La parità a scuola si riferisce alle politiche di pari opportunità declinate in ambito scolastico, politiche che in parte recepiscono riflessioni e stimoli dal pensiero della differenza di genere e in parte si avvantaggiano di una elaborazione più ampia e articolata. In ogni caso puntano ad individuare dispositivi legislativi, istituzionali, formali con cui produrre un cambiamento verso un più attento riconoscimento delle differenze, un irreversibile superamento di discriminazioni, iniquità, ingiustizie, garantendo il diritto all'espressione e realizzazione di sé a tutte e tutti.

La scuola può infatti promuovere un profondo rinnovamento culturale, rivolgendosi a intere generazioni di bambini e bambine, ragazzi e ragazze e alle loro famiglie. Essa rappresenta il primo e fondamentale attore impegnato nell'inclusione sociale, a partire dalle diverse provenienze socio-culturali di alunni e alunne. Possiede gli "anticorpi" per correggere gli errori e i problemi che nascono all'interno della società. Nell'argomentare queste posizioni, l'intervento riepiloga per sommi capi l'orientamento delle politiche europee e nazionali in relazione al binomio educazione scolastica e differenza di genere. Al contempo tenta di problematizzare alcune condizioni imprescindibili perché l'attenzione al genere possa promuovere un percorso di civiltà, di maturità e responsabilizzazione di un Paese.

**Parole chiave:** scuola, pari opportunità, discriminazioni

**Keywords:** school, equal opportunities, discriminations

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1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND GENDER DIFFERENCE

First of all: equal opportunities in education or equal opportunities at school? Assuming that we overcome the contrast between schooling and education with the synthesis according to which teaching means both schooling and educating, in the processes of teachers' discipline-based training not unbound from the didactic one, where do we place the competence for the critical reading of knowledge which is never neutral as it always expresses a gender rooting, or even an invisible sexist basis? Moreover, what tools should be placed at disposal of a teacher wanting to act as a "researcher in situation" (Dewey) and rigorously proceed with method in this unveiling activity? Again, if knowledge linked with gender cultures history affected the processes of understanding between men and women, and if the incidence of stereotypes and prejudices in the processes of representation and communication between sexes contributed to the tragically increasing phenomenon of violence on women, would it be acceptable to have a kind of education to difference endowed with discretionary power, left to personal initiative, deprived of systematic comparison and rigorous and substantiated evaluation? (as, incidentally, this kind of training is no obligation for none of the educational levels, even though in every context a dimension is considered unavoidable: we always deal with children, teenagers, men and women who are influenced by the prevailing thought and the culture in which they are immersed).

These are only some of the questions emerging when approaching the issue; for them there seems to be no clear course directions. Plans and publications have been produced; collaborations, synergies and network have been started. This has certainly modified perceptions, increased sensitivity and sharpened one's critical attitude. It is likely to have left an indelible mark in more than a subject and, based on this same mark, views, actions and attention, life plans and future choices will aim at a less discriminated and fairer world. A quick search on the web enables us to find a countless amount of experiences, studies, didactic and educational pathways dealing with gender difference in schools, knowledge as well as male and female identity. Less and less in fact do we get surprised when hearing about equal opportunities in the learning environment, in the workplace and at home. It is not a matter to underestimate.

Nevertheless, there are at least two reasons for which it is not out of place to think establishing equal opportunities in schools has only partly succeed.

