

PROCEEDINGS

Cultures, Practices,
and Change 02



third international conference
of the journal *Scuola Democratica*

education
and/
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Education never stands still—it moves, adapts, and transform in response to new realities, while reshaping society in turn. This collection explores some forces defining learning today: digital tools, intercultural dialogue, artistic expression, and the call for ecological responsibility. At its core, education remains a space for negotiation and reinvention.

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Vol. 2

**Cultures,
Practices,
and Change**

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RETHINKING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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How can we respond to the crisis of democracy and, at the same time, guarantee a full personal engagement to each citizen on a social and political level? Nowadays, several remarkable changes are leaving a profound mark on society, the most relevant ones being globalization; the increasingly unequal distribution of resources; the rapid growth of powerful companies and multinational corporations; the complexity of global migratory phenomena; the exclusion of a large part of the population from productive, economic, social, and political processes. These changes have generated unstable and precarious identity bonds: not only is closeness to the other associated with their acceptance and understanding, it can also trigger frequent divergences and often conflicts. These processes can have negative consequences on the way people participate in the life of their community, on both a political and cultural level. That is why they are closely connected with the pedagogical issues related to human formation and the development of a democratic conscience as citizens. Before being the best form of government ever theorized and experienced, democracy is the way a community conceives life, and its crisis can perhaps find a solution in active citizenship. Democracy, education, and citizenship are so closely interconnected that the education of man cannot exist without the education of the citizen. In democracy, the development and education of a community are not based on the conflict between social and individual goals, they rather coincide with the enhancement of each citizen. Everyone's experience helps find suitable methods for developing positive behaviours that respect human rights and citizenship; it also improves feelings of belonging to the community and implements participation in political life. The educational models reflect upon the person's belonging to a territory and a social context and tend to orient themselves towards a broader sense of the term citizenship, which include geographical, social and cultural perspectives: in this regard, Edgar Morin extends the concept to terrestrial citizenship. Therefore, the need to rethink citizenship education emerges once again to configure broader scenarios and possibilities, since no aspect of political and social life is foreign to citizenship, at local and planetary level. This paper aims to investigate how pedagogy can support a transformation in this sense, in different educational contexts, with a peculiar focus on schools. There is no doubt schools are undergoing a severe crisis and are far from fulfilling the educational needs of the new generations on their own. However, they play a key role for community development: despite school projects are often hindered by numerous issues, they represent a useful tool for citizens' fulfilment and for positive change, since they activate a connection with daily experience and the living environment and stimulate a deeper sensitivity towards the other. These aspects will be explored, paying attention to the thematic issues, problems, and methods, suitable to promote the full participation of citizens, in community life both from a territorial and global perspective.

democracy; citizenship; participation; pedagogy; education.

INTRODUCTION

The ecological paradigm considers the context, the environment, the set of circumstances in which everyone lives; as fundamental in order to understand the deeper meaning of a phenomenon and to build new knowledges (Bateson, 1979; Mortari, 2007; Fadda, 2002).

At the moment, different remarkable changes are leaving profound marks on society, as they add distortions to the pre-existing imbalances. For this reason they must be read as an organic totality, that generates precarious identity bonds and can often cause conflicts. The widening of the economic gap between nations, the unequal distribution of resources, the proliferation of pervasive outbreaks of war are intrinsically linked, because they are factors of the same phenomena that origins instability. These asymmetries are not only unjust; they alone are the reason why democracy is experiencing such a crisis, furthermore they are a proclamation of a state of belligerence. As Umberto Curi (2016, p. 10) underlines: it would be equally arbitrary and misleading to argue that a world in which 4/5 of the population have just over 1/5 of the resources can be peaceful, while the remaining 1/5 of the world's population can use 4/5 of the economic, monetary, energy, food resources available. Erasing or refusing to acknowledge the bonds between these different dimensions of a single phenomenon, would mean depriving oneself of a knowledge base, without which the understanding of the present, and even the prudent prediction of the more immediate future, would become impossible.

