

third international conference
of the journal *Scuola Democratica*

education and/for social justice

3-6 June 2024, Cagliari (Italy)

Education is a battleground of power, identity, and inequality. This volume unravels the tensions between exclusion and inclusion, privilege and marginalization, tracing how policies, epistemologies, and ideologies shape who belongs—and who is left behind.

PROCEEDINGS

01

Inequality, Inclusion, and Governance

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Vol. 1
**Inequality,
Inclusion,
and Governance**

Organizers and partners



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LEARNING ABOUT THE QUEER. DECONDITIONING IMAGINARIES AND EDUCATION

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Five years after the research study conducted in Italy and Spain by Vaccarelli, Fiorenza, Di Genova (2021), aimed at studying the attitudes of future teachers and social workers towards educational issues related to sexual orientation – my proposal intends to deepen and explore through a qualitative methodological approach how again the social background, the level and quality of the information possessed correlate with attitudes linked to educational issues related to sexual orientation. The research will be based on focus groups aimed at university students from the degree courses in Educational Sciences, Primary Education and Social Services at the University of L'Aquila. The focus groups will collect qualitative data through comparison and open dialogue between male and female students of the indicated study courses on some specific themes regarding their level of awareness of the LGBTIA+ reality. We will also try to understand whether they are aware of the need for education to assume a queer perspective (Burgio, 2012) that takes the principle of complexity (Borruso, Gallelli, Seveso, 2023) as a shared basis and question ourselves about gender education (Butler, 2014; Nanni, Di Genova, 2023).

LGBTIA+, training, Focus group, pedagogy, queer

INTRODUCTION

The research presented at the Third International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” is the result of some reflections generated by the ongoing debate in both the political and the cultural public sphere on gender discrimination, civil rights of LGBTQI+ people and educational and pedagogical principles to be followed in that regard. From many sides, attempts have been made to propose such guidelines with the necessary openness related to the

historical time we live in, in which the freedom of expression of personal identity – including sexuality – has become the new frontier in the affirmation of human rights.

In the world of education, the attack is aimed not only at materials used in teaching, but also at institutional documents that *simply* talk about gender equality and equal opportunity in the prevention of discrimination and unequal treatment. For example, some passages of the so-called “Legge della Buona Scuola” (*Good School Law*) (Law 107/2015) that explicitly call for ensuring the education for gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination, or the guidelines that the Ministry of Education has issued on this matter (MIUR, 2015a) have come under attack. Under attack, moreover, are certain World Health Organization documents proposing new *standards* for sex education in Europe (with Italy being dormant on this issue in the European scenario) or focusing on educational problems related to homophobic bullying as well.

In recent years, attempts have been made to construct the idea that an alleged gender ideology was circulating (see Accolla, 2015; Grimaldi, 2015), which constitutes a true social danger, aimed at confusing and undermining the ground of both girls’ and boys’ sexual identity. This operation has silenced many voices that, even from below, have experienced embarrassment over this issue. It put school administrators and teachers in a situation of indecision, bewilderment and fear, even where certain pedagogical intentions could have been expressed, and affirmed the paradigm of silence that, according to Pietrantoni, Prati and Saccinto (2011, p. 75), processes the homosexuality as a too delicate and unapproachable taboo subject.

1. WHY SHOULD EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH BE INTERESTED IN THESE QUESTIONS?

Why should pedagogical inquiry – both the more reflective and the experimental one – care about such questions, at the risk of seeming inconvenient? How much do the resulting problems affect those dimensions of education and training that concern educators, teachers and professionals working in social services?

- The pedagogical inquiry should be more concerned with such issues because, in the face of forces that are hostile to change, there is a world in motion. This world is real and manifest in its contradictory nature, and raises every day stringent questions about which substantial actions are needed (let us think about the homophobic bullying in schools and the

discrimination and harassment of LGBTQI+ people);

- Even today, in common sense and social interactions, as gender studies and pedagogy demonstrate (Burgio, 2015; Ulivieri, 2015, Burgio&Lopez, 2023), there is a tendency to naturalize those differences, which are instead the result of a long process of historical, social and cultural construction, implicitly mediated by the education in all its expressions (Nanni, 2023). One can think of “boys” and “girls” games, educational models that are never gender-neutral (Biemmi 2017), conditionings that eventually permeate the body, identity, future perspectives and interpersonal relationships. This is where the – implicit, unaware, “conditioned” – education becomes pedagogy, when it succeeds in reflecting, knowing and deconstructing, with the aim of becoming conscious education again, free from conditioning and respectful of individual inclinations.

The deconstruction of binarism occurs through a process of decolonization of the imagination of professionals with the aim of deconditioning education from gender stereotypes and prejudices – even (or above all) implicit ones.

The researches on this focus were conducted by the pedagogy group at the University of L’Aquila and presented in February at the CIEG (Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos de Género) International Congress “Social Gender, Feminist and Women’s Studies: knowledge, public policies and social justice” at the University of Lisbon.

From these considerations and five years after the research conducted in Italy and Spain by Vaccarelli, Fiorenza, and Di Genova (2021) – aimed at studying the attitudes of future teachers and social workers towards educational issues related to sexual orientation – the following research framework and design are constructed.

The latter started from the assumption that the processes of education and socialization are to some extent predictive of the future construction of attitudes. It was hypothesized that the type of education received at all levels (formal, informal and non-formal) plays an important role in the social reproduction of the *status quo* or, on the opposite, in the establishment of more open and change-oriented positions.

