



**Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference
of the Journal Scuola Democratica**

REINVENTING EDUCATION

2-5 June 2021

VOLUME I

Citizenship, Work and The Global Age

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

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**Citizenship, Work and The
Global Age**

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***Title* Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” – Reinventing Education
VOLUME I Citizenship, Work and The Global Age**

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

The challenges posed by the contemporary world have long required a rethinking of educational concepts, policies and practices. The question about education ‘for what’ as well as ‘how’ and ‘for whom’ has become unavoidable and yet it largely remained elusive due to a tenacious attachment to the ideas and routines of the past which are now far off the radical transformations required of educational systems. Scenarios, reflections and practices fostering the possibility of change towards the reinvention of the educational field as a driver of more general and global changes have been centerstage topics at the Conference. Multidisciplinary approach from experts from different disciplinary communities, including sociology, pedagogy, psychology, economics, architecture, political science has brought together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate constraints and opportunities for reinventing education.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and 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 800 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on research, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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Citizenship, Work and The Global Age

A Premise

What is education for? This philosophical question cannot be answered ignoring contributions from social and educational sciences. The growing focus on learning outcomes should have prompted discussion on the values and aims in defining policy objectives and developing accountability systems and evidence-based approaches. Whereas for years public discourse on education has most frequently been confined to a merely sector-based perspective, without addressing the relationship (i.e., interdependency and/or autonomy) with globalised societies or to face the new challenges of contemporary's world. The relationship between education and society and the issue of aims can be observed in a new context which has seen the weakening of the society-nation equation and the strengthening of global dimensions.

The crisis born of the pandemic is more and more global and multidimensional. It inevitably obliges to ask what the post-pandemic socio-economic scenarios could be and what challenges might emerge from the transformations of education and training systems and policies. Many researchers and observers think that the most relevant of these challenges is that of inequalities between and within countries. The medium-long term nature of many of these challenges poses a complex question: does the pandemic tend to widen or narrow the time-space horizons of people perceptions, rationalities, and decisions?

For decades, the field of education and training has witnessed continuous growth in globalization and internationalization: just think of the role of the large-scale assessment surveys and the increasing influence of international organisations. Phenomena and concepts such as policy mobility (lending and borrowing) or – within another field of research – policy learning, as well as global scaling up, global-local hybridization and policy assemblage might find a useful opportunity of debate and in-depth analysis in this stream. This might also be true of the related issue regarding how comparative research must be carried out and of the relationship between some government 'technologies' adopted in the latest cycle of policies – for example, quasi-market, evaluation, and autonomy of schools and universities – and the ever more criticized neo-liberal paradigm. In this framework, without any revival of the political or methodological nationalism, a critical rethinking of the national dimension, perhaps too hurriedly assumed to be 'obsolete', can be useful also for a comparative reflection. As to our continent we are in the presence not only of

globalization of educational policies, but also of their Europeanisation, due to the extent of the European Commission's strategy and its Open Method of Coordination. Beyond the official distinction between formal, non-formal, and unformal learning, it seems European initiatives and programmes shape a new policy world preparing the future of education, particularly through different expert networks, new ways of conceptualizing knowledge, and disseminating standards. On these issues there is no lack of reflections and research, some of which very critical indeed, whose results deserve to be broadly shared and discussed, too.

The equipping of the new generations with the tools – knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values – to live in a plural and interconnected world is delicate matter indeed in Europe. It is the issue at stake for the encounters – and at times clashes – between old and new visions and forms of pluralism and secularism. Around this theme are developed educational policies and strongly heterogeneous curricula. Such topic is linked also to the variability in young people's competences and attitudes towards 'cultural otherness'.

Life-long learning is another question of notable importance at international level as it implies both a diverse temporal horizon for education and its link to the dimensions of work. And a different approach to the relationship between school and extra-scholastic (life-wide) learning is also implied. From this stems the necessity of greater investment for example in both the early years (ECEC) and the adult education. We might ask, however, how much has been done to achieve this goal, and whether it risks remaining a fascinating but largely unfinished project for a long time.

Within a general rethinking of the aims and the means at the disposal of education systems, many papers ask whether until now enough has been done to educate towards citizenship and democracy and whether various national educational systems have adopted this issue as their core mission.

A second group of questions derives from some crucial challenges – such as the dramatic deterioration of the biosphere, the climate, and the health – which impose both the necessity of rethinking this mission in a planetary context and redefining the 'citizenship' as a concept not merely national, but multi-level, that is ranging from global to local; and in our continent European, too. How deeply are our nations presently involved in the task of educating their citizens in terms of knowledge of global and trans-national issues? And are they striving to build a collective common consciousness in Europe? What help is being given in this sense by proposals elaborated and experiences promoted by international organizations or the EU?