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The first reason concerns the building of knowledge. Western culture was built on the paradigm of totality or thought of the One. The male subject represented the hinge, the measure and the reference for social organization. In a parallelism between cultural and socio-political power, the male approach to knowledge emerged as rule and possession\(^6\); through it, the male subject has structured the symbolic and material order to his own advantage. Criticism of this way of thinking, also supported by school equality policies, took the shape of disciplinary pathways aimed at showing "the other half sky": by bringing to light official hidden and complementary versions of history, literature, art..., by re-reading Ministry's school programs sections according to a "gender perspective" aimed at highlighting male over-representation and the contribution of men and women – in this case too highlighted differently – to the development of mankind\(^6\). History was written by men, following typically male parameters: politics, war, power, violence... Immerged in a daily living whose plot had been affected by men, who did not acknowledge their vital function, women seem to have never really existed, if not as a stool at the foot of history\(^7\). This has deprived women of the right to memories, thereby confining them in the desolation of silence\(^7\). Not only: every time women realized something memorable, they did it by adapting themselves to male patterns. Bringing to light the presence of women in history and establishing a different way to be in the world for them was certainly a crucial and necessary step yet still dangerously anchored to a binary, dichotomous and oppositional logic, which by means of an additional operation broadened the representational model – from one to one plus one – without too much concern for educating to destructuring and restructuring, responsibly assuming one's own diversity, without teaching to conceive one's own identity as a dynamic combination of different belongings, avoiding to enhance the strict adherence to a certain pattern and use it as a tool for exclusion.

2.1 The risk of fundamentalisms

An excessive emphasis in redressing male and female representations has spread over time the belief that this was the target to aim at, whereas a more significant gain would have been the skill to read critically and dynamically the pro-


cesses by means of which men and women fitted or fit into society, taking an active part in it, determining evolutions and changes, having access to the opportunities it offers, realizing what they can be and what they are able to do\textsuperscript{72}, what kind of freedom they can make use of\textsuperscript{73}, how they build and rebuild their identity in that game of censure and acknowledgments which are constantly urged by the presence of others. This is the aim of gender studies, to which equal opportunities policies in schools have often appealed, that do not represent a particular subject area, nor do they deal with a mere compensation logic concerning the prevailing culture. They rather pertain to certain behaviour, a cross-disciplinary way of looking at sciences beginning from the study of gender identity, its historical contextualization, the social and cultural formation of both sexes, and the kind of relationships existing between them\textsuperscript{74}. Along with generation and cultural origin, gender is a category of analysis useful not only to understand reality around us but also to develop effective public and private policies concerning health, education, work organization, social support measures for families etc. Gender Studies are based in the first place on some crucial assumptions: human beings are always situated (first of all within a body, then in history, culture and a land); the alleged universalism of cultures and social rules is actually an abstract concept which setting reality aside mortifies it. With regard to our corporeity, culture is anything but meaningless.

An additional logic – namely the unveiling of "another" truth added to the known and incomplete one – simultaneously comes from and contributes to an identity representation which is fundamentalist, static and definitory: male is…(thus it can do), female is…(thus it can do or rather, in a society deeply affected by male social dominance, cannot do). Definitions are however arbitrary; they serve the purpose of simplifying the complexity of existence, but they do not give reasonable explanation of it.

\textsuperscript{72} Here explicit reference is made to the "approach based on skills" according to a gender perspective proposed by Martha Nussbaum (cf. M. C. Nussbaum, \textit{Diventare persone. Donne e universalità dei diritti}, il Mulino, Bologna, 2001).


2.2 The respect of identity dynamics as the basis for equality

In real life, clear boundaries do not exist. There exist continuity and contiguity, overlapping, contamination, ambivalence, stories... affected by our segmentations and definitions; as a result, the more relationships we establish with words, the more we believe to know. However, by doing so, a dangerous correspondence between being a gender and being able to do things has become consolidated. Passing over the critical aspects brought about by this connection (now that the gender category itself allows new interpretations, the whole system built on it is falling apart), female emancipation, which is one of the objectives of the pathways, merely adjusted the basic model, with the addition of some further specifications: "women can also do/be..." and "men can also do/be...", with its relative confirmation: "being/doing so does not mean being less women/men", and more complex questions such as: "is it possible to enter traditionally male/female worlds without altering one's own nature, without aping and conforming to others, and preserve an original identity, despite legitimately carrying out unconventional behaviours?". In fact, all these positions fail on an epistemological error, establishing a correspondence between abstraction and universalism, and highlight the difficulty of facing concrete otherness, deprived of the dignity of difference. This deprivation represents a form of violent discrimination against the concreteness of the real, which is removed on behalf of abstract normativity. A more productive and respectful conceptualization of identity not unbound from difference is one which diverges or even aims at destructuring the essentialist identity paradigm currently shown with all its limitations by the Gender debate (or rather by its deliberate and instrumental distortion): what we usually mean by identity and relate to that persistance over time granted by name and surname is not the solid and static representation of a subject, but a process of relentless changing, an incessant sequence of new versions of the self linked to one another, similar but not identical, not referring to a pre-established "original", a real and authentic "essential". As Hannah Arendt writes, "being and appearing co-

