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EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY

5-8 June 2019 Cagliari Italy

VOLUME I

Politics, Citizenship, Diversity and Inclusion

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***Title* Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" - Education and Post-Democracy
VOLUME I Politics, Citizenship, Diversity and Inclusion**

This volume contains papers presented in the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place at the University of Cagliari on 5-8 June 2019. The aim of the Conference was to bring together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate the concepts of "education" in a "post-democracy" era, the latter being a set of conditions under which scholars are called to face and counteract new forms of authoritarian democracy.

Populisms, racisms, discriminations and nationalisms have burst and spread on the international scene, translated and mobilized by sovereigntist political movements. Nourished by neo-liberalism and inflated by technocratic systems of governance these regressive forms of post-democracy are shaping historical challenges to the realms of education and culture: it is on this ground, and not only on the political and economic spheres, that decisive issues are at stake. These challenges are both tangible and intangible, and call into question the modern ideas of justice, equality and democracy, throughout four key dimensions of the educational function, all of which intersected by antinomies and uncertainties: ethical-political socialization, differences, inclusion, innovation.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and interdisciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners' mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for

debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 600 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on researches, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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Premise

In the European space of liberal democracies, the post-economic crisis era has seen the appearance of populist movements, sometimes anti-democratic (to the extent that they deny citizenship rights, ethical-cultural differences, individual life choices), sometimes anti-scientific and anti-modernist. Those phenomena may erode democratic values and make the pluralistic context slip into the risky and ambiguous territories of post-democracy.

The democratization of basic and higher education stands as a solid defence against populist tendencies. Ethical-political socialization, acquisition and development of civic, social, citizenship and character skills may be a precious resource to hold democratic life on together. Democratic life, political participation and active citizenship needs to be rearticulated, reshaped and reinforced as fundamental educational pivots in our overchanging societies.

Throughout the world, there have been continuous attempts to reform education at all levels. With different causes that are deeply rooted in history, society, and culture, inequalities are difficult to eradicate. Nonetheless, although difficult, education is vital to society's movement forward. It should promote citizenship, identity, equality of opportunity and social inclusion, social cohesion as well as economic growth and employment. Unequal educational outcomes are attributed to several variables, including family of origin, gender, and social class. Achievement, earnings, health status, and political participation also contribute to educational inequality within Western countries as well as or deeper within other world countries. Diversity applies to a number of aspects of student identity, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, and political and religious beliefs. Even if there are no official educational policies aiming at reproducing inequalities, teaching and learning practices are still unable to protect diversity and be effectively inclusive of student identities. This would imply giving thought to the attitudes, beliefs and expectations of students as individuals, and considering how these influences their approaches to learning and their interactions with teachers and with peers in the design of curricula, in the translation of curricula into day-to-day teaching and learning, and in the assessment of learning. Therefore, inequalities in educational opportunity, in educational access, in educational attainments are still the main dilemma nowadays. Several and differentiated tracks of research and conversation are packed into this stream in order to face the multidimensional dynamics of inclusion, integration, equal opportunities a diversity valorisation in both the educational spaces and knowledge society at large.

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Divided We Stand? Immigrants' and Natives' Decision-Making Processes at First Tracking in Italy

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Keywords: *Children of immigrants, Educational choices, Tracking, School context, Aspirations*

Introduction and state of the art

Students from similar social backgrounds tend to attend similar schools. While this pattern is common to many industrialized countries, the degree of school segregation is positively associated with the institutional practice of tracking (Blossfeld et al., 2016). Tracking consists of sorting students into different types of education according to their purported aptitudes and interests. It is especially when tracking takes place between different school buildings, as it is commonly the case in Europe, that school social segregation is higher (Chmielewski, 2014).

Indeed, the influence of socio-economic status (SES) on track placement is an established finding of educational research (Brunello and Checchi, 2007; Blossfeld et al., 2016). Following Boudon (1974), SES effects on educational transitions, including track placement, are often understood as partly mediated by school performance (primary effects) and partly operating independently of it (secondary effects). The latter are intuitively more disturbing because they concern students with a similar record of school performance (hence, presumably, a similar academic potential) who are either held back or pushed forward by their family origin. Secondary effects are stronger in educational systems where tracking allocation allows more room for free choice (Contini, Scagni, 2011; Dollmann, 2016). This is in line with the theoretical argument that, *ceteris paribus*, low-SES students and their families tend to make less ambitious choices than their high-SES counterparts because of relative risk aversion and imperfect information on the costs and the difficulty of prolonged schooling (Breen, Goldthorpe, 1997).