Finally, starting from infant and primary schools, what weight does citizenship education have in schools, what approaches are adopted and what have shown to be the most effective? What didactics are applied and what seem to be the most promising experiences? To what extent are teachers prepared and motivated and students interested in it? Universities and adult education should also play a role in citizenship education. What proposals and significant experiences can be described and examined?

The Volume also includes contributions on the relationship between education and economic systems which is a classic subject of social science. During the twentieth century, the functionalist perspective established a close link between 'school for the masses' and the construction of individuals personalities conforming to values and social objectives. Professions have then become more and more specialized and therefore requiring ever more targeted skills. Hence, the insistence on the need to train future workers in technical and technological skills, as well as more recently in the 'soft skills' climate, increasingly necessary in certain sectors of the economy (Industry 4.0). The alliance between the functionalist perspective and the neoliberal visions finds its conceptual and practical pivot in the employability conceptual frame. On the other hand, since the 1970s, critical research has highlighted that formal education system contributes to the reproduction of inequalities, confirming and strengthening hierarchies and power relations between different actors of the economic system. These lines of investigation have underlined the weight of cultural and social capital in determining school performance, but also the inflation of educational credentials as a combined effect of mass schooling and changes in the economic system. In more recent times, the fragmentation of the educational and training systems, because of the multiplication of public and private agencies in charge of training citizens, in addition to the explosion of the non-formal and informal as learning places (e.g., on the Internet), challenges the school to maintain its primacy as a place responsible for training workers. Moreover, it questions its ability to continue to represent a social elevator and / or a place of social justice.

The issue of the reproduction of inequalities and differential returns of educational qualifications fuels lively and stimulating interdisciplinary debates: economic stagnation, mass unemployment and job instability affect the inclusion of young generations in the labour market. Recently, in the context of lifelong learning policies, the relationship between training and work has become increasingly central, but the definition of the goals of these policies is not neutral: in the neoliberal mantra it is a question of guaranteeing the adaptability, employability and autonomy of each individual, so that one can occupy a place in society according to the dominant values. There is no shortage of critical voices about this individualistic and functionalist interpretation

of the Lifelong Learning vision. On the other hand, even the supporters of neoliberal-inspired policies want an inclusive training offer (from a meritocratic perspective), as it is essential for recruiting resources and supporting flexible production systems focused on knowledge.

The attention of scholars focuses on the effects of the 'knowledge society' in the educational system of European countries. In this perspective, several studies have focused attention on the orientation processes that contribute to the reproduction of inequalities as the students from the lower classes tend to orient themselves, and are oriented by their teachers, towards the vocational paths, stigmatized within the educational systems.

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Digital Citizenship and Digital Literacy to Give Voice to Teenagers: A Participatory Research Project

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ABSTRACT: *The paper takes on a theoretical frame of reference related to the concept of active, democratic and intercultural citizenship (Milani et al., 2020). It sits within a complex vision that takes into consideration the tendency towards the universality of human rights, interculturality and interdependency as well as the concept of citizenship as a concrete way of living and acting where there is a sense of collectivity to ultimately pursue common good and global education (CoE, 2016). The authors present data and reflections emerging from the project «The discomfort of teenagers during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown: educational problems and pedagogical reflections» (P.I. Lorena Milani, University of Turin). Teenagers from Val di Susa and Rivoli have actively participated in the research project supported by participatory research methodology (White, 1991). Students have been involved in the project as protagonists, actors and research subjects (Santerini, 2020). They have been considered social problems «experts» and have been involved in the process of making questions as well as creating the research method: an analysis of the discomfort experienced by teenagers (14-19 years of age) during the COVID-19 pandemic has become an opportunity for advocacy, development, digital citizenship and leadership (Rivoltella, 2020).*

KEYWORDS: *Digital Citizenship, Participatory Research, Student Voice, Global Education, Civic Education.*

Introduction

Suspension of face-to-face instruction in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic has led Professor Lorena Milani and our research group to study physical and mental discomfort experienced by children. Her project has fostered a further research which investigated the effect of school closures and prolonged period of distance learning on teenagers' behaviour in high schools. It has focused on the discomfort experienced by adolescents.

The study met the need of Norberto Rosa's high school to carry out a PCTO project (work-related learning experience) with digital tools and to introduce students to the concept of *digital citizenship* (MIUR, 2018/145).