The same links can be found with the migratory flows (Silva, 2015), the underdevelopment and the imposed poverty, which require an immediate attention, as serious as that of war and death under bombs, because these decisions taken consciously by western governments. Peace cannot be sustained without a more equitable distribution of resources, and the risks of entire population migrations cannot be effectively avoided if the gap between the opulence of the few and the misery of the many is not reduced (Santerini, 2017). It is worth noting that these processes have caused the crisis of democracy; day after day, they are undermining its principles of equality, which constitute its foundations.

Why is democracy facing such a deep crisis? Maybe because economy and politics are no longer interconnected as they were in the past: economy is now thought of at a global level, whereas politics is dependent on the local context. The gap between economy and politics generated the crisis of democracy, because the economic dimension develops on a global and supranational basis, while the political reasons remain linked to national contexts. These processes compromised the way people participate in their community life. It is perhaps superfluous to recall that civil and political rights are complementary to economic and social rights, since access to essential goods is the first requirement for the substantive and not only formal realization of the rights of every person (Santerini, 2001). The definition of economic and social rights is the product of a democratic debate based on social and civil rights (Mortari, 2008).

1. PEDAGOGY AND CITIZENSHIP

In democracy, the development of the community is not based on the conflict between social and individual goals; it is addressed to improve the enhancement of the citizen, towards the respect of human rights and the participation in community and political life (Baldacci, 2020). Each citizen is both the holder of rights established by law or by the cohabitation's rules, that define the background in which everyone exercises his freedom; and of duties, the first of which is the exercise of freedom within the framework defined by law, therefore, the designation and control of people exercising power is a citizen's responsibility. Democratic citizenship is aimed at the autonomy of the person, who becomes aware and responsible for the control over public authority. That is why democracy and citizenship are closely connected with the pedagogical issues of human formation and to the development of a democratic conscience as citizens (Cambi, Cives and Fornaca, 1999).

Democracy is not only the best form of government ever theorized and experienced, it is the way each community conceives life. At present, the relationship between citizens and public institutions is characterized by two poles. The citizen is both sovereign, who delegates the community to solve problems that he has no chance to solve alone; and he is a member of the political community, where institutions must guarantee the rights and freedoms of each one. Power is an emanation of free and equal citizens, thus, citizenship is given only in democratic contexts, which respect the equality and dignity of everyone (Cera, 2019). In this perspective citizenship is anchored on democracy, since both involve the recognition of citizens' rights to legal and political equality. Democracy, education, and citizenship are closely related: the education of man cannot exist without the education and enhancement of the citizen. The answer to democratic problems can be found in citizenship education.

Critical pedagogy can help to understand and transform the context and to improve the citizens' engagement; indeed, it analyses education as a category capable of emancipation towards radical forms of access to knowledge (Granese, 2008; Fadda, 2009). Social changes, with deep historical roots, which quickly follow each other, lead to new theoretical reflections and activate the experimentation of new dimensions of citizenship education. The ways in which human societies are organized, are responsible for the need to extend reflections and educational practices on citizenship. The latter responds to the transformations of the associated living and, to the political crisis, by promoting at different levels, the mobilization of all citizens.

2. CITIZENSHIP'S ROOTS

Citizenship education has both historical and recent origins. Historically this idea has as its ancestor, the notion of *paideia* in Ancient Greece, where this term was enriched with meaning, to the point of expressing the ideal of human formation (Jaeger, 2003). It was not only a cultural preparation in a quantitative and objective sense, but a value of personality in its high qualitative and personal expression.

According to Jaeger, *paideia* aimed to internalize those universal values that determined the *ethos*: the place to live, the identity of people, the norms and values, the spirit of belonging and citizenship. The *ethos* distinguishes man as responsible and able to answer for he himself. In this regard, *paideia* was the whole of civic and ethic virtues: it was a task of citizens and politicians; it aimed to act in the civil and cultural custody. *Paideia* has a persistent and radical nucleus linked to the existence and understanding of the essence of human being. Its evolution cannot be reconstructed here, but it is a focus of meanings to promote the person and the citizen.