When it comes to migration background, the implications of tracking are less straightforward. On the one hand, research has shown important «ethnic penalties» in educational achievement all over Europe (Heath, 2008; Borgna, 2017). Immigrant students generally perform quite poorly in school compared to native students; this is partly due to their less favorable socio-economic conditions, but not completely, as they also face an additional disadvantage specific to their migration status.

At the same time, however, several studies have found that children of immigrants tend to have higher educational aspirations and to make more ambitious track choices than comparable natives (e.g. Brinbaum, Cebolla Boado, 2007; Van de Werfhorst, Van Tubergen, 2007). In other words, once accounting for compositional differences in terms of SES and previous achievement, secondary effects seem to work to the advantage, and not to the disadvantage, of immigrants (Jackson et al., 2012; Dollmann, 2016). The higher educational aspirations of second-generation immigrants could reflect the upward social mobility ambitions of their parents (Kao and Tienda, 1995) or be due to a poor

knowledge of the destination country's educational system (Kao and Tienda, 1998).

In Italy, the role of migratory background for track placement has been investigated by a few studies: immigrant students appear generally overrepresented in technical and vocational tracks, even net of SES and school performance differentials (Barban, White, 2011; Contini, Azzolini, 2015). The Italian case might therefore be an exception to the pattern of positive secondary effects documented in other European countries with a longer history of immigration. However, these studies are based on data from the 2000s: since then, the immigrant student population has undergone major changes: in 20 years, students with foreign nationality went from 0.7% to 9.4% of the student population and today more than 60% of them are second-generation immigrants (MIUR, 2018). Against this background, the current paper addresses two related research questions: firstly, we ask whether secondary effects are (still) negative for immigrant students in Italy. Secondly, we explore the role of school guidance in the educational decision-making of immigrant and native students. Previous research has indeed shown that in Italy teacher recommendations, although not binding, suffer from a significant social bias and contribute to reinforce SES secondary effects (Argentin et al., 2017).

1. Data and methods

To address our research questions, we focus on a case study of relatively 'mature' settlement: our empirical analyses are based on a rich administrative dataset on the population of eight-graders of Turin during the school year 2017/18 (N=7,180). Data access was made possible thanks to a cooperation agreement with the City of Turin and its school-guidance service (*COSP*). This service involves the vast majority (60/61) of public and private lower-secondary schools. Students take the test in the spring of seventh grade or in the fall of eight grade, during school hours. Shortly after, they receive a track recommendation jointly elaborated by the school guidance professionals and teachers. The dataset is collected as part of this process and contains students' expressed track intention and track recommendation. It also contains information on students' background (including gender, nationality, parental education and occupation), school performance (grade repetition and self-assessed school grades), occupational aspirations, and test scores on five areas of cognition and motivational aspects.

By merging this dataset with school administrative records, we linked the track intention that students express before the test to the recommendation they receive after it and to the actual choice they make in the winter of eight grade.

Unfortunately, the data does not contain the place of birth of students or their parents, so we cannot directly distinguish first- and second-generation immigrants. As a second best, we classify foreign-national students who score below the tenth percentile in the linguistic test as newly arrived first-generation immigrants. We consider those who score above the tenth percentile as second-generation immigrants or first-generation immigrants who arrived during childhood (generation 1.75)⁶.

Our main independent variable combines migratory status and cultural capital: we define categories based on nationality and generational status and on whether at least one parent attained a tertiary degree. In our main analyses, we

⁶ It should be noted that students self-assess their nationality, so some second-generation immigrants – possibly the ones who feel more integrated – could assess themselves as Italian.

retain only the categories with sufficient sample sizes: high-cultural-capital natives (ITA-Hi), low-cultural-capital natives (ITA-Low), low-cultural-capital second-generation immigrants (G2-Low), and low-cultural-capital first-generation immigrants (G1-Low).