Students have been considered expert as protagonists of the pandemic distress and developed a questionnaire for the other students. The project promoted collaboration between University and High School with a scientific collaboration agreement (MIUR, 2015/17).

Several researches, within the Italian context, have highlighted the importance of the experiential dimension for the realization of the PCTO (work-related learning experience) (Tino, Grion, 2018). Among the different strengths highlighted by the research we find other confirmations including the importance of shared design, monitoring actions and curricular continuity (Morini, 2019).

1. The Context and Objectives of the Project

The need to transpose the design into telematic mode and to develop an online project within the PCTO has resulted in the need to create a questionnaire that would investigate both the possible presence of an adolescents' disease in this historical period, both the form and areas of manifestation of this discomfort, including the relationships and environments that affect it. The use of digital tools has also allowed the acquisition of skills necessary for the growth of digital citizenship by students (Lanfrey, Solda, 2018).

The project was carried out according to the Timetable:

TAB. 1. *Project Timetable*

October-December 2020	January-March 2021	April-May 2021	May 2021	September-October 2021
Creation of focus groups with the fourth grade students. Moment of clarification of the questions.	Creation of training sessions with students by the university researchers. Creation of the online questionnaire.	Online administration of the questionnaire to three high schools in the Val di Susa (TO) and one school in Cuneo.	First analysis of the results and discussion with the students.	Analysis and dissemination of research results (creation of events in which students will actively participate)

The first part of the project involved students and teachers of the humanities: psychology, anthropology and pedagogy.

The teachers realized focus groups during which the students expressed the uneasiness experienced during the lockdown months with respect to the school experience, the relationships of friendship and love, the family life, the expectations for the future.

From the material emerged during the focus groups were then processed the questions of the questionnaire that were then reviewed in a scientific way thanks to the help of university researchers in the formative moments. During the formative moments, which are entirely online, the students learned to use the digital tools provided by G-suite to create the questionnaire, reflecting on the research methodology.

During the realization of the project three important dimensions have emerged created by the direct active involvement of the students and teachers:

- Realizing the PCTO with digital tools: making students active protagonists in DAD (Distance Teaching) methodologies, which have often seen students passive receptors of content (Marcianò, 2020);
- Creating spaces to listen to the discomfort of adolescents by teachers to give voice to feelings, to become aware of what was happening all over the world (Freire, 2014). Many of the boys and girls claim to have lived the time of the pandemic from COVID-19, with emotional upheavals, spatial, temporal, affective, with difficulty (anxiety, difficulty in attending school, daily routine change, suspension of social occasions and activities, etc.);
- Offer a university orientation opportunity, dealing with research work in education. This is one of the goals of PCTO's paths (DL 22/2020).

Having the questionnaire built up for boys and girls means focusing the attention on the aspects that they, for the first, thought interesting. This allowed us to get closer to the students' point of view. It has been an important learning opportunity not only in relation to the contextual framework within which their experiences and emotions are placed, but also in view of a more timely and appropriate programming of the research process. In addition, the formulation of questions in the questionnaire by young people has provided important research data on which to focus pedagogical reflection.

The realization of this project was possible thanks to the collaboration between the Norberto Rosa High School and the Department of Education Sciences of the University of Turin. The law on school autonomy established by art. Article 21 of Law 59/97 states that «universities and educational institutions may enter into agreements with a view to encouraging refresher courses, research and educational and university guidance». This project built a link between university research, teaching community practice and student activity, trying to recompose the dichotomy between strong university science and weak knowledge of practice (Schon, 1999).

The project has enhanced the practical knowledge not only of teachers but also of students, who in this way acquire design skills and skills of global and digital citizenship. In addition to developing the attitude to research.

2. Co-constructing Change: a Participatory Research Project with Adolescents at the Time of COVID-19

In the framework of a concept of citizenship understood as the practice of belonging to the community (Pescarmona, Matera, *in press*), which is

expressed in the care and responsibility – ethical, civil and moral – this research project aims to promote a context of expression and promotion of civic duty, as a willingness to actively contribute to the life of the community (Deluigi, 2012) for the common good, with a view to improving the living environment of each citizen.

In the national and international context, several research studies show how the COVID-19 pandemic, and related restrictive measures, have had important consequences on the physical and psychological well-being of adolescents (Minozzi, Saulle *et al.*, 2021; Marques de Miranda *et al.*, 2020), but mostly exploratory research has been conducted.

