

Dismantling authoritarianism: the transition from 1960s to 1970s as a radical turning point to overcome «modernity» in education

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Abstract: In the introduction to this special issue, the editor highlights the main aspects for which the transition from 1960s to 1970s can be recognized as a revolutionary phase in the history of education, during which a liberating course came to an end, growing throughout the modern age, dismantling authoritarianism in education. After an overview on each essay, the editor underlines the value assigned to an historical look on those relevant changes in education grounded in a transnational and comparative analysis and of the complex processes they implied.

Keywords: anti-authoritarianism; long sixties; history of education; Europe; America.

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1. Introduction

Looking back to the history of the last Century, the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s seems to be a turning point in the culture of education in a wide perspective (Klimke & Scarloth, 2008; Horn, 2007; Farrell, 1997, pp.137-170). Analyzing the complexity of levels by which education has been transformed during this period recalls a big question that has largely involved a lot of researches on different related issues.

Coming to the current times, the conventional complications linked to the researchers' task to enlarge an analysis of the changes in education and their implications at that time seems to have increased for different reasons. The enlargement of the temporal gap from the historical events that contributed to beat traditional arrangements in education (such as the wave of students rebellions along different Countries in the Western World, the memorable marches and the impressive meetings of thousands of young people standing for civil rights and for

peace, the big assemblies and the parades claiming for democracy and self-rules in public and private life, the success of the women's movements) (Epstein, 1991; Farber, 1994) has corresponded to the spread of a sense of epochal separation from that time widely characterized by the sharing of a confident hope in the construction of a better world (Marwick, 2011).

Indeed, reflecting on the different ways and reasons why education became a core question for a generation grown in the feeling of being called to renovate the world after the terrible catastrophe of WWII and the breakdown of the colonial empires, the need for rebuilding education raised up as the expression of a moral dissent against all those forces which seemed to belong to an old system, based on a strict control over public behaviors, on the exercise of power, on the recourse to coercion to establish a symbolic hierarchy among different roles, in relation to the ideas of ruling and conforming to the rules (Hoefflerle, 2013; Rogers, 1961; Rogers & al. 2014).

In front of the spreading of such a moral need, claiming for freedom as a basic principle to regenerate the world after the collapse of that tragic model of modernity flew into the ruins of the war and into a global system of domination, the motivation for changing education raised up as the main task to dissolve every residue of a massively structured power tending to reduplicate itself within different levels and spaces of the social life. Dismantling authoritarianism represented the main way for bringing to completion the dismemberment of the cultural frame which operated through symbolic codes within educational functions based on asymmetric relations and on the working of formal and informal devices for the social control.

Within the raising up of a moral energy acting for disassembling the assumptions of a social and cultural framework entailed with the dissemination of microstructures of power, the dismantling of authoritarianism in education became a strategic way to promote an epochal turn over towards a new world. Therefore, the demand for reshaping education recognized a basic question in order to take on a larger cultural need and renew the project of modernity. According to this latter, the claim for freedom, justice and respect of human rights as well as the need for self-determination in private behaviors and for self-expression and peace, reflected the need to reject the frustration for a customary way of life caged into rigid schemes of conformity (Giroux, 2001).

For this reason, the «deconstruction» seemed to interpret the commitment of a whole generation in a period characterized by the fight for a different world to be reached marching on a direction opposing to the usual standards of «normality» and therefore largely marked by the need to express a wide sense of dissent towards those perverse mechanisms which ruled society by means of suffocating logics of repression (Mariani, 2008): wild and unscrupulous capitalism, fetishism of commodities, obsessive search for formal respectability, rigid control and restraint over sexual drives, assignment on submissive manners for regulating the relations between the subordinated and the masters.

Dismantling authoritarianism represented the necessary breakthrough for giving a more authentic sense to education, responding to the intention to express the highest aim it has to discharge, that is to promote the fulfillment of a real emancipation for the individuals in harmony with the social relationships.