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76 Cf. Giaccardi, Gender, non solo ideologia, in "Avvenire" of the 31st July 2015.

77 The raised issue is serious and deserves the highest attention, beginning from the basic question: "what kind of relationship do we have to maintain and cultivate with our biologic dimension, in a time when the boundaries of the 'natural' have been redefined and are constantly forced in every direction?" (cf. C. Giaccardi, cit.), yet the effort to keep on searching with a willingness to a calm and peaceful dialogue among different positions has determined hardening and uncooperative behaviour, violent accusations and unreasonable oppositions on the part of some social groups.

incide"\textsuperscript{79}: there do not exist abstract and universal substances to which human singularities can be related. Mankind plurality and specificity represent the precondition underlying human existence; this summarizes satisfactorily the inextricable tangle of versions making up the substance of the subject, as well as the mobile and elaborate system of his/her identity. The structure of this identity is relational, namely the result of the transformations implemented or undergone by the subject over encounters and experiences in life. Each single individual is born from the physical intercourse between two different persons; for this reason he/she bears in him/herself the difference, changing and evolving by means of a steady "differentiation" from the previous version (which version the following one resembles), structuring oneself through the interaction with other men and women in the flesh, in a movement of openness and disclosing representing the only possible freedom: subject to cultural conditioning yet not completely dominated by it. To this lifelong process there contribute history, culture, religion, upbringing/education, models, personal events, as well as the fact of being situated in a given time, space and body. In any case, a total and predefined (predictable, prescriptible) adherence between biological and human dimension (which is first of all symbolic, relational, emotional and spiritual) is never to be found. Still, it is precisely in the creative interpretation of this sense excess that everyone's originality finds its place and materializes.

3. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN SCHOOLS: A WASTED CHANCE

The second reason why equal opportunities policies in schools are still ineffective is given by the lack of a conclusive reform aiming at:

- training all teachers for a non-sexist use of the Italian language, a critical reading of knowledge and sufficient grasp on the processes for personal identity/difference formation in children and teenagers;

- supplying schools, at all levels of education, with tools and teaching aids in order to instill the respect of differences; tools diversified according to age to foster relational skills as well as a fair representation of men and women in history and knowledge;

- planning successful measures of interaction between schools and other research institutions, in order to start teaching experimentations as well as pathways for the assessment and documentation of their effectiveness.

Unveiling processes about the hegemony of a symbolic neutral-universal-male order have brought about minimal changes if compared to the efforts made. The scantiness of the funds provided for research, the absence of longitudinal stud-

ies, the shortage of coordinated, systemic and systematic interventions in the field of pedagogy have prevented from interpreting gender issues as a transformation process by means of which people can build new forms of relationship and sharing.

3.1 Ambivalence, collusion and complicity

In education contexts there persists fictitious neutrality about knowledge transmission, a silence accomplice of school\(^80\) which, keeping quiet about these topics, ends up by legitimating the already existent. Despite a kind of know how pedagogy which seems to have won places and teaching customs, the idea of school as a place for working out how to be, the "moral place" where sociocultural changes become learned words to support individual growth, has disappeared.