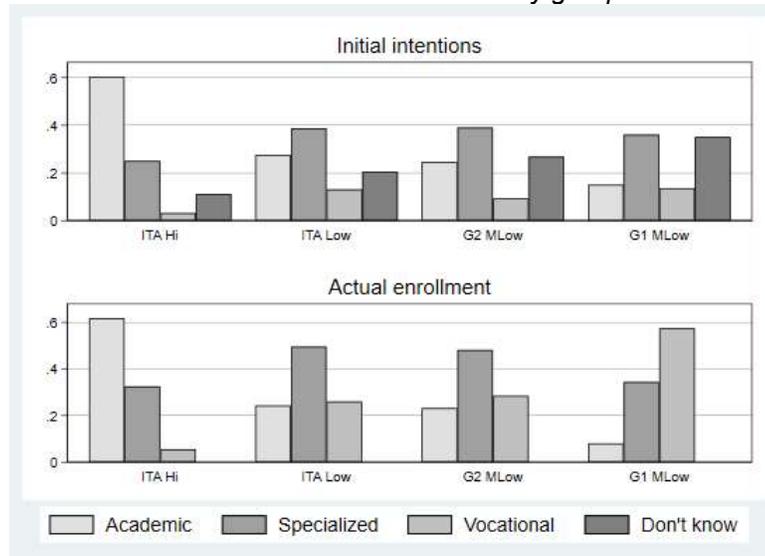
Our main dependent variable is track choice, which we operationalize as an ordinal variable with four categories: academic (traditional lyceums), specialized (other lyceums and technical schools), vocational schools, and vocational training programs. This categorization is based on the prestige generally assigned to the different tracks and the chances they open in terms of access to university and labor-market integration. After some basic descriptive analyses, we run logistic models on the probability to choose a non-vocational track for the four main groups. Our models control for gender, parental occupation, cognitive test scores, grade repetition, grade point average (GPA), and lower-secondary-school-fixed-effects. We present results as predicted probabilities for reasonable student profiles.

A second step of analyses delves deeper into the educational decision-making process: firstly, we model track intentions, operationalized following the same logic of track choice. Secondly, we model the probability of receiving a downward recommendation with respect to the expressed track intention. Thirdly, we model the probability to comply with such (non-binding) downward recommendation.

3. Results

Our first descriptive analyses (Figure 1) compare initial track intentions with the eventual track choices by group: at the moment of the test, a significant proportion of students still do not know where to enrol: indecision is quite high among non-privileged Italian natives, and even higher among second- and first-generation immigrants.

FIGURE 1. *Track intentions and choices by group*



Source: authors' elaboration from COSP and school-record data.

By comparing the two distributions, we notice a cooling down of aspirations for all groups except for the ITA-Hi, especially marked for first-generation

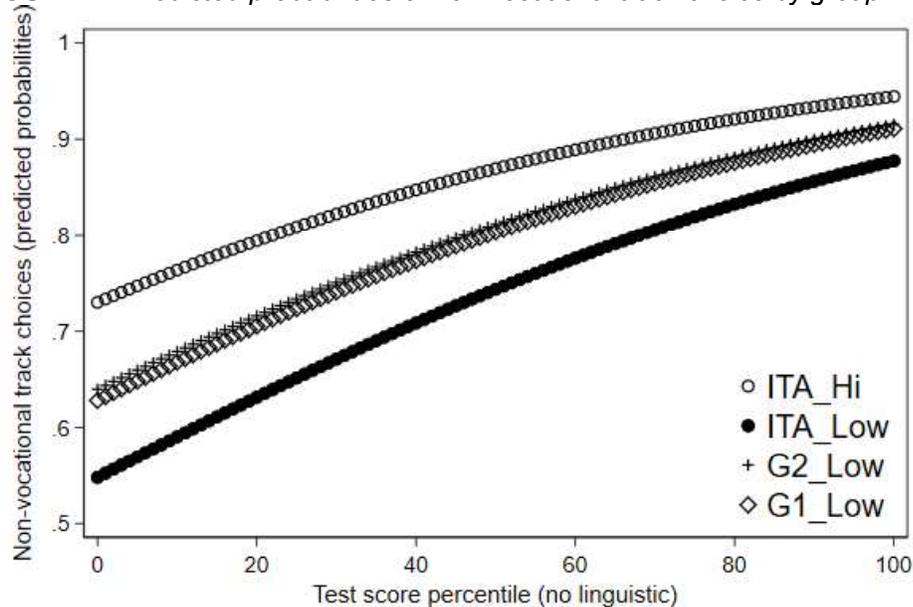
students. The pattern of intentions and choices of natives and second-generation immigrants with an equally low level of cultural capital is remarkably similar.