The demolition of long-lasting enduring frames reflecting the glare of authoritarianism within the formal and informal settings of education, and even so mainly within the domestic spaces and in schools, constituted the manifest way in which the anxiety for realizing modes of emancipation raised up. To deny, to transgress, to provoke seemed to be often manifestations of a smart challenge in front of the adults, the masters, the teachers' authorities. In this light, the will for change worked as a radical attempt to upset a blocked and distorted system of conditioning education, normally acting in a top-down sense. Moreover, the successful objective of dismantling authoritarianism in education also meant the determination for giving back the real initiative in making choices and in practicing freedom to the unfolding characters of the growing subjects – individuals or groups – out of the damaging interference of external controls.

The fatal trespassing of an emergent tendency to criticism towards expressions of antagonism was a recurring sign of the impetuosity for which the residues of a resistant authoritarianism were more and more felt as unbearable to maintain further. Operating in this way, the «educational revenge» came to join to a lot of emerging demands, interpreting the arise of a need for rebalancing society in the sense of giving more chances and to improve the effective participation of all social actors. Particularly, the need for changing education joined the increasing expectation for a larger acknowledgment of the basic rights belonging to the ruled and poor classes and to the social categories usually marginalized (Lancisi, 2016, Milani, 2011, Santoni Rugiu, 2007).

The breakdown of a sclerotic model of education, sketched upon the predominance of the adults and the passive compliance of the young people, acted like the symbolic focus on which a larger range of claims for the rebalance of society as a whole found a merging point. The disapproval of any conception of authority justified by the establishment of an «*a priori*» argument, and especially with regard to the respect due to the educational leadership, opened significant spaces for all the connected social relationships, asking for the emancipation of subordinated subjects, improving the request for a real democratic participation raising from the bottom.

In other terms, the deepening crisis in which the ordinary vision of the educational relationships drifted was recognized as a crucial issue for provoking a larger crumble in a social system arranged on an univocal symbolic code and, more or less openly, replaying an internal authoritarian function.

Therefore, education constituted a crossroad for several civil and cultural demands aiming to express the quest for a more free way of action and for less control not only in schools or in the learning places, but also in private interactions and domestic settings, as well as in social behaviors. The large use of the concept of «repression», drawn from the psychoanalytical science's descriptions, worked as a favorite tool to explain to what extent the pressure over the educational functions was real tied to a constraining device hidden within the modern society and widely interfering with all the basic human activities by introducing distressing restraints (Schmidt & Rusconi.1972).

By this way, the dismantling of authoritarianism in education took on the will to reveal the distorted setting for which modernity mainly used education as a powerful

tool for restricting and pushing away psychic energies conceived as potentially disturbing, to create a sort of obsession for the maintenance of order and for the exercise of control (Rusconi, 1968).

In the decades of the dismantling of authoritarianism in education the opposition to an abstract and tyrannical cult of the Reason, usually conceived as the main source to which the sense of reality is to be referred, corresponded to the need to revalue the authentic role of the emotional dimension in shaping experience and, particularly, in leading the learning experience towards an emotional feeling enlarging one's capability in transforming the reality all around (Marcuse, 1991; Abromeit & Cobb, 2004).

While on the one hand the consideration of the emotional aspects involved in education promoted the discovery of a lot of potentialities usually disregarded and mainly linked to the force of creativity and to the release of imagination, on the other hand it highlighted the relevance of the development of pleasurable and satisfying social bonds for the nourishment of individuality. In so far the dismantling of authoritarianism corresponded to the reinforcement of a democratic commitment of the educational practices based on the acknowledgment of the virtuosity of some typical kinds of social relations authentically displayed through reciprocity (Piaget, 1995).

Indeed, the years running along the transition from the Sixties to the Seventies could be recognized as a special period during which the culture of education was widely encouraged to emphasize terms like cooperation, collaboration, team-work, exchange, community (Betti, 2009; Beattie, 2002). The consideration and strengthening of all these dimensions, to which education has to be referred to complete its human profile and its goals, represented a main cultural trend in constructing educational visions, envisioning «participation» as a condition to set education at the centre of a democratic way of life (Kyrilo, 2013).