As Adrianne Rich\(^81\) already pointed out decades ago, school is a place of women, yet female teachers are reluctant to broach subjects and face tasks pertaining sexed pedagogy, as it compels to unpopular metareading and forces to think back to one’s own personal life history: not many among them feel like undertaking this path, maybe because most of them consider it not so interesting or unessential. Then, it is crucial to free oneself from some conventional behaviors by stating for instance that care is culture, complex culture gathering knowledge and feelings, a value increasing the meaning of what we do. Not only: it is necessary to state that there also exists male care, aimed at opposing men’s absence in care places. In nursery and primary schools, men as teachers are totally absent; this fact is corroborated by the number of students attending the Faculty of Primary Education.

We need relations and reciprocity cultures, grammars by which to read stories and contaminations, lowering the level of tension by boosting that of respect. As Barbara Mapelli writes: "The fact of becoming man or woman over the same life implies several direction changes, acquires new significances and various emotional nuances. It is a non-linear process where the same person, at different times, can identify with the sex models offered or regain his/her own identification by rejecting enforced stereotypes. What is certain is that the plan of the self as a woman or as a man is a daily weaving-work, which gathers in its stitches eve-

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\(^{80}\) With the emerging, in the Seventies, of a new female subjectiveness disclosing the outward naturalness of power relations, what became visible and explicit was difference thought by women; men’s experience remained unsaid, trapped in the patriarchal system in crisis which conceals its partiality. The male gender issue appears thus as an invisible and unresolved knotty question, as if the linguistic, symbolic and institutional constructions produced by it had made men invisible to themselves. In fact the omnipotence of male words on moral, science, politics and culture goes along with the widespread silence of men on themselves.

ry minute detail, every small choice, every surrender or conflict, rebellion or complicity."82

To understand possibilities and limitations of one's own becoming is the basic learning for new births: the development of an existential plan interlacing autonomy-intimacy and dependence-recognition of the other and of the self within the other.83

3.2 For situational, recursive and destructuring education

Identity and difference learning must provide everyone with the resources to understand themselves in their own complexity, in order for each individual to accept and firmly share his/her frailty, without referring to strong or ready-made models. History teaches if it does not become a trap, pull of the past or claim on future. We need thus methods of continuing situational training, beginning from the critical deconstruction of the hardened forms through which gender identities are culturally and socially shaped. A kind of training instructing how to connect the immaterial – conditioning, past legacies, pressure and uncertainty spoiling the general cultural climate – with the concreteness of existence, life cycle pedagogy with family pedagogy, so as to realize how family past experiences are imprinted in the building of the self, social pedagogy with school pedagogy, to understand that relationships among subjects are encouraged by environments which are apparently far or other than daily life contexts – such as media messages –, yet directly incisive. In order for change to take root in everyday life, in interpersonal relations and in all spheres of existence, it is necessary to act more radically on media forms – which spread in schools from the outside world and in the former become not infrequently ratified –, which more than others affect imagination by influencing thoughts and behaviours. School is not the only one responsible for the persisting of roles and stereotypes based on sex; however, every time it does not blame and simply ignore them, it legitimizes what can be defined as the invisible evidence which through fictitious neutrality proposes gender rules whose power increases as they remain in the unsaid. We must change the perspective through which didactics not only critically re-reads over disciplinary contents evaluating implied authorizations and gender censorship – for instance, how many and which women, how many and which men are represented in textbooks, with what activities they are associated… – but also follows unforeseeable and complex paths winding among the events of every little boy and girl, individual biographies which have left a mark in official history and the quest for forms and means to express an original evolutionary potential which is part of everyone.

83 *Ibidem*, p. 32.
However, what kind of education has been thought, which pathways, which tools have been developed to carry out this learning? What places have been envisaged as rooms for oneself and distances to be crossed in order to get closer and meet? Within a complex and controversial yet certainly productive and rich debate, what is the commitment of the institutions in charge of guaranteeing equal opportunities in schools with regard to the issue?