The research focused on the need to explore the level of knowledge of female and male university students – from the degree courses of Science in Primary Education, Science in Education and Science in Social Service at the University of L’Aquila – and how much their level and quality of information about gender

studies were related to educational issues connected to sexual orientation.

2. EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ON GENDER ISSUES

The research was carried out from February to May 2024; for data collection, it involved three focus groups targeting male and female students of the three Bachelor’s degree courses. This was followed by three structured interviews with one member of each group on a voluntary basis to implement some dimensions that emerged from the thematic analysis carried out with the MAXQDA software.

The focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews, each lasting about one hour, were conducted via videoconference using a structured outline that addressed the following questions:

- Does the social background influence the attitudes and opinions related to educational issues connected to sexual orientation? If yes, in which way?
- How would you rate your own level of knowledge on LGBTQIA+ themes?
- Do you think that access to information on the topic is easy and affordable for everyone in any setting (school, university)?
- Do you know the meaning of the term intersectionality?
- As a future educator, teacher, social worker what do you believe is the role of gender education and what practices would you put in place? What do you propose?

The process of content analysis of the texts led to the creation of a codebook (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, McCulloch, 2011) (Tab. 1)

Tab. 1. The Codebook

Category code	Subcode	Excerpts
Considerations about one’s academic path	The internship as an educational experience Need for more practice in the university Positive experiences with courses, workshops or seminars Perceived need for more specific courses Desire to keep the university open to the territory	The internship as an educational experience “Personally, as you say, the internship is the thing that has helped me the most. I’m now in my third year, I’m almost finished, and the

	Need to train trainers/educators	<p>internship is the experience that has helped me the most, because it allowed me to put in place the not only theoretical teachings that we have learned in this course of study and, at the same time, it allowed me to see how some issues are not dealt with or preferred not to be dealt with to avoid any problems. Yet maybe the problem begins right there, as educators we should experiment more, inform ourselves more and then try to put in place new practices that can involve everyone.”</p> <p>Perceived need for more specific courses</p> <p>“Well, maybe I would include a course in gender pedagogy also in the three-year degree course that at any rate can give you at least the basic training to then go further on specific dynamics in the Master’s degree course. I think it would be good, useful, necessary,</p>
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		<p>and could arouse personal interest from each of us”</p> <p>Desire to keep the university open to the territory</p> <p>“Debate is also important because then, I mean maybe, those who come to the university have the opportunity to access certain topics, while still those who do not come to the university risk to be left without this knowledge.”</p> <p>Need to train trainers/educators</p> <p>“In my opinion, before introducing it at the educational level, there should be some training of the people involved on these issues. What I mean is that you can’t disregard something like this, otherwise the education obviously fails, so for sure an investment needs to be made primarily on us and then on those who have to receive and learn these teachings, if we really want a change from this point of view and therefore a greater inclusion.”</p>
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<p>Proposals for educational practices</p>	<p>Use of game-play and drawing during workshops Use of illustrated books Updating textbooks Educating adult parents about gender Implementing the curriculum Addressing issues on a daily basis Starting with children Admitting lack of ideas for educating about gender</p>	<p>Implementing the curriculum/Addressing issues on a daily basis “I think that in the curriculum of any subject, or rather of the subjects that most allow it, like literature, history, art, music, perhaps also mathematics, there have been personalities like Alan Turing, who could be food for thought. It’s good to include them in the curriculum, without bringing them out as exclusive events, but as foundational elements, also talking about personalities or events or works of any kind that relate to the LGBTQ+ world. That could certainly work anyway, because you put it into the curriculum and then it can be passed to the children as something on the agenda, not just as something exceptional. This can be done also with racism, with the Shoah.” “(...) especially, maybe, not to be</p>
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		<p>reduced to just a lecture, on a given day, without a continuation, because in the end that's what it is, but it should be also something a little bit structured and lasting (...)"</p> <p>Admitting lack of ideas for educating about gender "Honestly, I wouldn't be the one to start this." "I couldn't really tell what tools are actually used"</p>
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For all the constructs (supercodes), subcodes have been developed that, in the economy of this paper, will not all be explored here and will relate to:

- Participants' perceptions and sensitivity;
- Participants' statements and stances;
- Biographical experiences;
- Analysis of the emerging topics that demonstrate a familiarity with LGBTQIA+ issues.

The evidence that questions the pedagogical world at various levels is the need for more training and, at the same time, the inability to formulate a structured response to the need itself. The impact this scenario may have in the educational and social professions of the future is evident and requires scientific answers. It is imperative, as this research briefly illustrates and demonstrates, to demand teachers, educators and social workers who have theoretical awareness and adequate knowledge, free from prejudices and pathologizing views related to the gender issue. Academic training must necessarily consider this, and it is necessary to equip oneself (Batini, 2011) regarding modalities, themes and methodologies, especially by decolonizing views and beliefs.

There is a need to reflect on and deliver education from a queer perspective

(Burgio, 2012) that takes the principle of complexity (Borruso, Gallelli, Seveso, 2023) as a shared basis and that investigates the gender education (Butler, 2014; Nanni, Di Genova, 2023). By bearing in mind that there is no single theory of gender, nor a single way to do gender education, and that the debate about genders, identities and intersectional oppressions is in constant evolution, as it is the process of deconstruction and co-reconstruction, educating for genders thus results in educating for multiplicity as an openness to intersectionality.

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