The emerging of a utopian tension depicted the atmosphere of an age during which the use of strongly passionate words, such as dream, fantasy, imagination, belonged to a renewed awareness of education like something that has to refer its action not only to the world men live in, but also to the world men desire to live in and, then, to construct the ways of living together as the realization of the human «kingdom of ends» (Kellner & al., 2009; Mellon & Gerverau, 1997).

Therefore, looking back to a stormy transition during which modernity came definitely to its depletion, thus paving the way to the postmodern times, seems to call us to comprehend how the dismantling of authoritarianism represented the key for opening a breach onto a new perspective, beyond the provocations often showed by the expression of a radical thought. In this new conception the task of thinking and acting education has to find its leading direction in improving freedom and emancipation, making the reflection on education a relevant space for the development of a critical thinking supported by an essential commitment for peace.

2. Overview of the articles

The papers presented in this special issue are written by academic scholars living and working in different Continents and Countries. The different focus they

adopt examining the various questions turning around the main subject – *Dismantling Authoritarianism and Changes in Education across the Transition from 1960s to 1970s* - permit to gather a deeper knowledge of events, situations, characters and cultural outcomes belonging to the critical period here highlighted as the fundamental phase for the reshaping of education along with the definitive abandonment and rejection of any trait connected to the assumption and persistence of authoritarian structures and functions within the educational practices and objectives.

The articles point out different perspectives and approaches, allowing the appreciation of many historical ties linked to the transformation of education thanks to the participation of more explicit principles of freedom and independence, which have become ever since unavoidable for communicating the authentic sense and the typical experience education has to declare. Therefore, the papers offer a large and assorted framework, including a wide range of elements, almost original, to examine more in depth a recent moment in the history of education in which a breaking and innovative wave ran broadly around the globe, creating social movements, inspiring new forms of culture, eliciting a spirit of common actions, remodeling ordinary customs, and thus inducing to recognize in education an essential key to promote emancipation in a wide sense in favor of individuals and groups.

The great personality of Martin Luther King, almost a symbol of the campaigns for civil rights and social justice spread during the Sixties and quite an icon of that memorable period is the main character from which the study offered by Robert Hamilton from University of Glasgow (UK) takes its moves. The article by Hamilton shows the strong connections among social demands, like those which inspired a raising battle against poverty, civil struggles for more equality among the social classes, such as the ones that lead to the rejection of racism, and the cultural need for the improvement of children and adult education. The author highlights the evolution of King's vision showing how, in the mid-Sixties, the Afro-American leader was ever more sure that economic injustice was the core question to face to give way to a process of solution of racial inequality, thus setting education more and more at the centre of his agenda. The sketch he drew for a Poor People's Campaign became a real program for emancipation after his assassination, when thousands of poor people travelled to Washington DC to build a temporary community, known as Resurrection City. In this original experience, the attention over education was relevant and gave impulse to the strive to improve the condition of poor people stimulating the birth of educational organizations, such as the Freedom Schools or the Poor's People University. Nevertheless, the authentic educational dimension of such an experience was the practice of adult activism claiming for equality and rights, thanks to which a great number of usually marginalized people had the opportunity to be involved in a situation which forced them to better understand their real condition and to develop a response against the dominant representations legitimizing social discrimination.

The essay regarding the construction of a critic awareness of reality able to produce strategies for change is deeply analyzed in the essay by Cole and Mirzhaei, Western Sidney University and University of Dallas/Texas. The authors invite to examine the ways the hard question is developed within two different models of pedagogy deriving from the critical thought performed by Deleuze and Guattari by

one side, and by Bashkar by the other side. Both these models offer interesting ways to reinterpret the role of subjectivity in the creation of a critical thought able to challenge the reality existing, showing an inner tendency to promote a pedagogy oriented to non-conformism and progressivism. Both contribute to set noticeable bases for the organization of a critical pedagogy, showing also a common inclination to develop a sharp objection against the capitalistic system, recognized as a devourer machinery whose symbolic scheme is strictly connected to the typical expressions of authoritarianism. Nevertheless, Deleuze and Guattari's approach seems to be particularly clever in dealing with authoritarianism, extending its insights far beyond the more usual vision scattering from the dialectics of the real. Indeed, it results in a radical critical position requiring an «unmaking» of pedagogy, while the authentic meaning of education has to be recognized in making one able to create wider and more profound mindscapes by means of thought.