4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICIES IN EUROPE AND ITALY

Since the world conference on women held in Beijing in 1995, despite the fact that one of the first strategic goals was precisely the reform of the educational system and the verification of its effectiveness, interventions focused on the gender issue applied in the field of teaching have been entirely neglected if compared with equal opportunities policies in the working world and in institutional political representation. In Italy as well as in Europe, close attention is given to economy, to work and the need to boost women's employment in the sphere of economic development, namely the sciences and technologies. The measures undertaken aim at including women in executive bodies, as well as in decision-making, financial and power institutions, but they are not intended to implement a deeper transformation of these organs. The meaning attributed to gender policies in education lost its vigour on the interpretation, which sees the role played by the educational world as functional to economic competitiveness, and considers school gender policies promoters of the access of girls to science and technology professions.

Since the treaty of Lisbon84, gender issues have indeed been included in the agenda of the Committee for the Council of Europe, yet in a discontinuous and heterogeneous way, without methods to record impact and results.

The European Road Map 2006-2010, a kind of equal opportunities schedule, denounced how the path of women's civil rights had still a long way to go even in modern and democratic Europe, and urged Member States to concretely start a series of projects aiming at actual equality. This document was a sort of manifesto not only for the institutions, but also for all those educational agencies (schools, associations and the social community) appointed to the building of a democratic and sympathetic culture, by promoting a more considerable presence of women in the economic and political processes. In particular, the Road Map work program identified two directions to overcome gender stereotypes: one for students and one for the teaching staff, concerning initiatives of teachers' training and guidance for teenagers. In the report dating 2008, but especially in the following papers by the European Commission dealing with gender awareness

84 The Treaty was approved in 2007 and became effective in 2009; it establishes the European Constitution and strengthens the democratic principle and the defence of the fundamental rights.
through the school system, particular stress was put on topics such as conciliation and men's participation; once again, cultural activity was subordinated to these objectives. No major role was recognized to the need to combine gender and education policies. However, this does not mean that single Countries did not act in this direction.

The increasing phenomenon of violence on women is likely to have given new importance to education and the school system, since on 12 March 2013 the European Parliament approved a legislative Resolution on eliminating gender stereotypes in the European Union; a document indicating real actions to undertake with regard to mass media and culture, education and training, the labour market and the economic and political decision-making process. In that part dealing with education, it was highlighted how school programs can significantly perpetuate gender discriminations when not rightly oriented to the overcoming of stereotypes based on sex. Member States were therefore asked to assess syllabi and textbooks contents in view of a general reform leading to the inclusion of gender issues, as a cross topic, in all didactic materials, both in terms of gender stereotypes elimination and higher visibility of the contribution and role of women in history, literature and art, beginning from the early stages of education. Member States were also pressed for specific orientation courses, in primary and secondary schools as well as in higher education institutions, for the purpose of informing young people about the negative consequences of gender stereotypes and encouraging them to undertake study and professional pathways by overcoming conventional outlooks, which tend to identify these pathways as typically «male» or «female».

4.1 Some significant experiences in Europe

Examples of significant and advanced experiences concerning education policy can be found in northern European countries; here the research carried out by Gender Studies (evolved from Women's studies) contributes to shaping teachers' training and didactic experimentation.