Additional descriptive analyses reveal that first- and second-generation immigrants with high cultural capital are somehow more ambitious than those with low cultural capital. However, in line with previous research (e.g. Leopold and Shavit, 2013; Borgna and Contini, 2014) parental education seems to make less of a difference for immigrant students than it does for natives. In terms of test scores (excluding the linguistic component), the G2, irrespective of their cultural capital level, perform similarly to the ITA-Low, while the G1 score extremely low.

2.1. Are secondary effects still negative for immigrant students?

To address our first research question, of whether immigrant students (still) make less ambitious track choices than similar natives, we move to a multivariate framework. Figure 2 displays the predicted probabilities of enrolling in a non-vocational track (either academic or specialized) for our four groups by different test score levels. The probabilities refer to male⁷ students who come from low-SES families and have an average school performance record (GPA=7/10, no grade repetition). The model includes lower-secondary-school-fixed-effects, because we found evidence for very large school effects.

FIGURE 2. Predicted probabilities of non-vocational track choice by group



Source: authors' elaboration from COSP and school-record data.

Our analyses show that immigrants make *more* ambitious track choices than comparable natives. More precisely, net of compositional differences (in terms of social class and prior achievement) both G1-low and G2-low are less prone than ITA-High, but more than ITA-Low to opt for a non-vocational track. The differential with ITA-Low is not statistically significant for first-generation immigrants, possibly due to the small sample size of this group (N=205).

In contrast to what found by previous studies on Italy, but in line with the international literature, we therefore find evidence for *positive* secondary effects for immigrant students, at least of second generation.

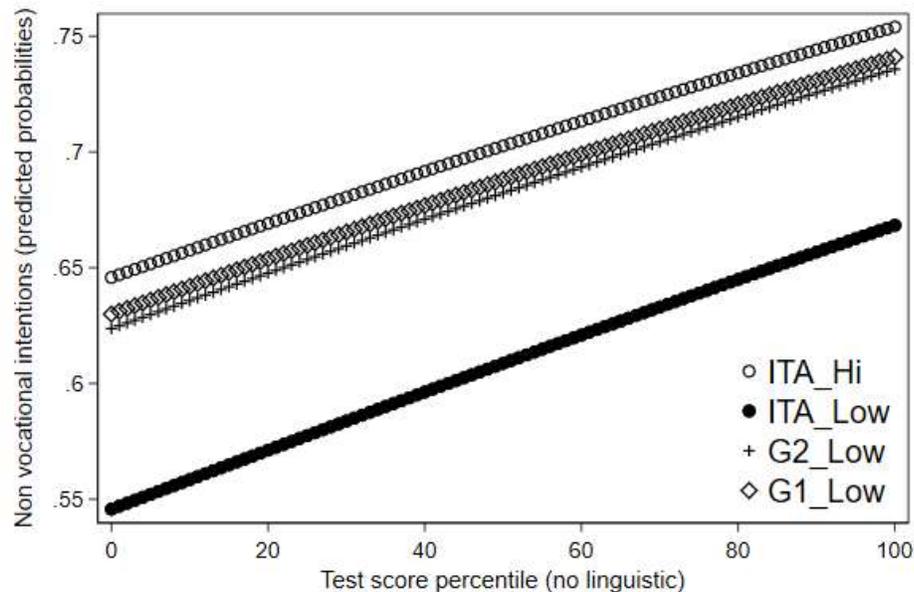
⁷ The pattern is the same for female students.

2.2. What role for school guidance?

Our second research question concerns the role of school guidance and in particular how track recommendations intervene in the transformation of the initial intention into the actual track choice, which – as seen above – appears to be a cooling-down process for all groups except for the ITA-High.

As a first step, we analyze initial intentions to seize between-group differentials net of confounding factors. Figure 3 displays the predicted probabilities to state a preference for an academic or specialized track, as opposed to a vocational track or stating no preference.