Actually, the relation authority/freedom has been a highly debated question in the pedagogical discourse and the need to legitimate a form of authority not compromising the freedom of the students has been an issue for the pedagogical debate. The article by Jones Irwin from Dublin City University deals with Paulo Freire's insight on the Authority-Freedom problem in education, analyzing how the rich experience gathered by the Brazilian educator across the transition from the Sixties to the Seventies, and then enlarged through the reflections and analysis elaborated in the following years, represented a pathway to a new formula for a democratic education. The author argues how the refined address given by Freire to the delicate problem shows its debt to the special context he faced, with regard to his commitment in relieving the world of the «oppressed», while from a theoretical point of view its conception recalled the one assumed by Dewey for rejecting an abstract and pure ideal of freedom and explaining the necessity to comprehend its bearing to a contextual setting. Really, in a way not so different from Dewey, Freire suggests that the possibility to construct a practice of education in which Authority and Freedom can coexist without canceling each other lays on the capacity of educators to carry on their activities and to maintain their leadership throughout an unrelenting and unfinished process of «self-critique». In so far, education calls for a permanent need to question the educational practices and their aims, as well as to examine the educational processes in their methods and presuppositions constantly, in order to inquire its final direction and validity.

The process of democratization of the educational institutions involved by the beat of the times is a subject both characterizing the contributions by Foukas and Gonzalez, even though they focus two different situations and contexts.

Foukas, from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, analyzes the attempt to modernize the educational and scholastic system in Greece brought about by the temporary reform acted in 1964, according to criteria of a more democratic access based on a progressive vision. It represented an occasion to draw the Greek educational system closer to the more advanced European standards, trying to shake a languishing situation for which the Country stood behind with regard to the main indicators of quality and efficacy in public education. The reforming process lasted for a short time. The changing of political government in the following year stopped the modernizing attempt and a conservative address turned back to guide

the educational policies in the next years, shutting down any opportunity to achieve more satisfying standards for a long time.

The article by Gonzalez, from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional / Mexico, deals with the changes occurring in the educational system in Mexico during the crucial transition from the Sixties to the Seventies. The author explains in a broad perspective the complex transformations happened in education and in school at different levels at that time, in the attempt to enhance the educational system both from a quantitative than a qualitative point of view. Moreover, he points out how the noticeable changes that permitted to enlarge the educational offer, to create more educational profiles and to raise the teaching standards had not only relevant effects in modernizing education, but was also a change in the basic address leading the pedagogical views. Education abandoned its previous aim of absorbing people in the authority of the sovereign National State, and embraced a new model, actually not free from other hidden compromising aims, linked to the success of the technological and efficient model of agency applied to public policies, seeking to establish a functional scheme of «governamentality».

Besides school and educational system, another relevant object worth analyzing in order to understand the deep changes in education generated across the transition from the Sixties to the Seventies is the family. The article by Fuertes, from University of Valencia, highlights its importance focusing on the deep transformations in act in the social system across the intergenerational change during the Sixties, looking at the special case of Spain. The author discusses the different system of social representations and beliefs belonging to the new generation growing up during the Sixties, whose assets of values came to a progressive detachment from that rhetorical discourse, stuffed with national and authoritarian elements, so strongly characterizing the first period of Franco's dictatorship, under which their parents had grown up. The change was particularly evident so that the model of traditionalism, usually operating within the family system of transmission of values and beliefs, showed little by little not to be able to support an ideological project reproducing an internal mechanism of authoritarian socialization. The article reveals at the same time the progressive fade of enthusiasm for that close conservative and traditionalist rhetoric, highly compromised with authoritarianism, that determined the failure of the dictatorship's attempts to involve the primary teachers in the conservative professional organizations politically linked to the «Falange» in the same period. Two other contributions, those offered by Hinterholz and Garcia, disclose an interesting analysis of a similar issue, related to the control over subjects or organizations actively involved in the educational processes (such as students, teachers and their respective associations) by authoritarian governments, worried for the potential disorders generated within their activities.