In Denmark, for instance, gender studies boast a well-established and long tradition, high quality research pathways conducted in specific centres and within university, in disciplinary and cross-disciplinary contexts. As in other Countries, research here operates primarily in the social sciences and humanities. Thanks to the considerable support from the State, there have been developed national networks and coordination systems of research centres and associations setting up studies on a national and international scale, and there have been established bodies and tools for disseminating the achieved results. Moreover, important national archives and databases have been implemented, while standard and periodical publications have been spread all over the Country. Despite public financing, no "institutionalization" of gender studies has occurred within University; as a result, Denmark does not have a complete program about gender studies, neither
in social sciences or humanities nor within faculties at different academic levels. However, the considerable investment on gender studies has brought about increasing general interest within the Country for this research field, even though many boys and girls keen on this topic decide to continue their studies abroad. It has to be added that, in recent years, the Danish debate on equality has sensibly grown weak and, along with the diminishing of feminist movements, research too has assumed more theoretic features. Significant progress has been made in Sweden, instead, where the current government and five among the biggest political parties declare themselves feminist. In Sweden since 1980 the Centres for Gender Research (inaugurated at the end of the Seventies by a study group of scholars coming from the Country's most renowned universities) have received considerable support from the State, becoming an authoritative and weighty point of reference for stimulating interdisciplinary and field research. In addition to these cross-disciplinary centres, research on gender issues has developed in most universities within traditional departments, as an integral part of the various disciplinary sectors. This has led to a high-level research organization and to the consolidation of gender studies as an independent subject. Gender research has thus developed both as a free discipline and as a multidisciplinary field. During the Nineties, this research field, which has assumed the designation of "Gender Science", became established within the university offer and today degree courses, post-graduation courses and PhD programs can be found in almost every university and campus of the Country. The State has never ceased to support gender studies because it has recognized their importance in promoting gender equality in higher education as well as in society. In addition to that, gender scholars have founded an association, the National Association of Gender Researchers, with individual subscription. This association strengthens the cooperation among gender researchers and facilitate the activation of research pathways and joint actions, where necessary. The fact that research committees and Swedish authorities have had long-term strategies for developing gender research has thus proved to be of the highest importance. It must be said, however, that in the latest research plan by the government, the gender issue was scarcely mentioned, despite the fact that the European Union explicitly asks for the gender perspective to be included in all research pathways.


86 Gender research has considerably influenced knowledge development in many research fields. Only to mention a few examples: the literary canon has changed since it was analyzed from the point of view of gender perspective. Moreover, gender research has also altered the way historical studies are carried out, and research pathways in medicine and biology have benefitted from gender perspectives unveiling sex-based prejudices in the understanding of research outcomes.
Finally, the Norwegian experience has pointed out how training courses for educators and teachers should elaborate specific didactic programs and support the development of relational competences considering gender\(^{87}\), while fostering research and dissemination of knowledge, methodologies and teaching/learning tools able to capture gender and individual differences. In Norway too, State support has considerably contributed to the development of Gender Studies, which, in turn, have positively affected more equal social policies\(^{88}\).

Overall, as far as gender studies are concerned, we can say that there is a North European "bottom-up" model, with research plans starting from below (Denmark), whereas the Swedish and Norwegian models are based on gender equality studies at a high level of institutionalization.

In the latest years, however, the worldwide economic crisis has determined spending cuts in the research field.

In addition, also the European Framework program Horizon 2020 has drastically reduced funding for the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) by re-routing it towards scientific and technological research. This leads us to think that the gender perspective still arouses resistance, maybe because in comparison with other study fields it challenges social norms and power allocation. Therefore, it is key to consider this resistance towards gender research, which bears everywhere witness to the need for social changes. What is so "destabilizing" in plans on education to differences that such an opposition shall arouse? Probably the freedom and power renegotiation – at different levels – it implies\(^{89}\). A comparative study carried out across 11 European Countries has shown indeed that the level of institutionalization of gender studies in a Country – specific research Centres,

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\(^{88}\) "In Norway, state feminism has been an important dimension of the national political context for the development of gender studies. The concept of state feminism was introduced by Her- nes (1987) to refer to how the Scandinavian welfare states have furthered feminism "from above" through womenfriendly welfare and gender equality policies in conjunction with "feminization from below" and feminization of the welfare state professions (Holst 2005). State feminism has created a structure of possibilities for women's and gender studies to develop and be institutionalized in the academia, while gender research has importantly influenced state politics in areas such as childcare, education and politics" (Christine M. Jacobsen – Norway, in Pauline Stoltz, Christine M. Jacobsen, Lena Gemzöe and Margaretha Fahlgren, in Bencivenga R., Perspectives on gender studies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, in "AG About Gender - Rivista internazionale di studi di genere", Italia, 4, May 2015, p. 234. Available at: <http://www.aboutgender.unige.it/index.php/generis/article/view/290/213>.