In order to provide a competent response to the existential, social and educational challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has produced and continues to generate, the research project aims, first of all, to understand what students' perceptions are of the current health emergency and its consequences. This as a starting point to re-interpret, through the eyes of the students, the phenomenon under study and to identify and implement strategies aimed at a more conscious taking charge of their state of mind and their needs by the adult society.

Assuming the interpretivist epistemological perspective (see Mertens, 1998), the research is inserted within the transformative paradigm, providing, therefore, a participatory approach (White, 1991; Mortari, Ghirotto, 2019) that aims to stimulate participatory processes from below, returning centrality to those who are considered 'experts' of a social and educational phenomenon, in a perspective of advocacy and social justice.

Therefore, through the active involvement of 1,157 male and female students from 4 schools in Piedmont (Italy) throughout the research process, the research has two main goals:

- Understanding the phenomenon: investigating the perspective of the subjects in training, the first recipients of educational interventions and welfare policies and reorganization of the school system, allows us to capture the complexity of the phenomenon, taking into primary consideration the points of view of people who live and mean the situation of study (see Lincoln, Guba, 1985);
- Improving educational practice: pedagogical reflection from minor' conceptions allow us to inform educational practice and, therefore, to provide a more adequate response to the needs that emerge from the educational context.

In particular, students were involved, in a circular process of generative dialogue between researchers and adolescents, in the phases of:

- *Design*, construction and validation of the questionnaire, based on the solicitations received from the students regarding the themes considered of greatest interest for the investigation. In this way, students were guided in the learning and use of digital tools, developing new skills in a process of digital literacy;

- Training, thus support and accompaniment on the methodology of research in education (in relation to research typologies, questions, objectives, methods and techniques) and on digital tools that can assist the researcher in processing and presenting research data (e.g., Word Art software for creating word clouds). The sharing of knowledge and perspectives between researchers and participants and the co-reflection on them led to the reworking and co-construction of more complex knowledge about the phenomenon under study and generate an epistemological transformation in both. The training connotation of the research process is fostered by the role of the researcher, who, by stimulating the creation of a mutual learning environment, helped to clarify and contextualize the subjective experiences of the research participants;
- Co-processing of research data, in which students were involved in the analysis supported by the researchers.

Therefore, collaborative strategies of data collection and analysis were used in order not to exacerbate the power asymmetry between researcher and participant, both *subjects* and *partners* of the research. The methodological choice is based, therefore, on the full mutual recognition of equal dignity in the process of knowledge construction, in a common planning supported by the reciprocal will to bring transformations to the context.

Throughout the research process, the active participation of students allowed them to share emotions, feelings, perspectives and suggestions, not only with the researchers, but also with other students, helping to reduce the learners' loneliness, to increase their confidence and to create an 'inclusive community' among peers in which to recognize themselves. Thus, the research takes on an ethical connotation on the micro level, proposing to facilitate improvements in the lives of the participants (Kara, 2015).

3. Research as an Emancipatory Tool

The assumptions at the basis of this methodological choice are in the will to rethink the right to listen to the child, provided for by art. 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in terms of a right that is fully respected and recognized when the child is concretely granted the opportunity to produce information and to express it freely. In this sense, adolescents have been made protagonists, actors and subjects of research, together with researchers, because they are considered 'privileged witnesses' in the knowledge not only of the social phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences in terms of discomfort and restructuring of social and educational contexts and interventions, but also of the possible ways to investigate and to bring about improvements in the areas of life that have been affected by

the emergency. In the context of these considerations, two important goals emerged that the direct active involvement of students in the research project could allow to pursue:

- to provide a pedagogical and methodological perspective: firstly, to teach students to use research methodologies through practice. Secondly, to build spaces for discussion with adolescents, increasing their personal and social awareness and power in view of change (Freire, 1968);
- to be an important opportunity for orientation: approaching the discipline of scientific research can open up new opportunities for self-experimentation and generate new aspirations and motivations.

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the research assumed an emancipatory connotation. In fact, the participants were supported in the process of discovery and re-discovery of their own instances and their own potential and in that of making them explicit. Therefore, primary importance was given to the real needs of the research subjects and not to those 'thought up' for them by the researcher outside the context. In addition, the voice of the participants was supported by theory, in order to more consciously inform educational, social and welfare policies in favor of the same participants. Research thus becomes an emancipatory tool (Kemmis, Wilkinson, 1998): it encourages processes of self-awareness and self-determination in the subjects and fuels a political debate for change.