Hinterholz, from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) casts lights onto the control enacted by the Brazilian Military Dictatorship over the students' organizations in Universities to stop the propagation of students' unrests after the events of May 1968. The author studies in particular the case of the «Casa do Estudante Universitario Aparicio Cora de Almeida», a student college located in the city of Porto Alegre, assuming it is a sort «breach» to penetrate into that informal educational system represented by the common space where students used to spend

a relevant part of their life, such as dormitories and other accommodations places. Coming closer to the life of the young people in the students' houses it's possible to appreciate the informal ways and materials by which they could participate to the spreading wave of rebellion (organizations of cultural circles, readings of books and journals, film visions) and to reveal, at the same time, the actions of control and policing taken by authorities over the students' movements. The author takes advantage of the collection of oral memories and narratives to indicate also the complexity characterizing the experiences of the students who felt and elaborated in different ways the echoes of the global rebellion agitating Universities all around the Western World.

Garcia, from Universidad Nacional de Rosario, focuses on the situation of Argentina during the so called period of the Argentine Revolution (1966-1973), when the educational and the social framework were embraced by an ultra-conservative grasp. The rhetorical arguments supporting the necessity to reinforce the national security became a pretext to extend a strict control over social life, both in the public and in the private spaces. Therefore the control over the students associations in the Universities highly increased, animated by the will to exert a pressure on an area of public life considered to be particularly subjected to integrate subversive tendencies. The author particularly examines the area of Santa Fé, revealing also how the authorities enlarged practices of secret control over the teachers associations suspected to be nourishing dissident tendencies too.

The articles submitted by Calvetto and Romano shed a light on the Italian framework.

Calvetto, from the University of Turin, reminds the complexity of the Italian situation across the Sixties, characterized by a strong trend of economic growth by one side, but also by the spreading of social contradictions (inequalities, marginalization of weak classes and subjects, internal migrations, uneasiness among the workers conditions) by the other side. The author highlights the character and work of Danilo Montaldi (1929-1975), one of the intellectuals mostly committed in the debate on Marxist theories and Social Sciences. In the 1960s he gained popularity with social surveys dedicated to immigrants, the humbles and the working class. The originality of Montaldi's approach consisted in looking at the worker's subjectivity and, by this way, focusing on the more complex apparatus of cultural forces resting on and conditioning his or her vision of life. On the other side, the process of emancipation of the subordinated classes put into light the development of an educational process, acting as a way for liberation in which they had to find an opportunity for elaborating a proper narrative and gaining space for expressing a proper discourse.

With regard to the Italian context of the Sixties, Romano, from the University of Palermo, dedicates her study to the role assumed by Aldo Capitini, one of the main characters who contributed to integrate the culture of education with democratic values and pacifism along that period, in a special initiative for the democratization of the school system. Romano draws attention onto Capitini's contribution in starting up an association (ADESSPI), out of political or collateral control and therefore largely open to involve the participation of men and women belonging to different ideological and cultural positions, aiming at the development of the public school system. Through the promotion of this association Capitini worked for enlarging his idea of

school as inclusive «community», respectful of all the cultural differences and based on the promotion of the «dialogue» as a method for connecting one to the others. Moreover, in his vision, an essential issue was pointed at affirming the importance of teaching «citizenship» conceived as a way for appreciating everyone's contribution in constructing social life.

As a collection, the monographic issue dedicated to *Dismantling Authoritarianism: Change in Education across the Transition from the 1960s to the 1970s*, underlines the wide range of approaches through which it is possible to enlarge the knowledge of an historical framework and a period which can be considered as decisive for promoting the enduring changes in education whose consequences are disquieting the current times. One of the hardest suggestion the issue offers is to go forward in connecting the historical researches on the period not only for the development of a comparative look, but for a more integrated vision of a very complex historical phase still calling for further and deeper studies.

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