In recent history, the beginnings of attention to citizenship education can be traced in 1948 with the publication of the *Declaration of human rights*, in which education aims to the full development of human personality to promote tolerance and friendship among all nations. In 1974, the *UNESCO Recommendation on Education for International Understanding* investigated on what does it mean to be citizens. This document pursues the abilities to communicate with others, the participation in solving community problems, as well as the respect for other people. In 2014, the development of citizenship is defined as a key target by UNESCO and today we are still working on the construction of appropriate educational models for this purpose.

The term *citizenship* has historically been related to belonging to a territory and a group in which certain rights are recognized. The actual challenge is to prepare citizens for life, thinking on citizenship no longer anchored in life of individual states, but as a presupposition of community life that is terrestrial, planetary (Morin, 2012). This concept is also related to the proposal (Morin and Kern, 1996) for *planetary humanism*. This broader sense of citizenship involves geographical, social and cultural perspectives. Man is human beyond the nation and ethnicity, he is the bearer of his humanity that is universal and can be recognized in the subject undergoing a process of internalization and radicalization, that means to find common roots.

The extension of citizenship leads to rethink it, since no area of associated living is detached from it; this extension involves proposals concerning its contents, since it develops from the individual sphere, it increases its horizons towards wider dimensions around each person, as family and institutions, and it affects all community, with sustainability. Therefore, the need to rethink citizenship education emerges to configure broader possibilities at local and planetary level. It is the assumption of responsibility for the individual and the community, for the citizens and the democratic institutions. Citizens belong at local level to the city and to the state, but they are also citizens of the world and they must take an interest on it. Citizenship education necessarily accompanies each person throughout the entire life cycle and in many areas of life, thus it can be adapted to local contexts and cultures, and also to education at school.

3. SCHOOL'S ROLE

School is a formative institution that contributes, not only to the teaching and learning process, but also to the acquisition of ethical attitudes and values related to

democracy and citizenship. Dewey (1992) defines school as a democratic community, where decisions are taken through discussion, expression of opinions, respect, argumentation and participation. Schools are undergoing a severe crisis and are far from fulfilling the educational needs of the new generations on their own. However, they still play a key role to promote every sphere of community development. It isn't enough to strengthen students' knowledge about the functioning of the democratic system; it is necessary to introduce at school different topics in a problematic way, stimulating students through the pleasure of investigation and discovery. Citizenship education is one of the educational emergencies that school must face, connecting personal experiences and living environment, and stimulating a deeper sensitivity towards the other.

Citizenship education projects at school are internationally valorized, because they promote students' skills on democracy, as well as their involvement in institutional practices, both from a local and global perspective (Euridyce, 2017). Students' engagement improves the ability to plan together to solve problems around them, as individual and as part of the community.

Citizenship education cannot be abstract, it is related to specific contents and to practical approaches (Chistolini, 2006). The dimensions of reflection and action are interdependent: at school theory and practice of citizenship education enrich each other. The theoretical reflection develops hand in hand with the practice towards the achievement of different skills. It is possible to identify three dimensions of citizenship that can be developed at school:

1. On the *cognitive* level, knowledge implements the informations on the historical evolution of citizenship and democracy. It is exercised with reference to juridical and political norms that regulate community life.
2. On the *attitude* level, affective involves the ability to think in an original way, to listen other people and take part in a discussion. It entails the awareness of each citizen and the responsibility in the promotion of democracy.
3. On *skills* level, psychomotor is the ability to question the world, to employ critical thinking to solve problems, to evaluate the better decisions to take. It means to review choices and actions, to cooperate to achieve a goal. It is linked to conflict's resolution by discussion, negotiation or mediation. This dimension concerns the recognition and acceptance of the other, dialogue, listening, responsibility and equality.

Developing these areas at school would mean to promote a full personal engagement of citizens, activating a connection with the living environment and giving attention to other people.

In this context, it has been possible to offer only a few points of reflection, but it would be interesting to study more practical suggestions to adapt them to different school situations.

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