4. Young voices, needs and freedom

Students considered the project as a way to state their opinions freely, as well as an advocacy programme, which could reveal their unseen and unheard needs. Therefore, it has been defined as an 'open window' during the lockdown period.

They need to express and narrate emotions; school and home experiences, family and friends relationship and conflicts, episodes of violence and self-harm, changes in lifestyles, possibility of personal fulfillment, social disappointment and disorientation.

We want to report some extracts from the interview questionnaires which reveal disorientation, anger, discomfort, but also the desire to speak and explain the teenagers position to the adult world.

One of the student, witness 1, testifies the discomfort in relation to the misunderstanding of the adult world and the lack of listening «we always say *poor adults* who do not work or *poor children*, but...what about us? we scream and you are not listening to us. I have become continually depressed and suffering of anxiety attacks because of you, your attitude and your education».

The lockdown, prolonged by distance learning for adolescents, caused disorientation and a sort of temporal, emotional and relational

suspension that is described by many boys and girls. Witness 2 says «It was a bit sad, my friendships have not diminished, but returning to school I felt alive again. In this period of lockdown, it is as if i have not lived. I went from lessons to books, and I did the same thing every day».

The habits of adolescents are upset, and their passions remain suspended in a meaningless space-time: witness 3 says «I had many projects, trips, parties, appointments, friendships, entertainment, goals, desire to do, enthusiasm, dreams, passions, commitments that I had made and that I wanted to carry out. I had, now no more».

Along with emotional and motivational suffering, there is an increase in awareness of what the school is able to give and around the role of teachers «I felt a great demoralization and demotivation. I discovered that being in the classroom is precious, because, and this must be said, the teachers, the environment itself, captures us, holds us back. Being away and looking at yourself from a screen, where you are on the other side, who can do what you do, leads to more distraction» (Witness 4). Pupils recognize the educational role of teachers, beyond didactics: «I want to be honest, I missed most of the lessons, because I could use the phone, have lunch, mind my own business, just because in front of me, I had my pc, my sandwich and no camera on. Unfortunately, it happens, we get distracted, often. Professors are indispensable, their looking us i the eye, waking us up, letting us, follow us at all costs, it is precious. Staying at home was worse than good and with the arrival of the second wave, the colours, well, everything was in vain for me» (Witness 5).

Many students also spontaneously report the onset of episodes of violence, anxiety, sleep loss, eating disorders, depression. We can read this in the words of witness 8: «It has been a bad year; it has severed ties with almost everyone except the people I understand are important. Despite this, it was and still is a bad period that still leaves a trace in everyday life with anxiety attacks, panic attacks and emotional crises. I am not optimistic about the situation, and I think that everything will be repeated like last March as in a loop. My emotions are all in confusion, I don't know if I'm happy, sad or just apathetic, it's chaos».

Self-harm and pain also emerge both from the data and from the free declarations of the students: «I started to be more and more stressed and, to bite myself when inside of me I can no longer bear certain things. I just hope the situation improves and I hope I can have an experience like a normal high school student» (Witness 9); «I lost myself and felt emotions that I had never felt before, negative emotions. I suffered, I had eating disorders and self-harm, despite I always been a very sunny and positive girl» (Witness 10).

Despite the severe level of suffering experienced and suffered, the students demonstrate a lucid ability to analyze relationships with the adult world, the social situation and a profound introspective competence in the search for glimmers of hope: «2020 was a very difficult year, my outlook on the world has changed and – looking for a

positive side – loneliness allowed me to reflect on the person I am and the person I want to be» (Witness 11).

Conclusion

The project aims to join participation, engagement and critical resistance of students. They have become agents of change:

- their active involvement as protagonists and researchers allowed to join more than thousand students in the Piedmont area;
- their words invite teachers and leaders to assume new educational postures;
- peer support and anonymity have allowed the most fragile subjects to report the situations they have been experiencing.

The students' questionnaires adopt the perspective of the Pedagogy of the word (Freire, 2002, 2014; School of Barbiana, 1967). The participants have chosen some specific areas of the questionnaire and the terms that have been selected can be defined as generating and liberating words.

The words that students have chosen, investigated and used restore freedom and can guide the adult world, educators and citizens in general, to become aware of the situation they have experienced. These words can accompany the fight against inequalities, can promote a social change and a paradigm shift. We do not hope that the world will change radically because it is changing language, but – with Freire's thinking – we believe that hanging language is part of the process of changing the world: the relationship between language, thought and the world is a dialectical, procedural and contradictory relationship (Freire, 2014).

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