational set-up of adult education centres, including evening courses].

⁴ This political direction emerged at the Conference “Pathways to Inclusion - Strengthening European cooperation in Prison Education and training” organised by the European Prison Education Association (EPEA) was held between 22 and 24 February 2010 in Budapest (Hungary).

These are two actions that can be the expression of the social justice education approach in which there is the possibility to provide subjects with freedom through education (exercising of the right to education also for marginalized subjects). On the other hand, we must not forget that the White Paper on education and training (European Commission, 1995) highlights the fact that the valorisation of human resources increases global competitiveness and safeguards individuals' expectations of social achievement.

Two last structural examples of how, through a process of educational equity, the continuity of a right is guaranteed but also the continuity of the person with his capabilities (Lanzetti, Ricci & Piscozzo, 2012), are the "school in hospital" and "home schooling". Two educational paths which take the form of school structures but which are external to the school even though they are recognized by the Ministry of reference of the Italian government⁵ which place the subject at the centre of the system as part of it.

At the international level, with the dissemination of the objectives of the UN Agenda for sustainable development since 2015, educational processes have assumed an even greater role in the recognition of human rights (UN, 2015) which aim at social responsibility, freedom (of expression, of speech, of the press, of association/organisation), to social justice, to the values/principles of democracy. The objectives of the agenda are aimed precisely at a change of educational paradigm by 2030, recalling a long-term vision, with respect to different themes.

In the European Union, on the other hand, the Global Education Network in Europe (GENE) is a network of ministries, agencies and other national bodies responsible for the support, funding and policy-making in the field of global education, which involves the establishment of a new European Declaration on global education by 2050. A Declaration that aims to introduce issues such as international solidarity, human rights, sustainability, peace and even social justice into education. The European Union, starting from the concept that school is the first place where one learns to create, accept and modify a common code (ASVIS, 2022), also considers it the first place where issues such as social justice can be internalized and learned as a new cultural approach.

Returning to today's Italy and to the second order of questions (social justice education as a teaching/learning process), there are no specific educational projects that only contemplate social justice but there are various

⁵ The school in hospital is recognized by two ministerial circulars (Circular n. 345 of 12 January 1986, "Scuole elementari statali funzionanti presso i presidi sanitari" [Elementary state schools operating at health facilities] and Circular n. 353 of 7 August 1998, "Il servizio scolastico nelle strutture ospedaliere" [The school service in hospital structures]), but both (hospital schooling and home schooling) are recognized as a right by Law no. 285 of 1997, "Disposizioni per la promozione di diritti e di opportunità per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza" [Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities for childhood and adolescence].

projects oriented towards the application of Goal 4 of sustainable development (Quality education) which includes specific targets on social justice, social equity, recognition of the rights to education. Specifically, target 4.7 includes in the Educational global citizenship (EGC) the objective that all students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote the sustainable development through, education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

In the Italian school programs proposed in recent years, some of these guidelines are put into practice in a differentiated way both at national and regional levels. Global citizenship projects, for example, aim to recognize everyone's rights, social inclusion based on social belonging and solidarity. A final example of this model is shown at the regional level by the CPIA of Prato and the Tuscany Region which, through the issue of a Global Citizenship license, seek to educate the population to knowledge and awareness of their abilities, their social role, of the other, as well as to become aware of the concepts of solidarity, equity, social well-being and social justice.

These projects (recognised by the Ministry), very often differentiated for each level of school, have introduced new models and educational processes aimed at a re-appropriation of human rights and one's freedom in being able to be, have and build oneself as a person and citizen.

Conclusion

These educational projects that refer to social justice education, in their implementation, do nothing but favour the process of "conscientization" – repeatedly referred to by Freire (1979) – as well as the construction of a critical conscience that allows to acquire awareness of one's own abilities. These educational projects allow for a change of cultural paradigm for both educators and pupils (CEU, 2008) by favouring that "dialogical cultural action" which according to Freire (1990; 2005) should have led to a real "revolution cultural" capable of building a society through the many "what to do" of humanity and not only through "doing". With a concrete implementation of the social justice education approach, it is possible to trigger educational dynamics that recognize not only the centrality of the subject (with his diversity and abilities) and his identity (Banks, 2008; 2009), but also lead to the formation of aware citizens of one's own abilities as well as the value of the other.

In Italy, as seen above, the application of this approach is aimed at pursuing the directives of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development with the main objective of promoting active global citizens aware of their own abili-

ties but also ready to understand and recognize the other with different capabilities. The universal right to education in Italy can also be read through the key of social justice education especially for the aspects concerning the inclusion of subjects possessing different abilities (capabilities) regardless of their physical, social and cultural condition.

Although the reference to social justice education is not made explicit in the Italian ministerial documents, its concrete application can be found in the principles of inclusion and social recognition which characterize any interventions of an educational nature, promoting the construction of actions of equity, equality and recognition of those with different abilities. On the other hand, Aaron Sachs (1995) states that for adequate human development it is necessary to start taking into consideration the application of two fundamental principles: equality and equity. In this way, we recognize the social value of people's existence and of their living in society by affirming their abilities. The interpretation of the very concept of social justice presupposes the responsibility of the State in guaranteeing citizens policies that aim to provide for preservation and social co-responsibility: policies aimed at equity, the distribution of resources, the guarantee of opportunities (Solomone, 2019; Nussbaum, 2001). In other words, and in the generality of geographical territorial conditions, a social and educational change oriented towards social justice is envisaged which observes the awareness of the social value of all subjects.

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