FIGURE 3. Predicted probabilities of non-vocational track intention by group



Source: authors' elaboration from COSP data.

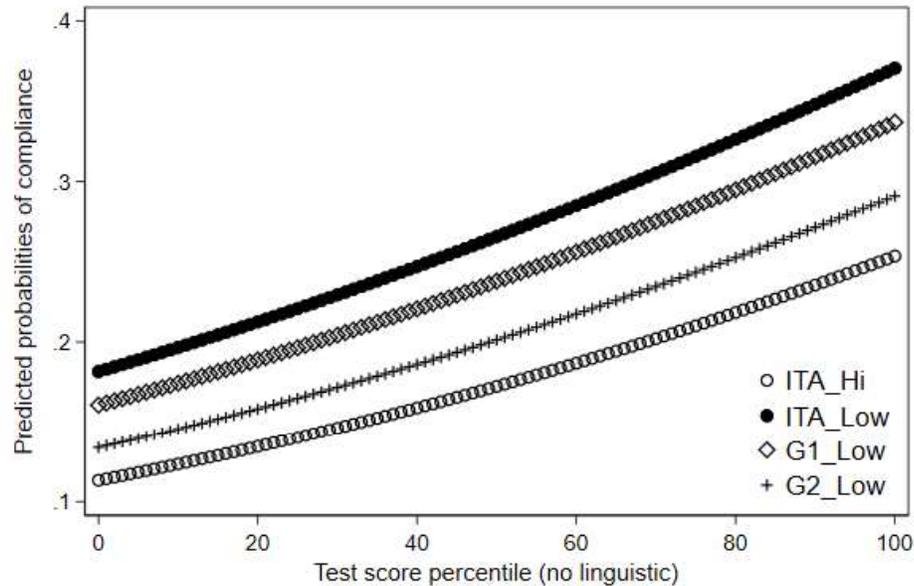
It is evident that immigrant students start off as far more ambitious than natives: net of compositional differences, both G1-Low and G2-Low do not differ significantly from ITA-High. This pattern could reflect higher educational and occupational aspirations, but also a lack of information on the Italian school system (Kao, Tienda, 1995, 1998). Either way, the divide between immigrant and native students of low cultural capital is higher in the initial intentions than in the actual choices. It is therefore sensible to investigate whether school guidance might divert immigrant students away from their initially higher aspirations.

Based on our analyses on track recommendations (not shown here), we are able to characterize Turin school guidance system as overall restraining, but subject to little or inexistent bias. G2n students are slightly more likely to receive a recommendation lower than the initial intentions but, given that the latter are very ambitious, for this group there is clearly more room for downward guidance.

The relatively unbiased nature of school guidance does not rule out the possibility that some groups are diverted away from their initial intentions. Our last set of analyses investigates this possibility by modelling the compliance with a downward recommendation. ITA-High have a very low likelihood to follow a downward recommendation, while ITA-Low are much more likely to comply; G2 display an intermediate pattern (Figure 4). This lower compliance could be a

sign of resilient ambitions but could also reflect a lack of trust in the school institution.

FIGURE 4. *Predicted probabilities to follow a downward recommendation*



Source: authors' elaboration from COSP and school-record data.

Conclusions and outlook

To sum up, we find large gaps between high- and low-cultural-capital natives in terms of initial intentions and actual choices. In contrast, among low-cultural-capital students, natives and second-generation immigrants are descriptively very similar. Once accounting for compositional differences, especially in terms of previous achievement, secondary effects to the disadvantage of lower-cultural capital natives persist, while second-generation immigrants stand out as highly ambitious, in line with the international literature (e.g. Brinbaum and Ce-bolla Boado, 2007; Jackson et al., 2012). Our next step of analysis will explore the role of occupational aspirations to explain these differentials. Interestingly, between-group differences do not seem to result from biased school guidance, but rather from different compliance behaviors with respect to the (non-binding) recommendations. This is in contrast with previous findings on teacher-assigned recommendations (Argentin et al., 2017) and warrants future research on the role of professional guidance to reduce inequality.

Finally, future research should investigate whether the ambitious choices taken by immigrant students place them in a more precarious situation in terms of school failure and dropout, or whether, in contrast, their higher aspirations are able to protect them from such risks.

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