\(^{89}\) Gender relations, as full of tensions around the symbolic forms of power, can be considered a total social field (cf. Moi, T., Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's. Sociology of Culture, New Literary History, v. 22, n. 4, 1991, pp. 1017-1049), intersecting all other research areas. Therefore, it is necessary to increase gender oriented research, by examining the reproduction of sexed social hierarchies and sexuality policies.
high education institutions and University – is directly proportional to the inci-
desiveness of the equal opportunities policies implemented in that same Country\textsuperscript{90},
namely level of democracy as well as critical power management. The analysis of
the sex-based organization of society and the impact of gender policies enables
fighting disparities which still weigh heavily in particular on women.

4.2 Gender Studies and school policies in Italy

In Italy, the physiognomy characterizing gender studies is anything but well
defined. Despite remarkable research results in the field of Gender Studies, the
outcome about transmission and training is marked by discontinuity. On the one
hand, we record high moments of deep involvement among different generations
(qualified journals and publications, seminars, summer schools, conferences, doc-
torates); on the other hand, we report an erratic availability and programming of
courses and research groups in many important universities of the Country, along
with scanty opportunities for young women to hold leadership positions\textsuperscript{91}. A sur-
vey of the web pages of campuses across the Country confirms that gender studies
are widespread almost everywhere, acknowledged by a not very reactive academic
establishment which accepts them with resigned paternalism and/or indifference. Be-
side a considerable amount of single-subject courses and specialized teaching pro-
grams, there also exist top quality courses, seminars, post-graduation specializa-
tions and intercollegiate doctoral studies, as documented by the good research out-
comes achieved over the last two decades by many young men and women who
have attended these education cycles; it is a clear demonstration that in recent years
much effort has been made to establish very serious educational pathways, which
are in no way inferior to those offered by other Countries.

The halo of skepticism around gender studies is due to the deep crisis affect-
ing the whole political, institutional and cultural system, which seems to put in
cold storage every possibility to effect changes. For almost fifty years, besides,
the attempt has been made to take stock of the knowledge established thanks to
the enthusiasm of feminists acting in universities, who were persuaded of the
huge potential of these studies to criticize the idea of arrangements based on dis-
ciplines and subjects. Today this enthusiasm is seems to be increasingly, de-
meaned by a system of more conventional academic customs\textsuperscript{92}. In the mid-
Nineties, the debate tried to make a distinction between assimilation, integration


\textsuperscript{91} Cf. P. Di Cori in the paper presented at the conference \textit{On ne naît pas... on le devient}. I gender studies e il caso italiano, dagli anni Settanta a oggi, tra liberazione sessuale e nuovi tabù, Université Stendhal-

\textsuperscript{92} Ibidem.
or independence of gender studies within curricular organization. After years, after several useless attempts to reform the didactic 'machine', these three options are still unresolved issues.

School equality policies should be supported and fostered by the Department for equal opportunities (in agreement – of course – with the Department for education), which however does not has funds to promote scientifically important research plans with system impact\textsuperscript{93}, able to alter the cultural paradigm within the school educational system, beginning from teaching staffs' training at all levels\textsuperscript{94}.

A Bill (n.1680) presented on 18 November 2014 and proposing the "Introduction of gender education and perspective in the activities and didactic materials of the national education system schools and within universities" is currently waiting to be approved by the Senate. Aim of the Bill is the "integration of the educational offer of school curricula at all levels with the interdisciplinary teaching of gender education, the elimination of stereotypes, prejudices, habits, traditions and other socio-cultural practices based on people differentiation according to sex, and the overcoming of obstacles limiting the complementarity between sexes within society" (Art.1). The Bill envisages "the setting up of compulsory training courses or courses integrating the already existing programs, for educators and teaching staffs" (Art.3). In addition, by referring to the "POLITE" project (see note 23), it provides for the adoption within education institutions at all levels of textbooks and didactic materials with the self-certification of publishers committed to the respect of the guidelines included in the self-regulation code «Equal opportunities in textbooks» (Art. 5).

The achievement of equality and the overcoming of discriminations based on sex, as well as various forms of violence affecting women and girls, have to be fulfilled first of all through a cultural change aimed at eradicating stereotypes and static representations of reality. The education intervention represents the only means able to give back to world and gender representation profundity and complexity, equality and difference; besides, education, especially when commit-

\textsuperscript{93} One of the few, considerable efforts made in this respect was the project "POLITE: Pari Opportunità nei Libri di Testo", promoted in 1996 by the Premiership – Department for rights and equal opportunities along with the Associazione Italiana Editori, and included in the IV mid-term EU action plan program on equal opportunities between women and men 1996-2000. Polite is a European project for school textbook publishing self-regulation aimed at fostering a cultural, didactic and publishing reflection to rethink textbooks and present women and men, main characters of culture, history, politics and science, without sex-based discriminations. The project has produced a "self-regulation" Code as well as two vademecums for the purpose of requalifying didactic materials in view of an increased attention towards gender identity. (cf. www.retepariopportunità.it and http://www.ub.es/geocris/-xcol/163.htm; Progetto Polite. Saperi e libertà: maschile e femminile nei libri, nella scuola, nella vita. Vademecum I e II. Milano, Associazione Italiana Editori, 2000/2001). However, the Self-regulation Code has never become effective and the situation concerning textbooks has remained unaltered.

\textsuperscript{94} Cf.: http://www.pariopportunità.gov.it/index.php/istituzione-e-competenze
ted to the overcoming of stereotypes and the use of a language respectful of identities and differences, proves the most powerful instrument to change the world and create a fairer and less violent society.

5. RESTART FROM RESISTANCE

Teachers certainly play a major role in school educational practices dealing with gender differences. Is it yet possible to educate on difference respect and stereotypes decoding, if teaching professionals lack the experience of a specific path in basic and continuing vocational training? If they do not have teaching aids and didactic tools useful to unveil the fictitious neutrality of knowledge? If they are not able to reassure, or better still, involve parents in the usefulness of this investment? Is it possible to start methodologies of situational training to test new model more respectful of differences if basic training is for the most part far from critical pedagogy on gender, impersonal, very little based on experience and verified, and not so open to the different stories of boys and girls, different biographies, through a narrative and autobiographical approach?

With regard to these issues, the impression is that we have always to start all over again. Certainly, the power of stereotypes and prejudices as means of social cohesion contrasts with the flimsiness of emerging thoughts and customs; yet, it is maybe advisable to take note of the fact that the censored stakes are higher than the explicit ones, and that – as M. Grazia Contini pointed out in a book written some years ago – behind the flaunted desire for alliances, there lies hidden a much stronger wish for disalliances95.

What competences are needed to educate on the recognition of gender difference in its history and as rights practice? Which role can University play in this teaching staff training? What influence could be exercised by the setting up of research linking up various disciplinary fields of study, spaces and subjects within and outside the education environment, focusing on catalysts for change in the school system – for instance with regard to the feminization of a good part of the educational pathways – and outside, in connection with professions, cooperation at home, contrasting iniquities and violence…?

Since education has to do with rules and with learning how to comply with them, education to differences opens spaces of meditation on the present system of relationships existing between sexes and the prevailing male and female models, which are iniquitous because compulsive and a source of personal and social distress, witnessed by the many suicides of teenagers, victims of bullying, along with data about gender violence and the amount of feminicides, to mention only a few aspects describing the Italian contemporary scenario.

REFERENCES


