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Teacher Training for Secondary Schools in Italy: Professional Role and Reflective Practice

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Abstract: In the first part of this contribution the main guidelines that have characterised the training of secondary teachers in Italy in the last 15 years will be drawn. They will highlight the legislative and regulatory issues for the completion of university education in order to gain access to the paths of employment in secondary schools. In particular, we will emphasise the organisational and political conditions that have given form and content to the paths of specialisation/ teaching qualification and, on the basis of a widely established literature in the current debate, we will reflect on how much and how these settings correspond to precise cultural views that feed a certain idea of school, of teacher and ultimately of society. In the second part, starting from direct experience of initial training for secondary school teachers, we will resume the steps of a reflective practice on the political and cultural role for the teacher, whose valorisation must be explicitly invoked in the context of training and refresher courses, to complete the process of professional preparation adequate for the challenges of our time.

Keywords: Teacher education; Secondary school; Intellectual work; Knowledge society; Reflective practice.

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1. Training courses for secondary school teachers in Italy since 1990

In Italy, the debate on secondary school teacher training was aroused at the end of the sixties, after decades of substantial silence (Bonetta, 1997; Santamaita, 2000; Santoni & Santamaita, 2011). In correspondence with the period of social and political movements of nineteen sixty-eight, there strongly emerged the need to rethink the training agencies in view of a substantial enlargement of the right to education and academic success for a much wider band of the population, in reality excluded or rejected by an education system marred by transmissivity and selectivity (Ulivieri, 2001). It seems clear that a key issue for the renewal of the very idea of school and education consists precisely of teacher training. On the one hand, it is the very same teachers who request a greater recognition of their skills and in general of the social role they hold in the context of a changing

society, in which training needs emerge strongly and in an ever transversal way; on the other, there is the awareness that this recognition comes through a strengthening of professionalism and expertise that the teacher is required to master in order to effectively play that role. A specialist expertise of a disciplinary nature is not enough and one begins to reflect on the need to expand the socio-psycho-pedagogical training of secondary teachers. Attention was turned toward crucial, previously unmentioned issues: the communicative relationship and in general the management of relational dynamics within the class, the importance of planning, and the need for preparation not just theoretical and hence the completion of training, through probation, in methodological and educational aspects (Franceschini, 2006). It became clear that the completion and constant updating of training could no longer be left to the voluntary initiative of the individual teacher.

The season that opened at the end of the sixties was very slow in bearing fruit, if we think of the policies for the training and recruitment of teachers, which had basically remained unchanged for a long time. The decades of 1970-1980 were on the other hand an interesting period in which the issue of initial and ongoing secondary teacher training was addressed through significant experiences of bottom up experimentation, promoted by universities and that anticipated the necessary ministerial legislative measures. It was the teachers who entered the school after experiencing alternative experiences of training that brought with them a very significant wealth of educational and teaching renewal, while the system remained essentially still blocked. During the seventies they began to experiment with alternative ways of «schooling», based in particular on the academic contributions of the critical pedagogy put forward by Dewey and other activists, which aim to dismantle the system of the Gentile mould of teaching and school practice from within the school itself. They began to promote and experiment with alternative models to those of the rigidly traditional school, such as open classes and group work, workshops and creative expression; they began to shake the authoritarian setting of the rigidly adult-class model of management, focusing on the participation and active involvement of pupils and through communicative methods that used dialogue and were democratic; one began to think about the school and the classroom as a learning community (Ulivieri, 2008).

In the eighties the bottom up experiments did not end, and in coincidence with a society struck by rapid but inhomogeneous cultural, economic, social and technological development, it became necessary to reap the best fruits and to put them to best use by bringing about a deep and comprehensive reform of teacher training and, ultimately, to rethink a professionalism that was too complex to be built in a voluntary form and by virtue of self-training experiences. That is, it became necessary to give coherent and organic answers to the new questions

of professional training, in a social context in which mere knowledge of the discipline was inadequate for the demands of the school which was increasingly made subject to a complex democratic society struggling with the demands posed by the development and by emergencies arising from its contradictions. These were indeed issues that a mass society is to ask itself at the time when the traditional school is called on to become a means of mass education, in the most progressive sense of the term (Alberici, 2002; Orefice, 2011).

It was not until 1990 that in Italy the first organic law reforming the initial and vocational training of secondary teachers was passed. Law no. 341 of 19 November 1990 reformed the university system, entrusting the professional training of secondary teachers to universities, called on to organise a post-graduate school, two-years in length and divided into different courses, depending on the teaching subject, with common transversal courses referring to the science of education and teaching methods, and laboratory activities and mandatory teaching practice.

The path that led to the implementation of Law 341/1990 was, however, longer and more hindered than expected (Ulivieri, 2012). It took a little less than ten years, characterised by multiple changes of the heads of the Ministries of Education and the University, until in 1999 the minister Luigi Berlinguer was able to enact the implementing decrees for the didactic organisation of the Postgraduate School: the so-called SSIS were activated with the Decree of 27 July 1999.

A School of Specialisation was established in every Italian region. Access to the schools was with a programmed number and took place through a competition; both the number of students admitted and the areas of specialisation were established according to actual regional needs. The two-year course was divided into four semesters. The courses of pedagogy, education, psychology, sociology, history of education, school legislation and environmental education were common to all specialties. These were accompanied by courses in the specific subject, regarding all the historical, epistemological, methodological and teaching aspects of the subject, as well as workshop activities of a practical and experiential type held by secondary school teachers especially appointed to the role of supervisors. Finally, teaching practice activities were foreseen to be compulsorily carried out in secondary schools affiliated to the school and carried out with the collaboration of teachers-tutors who accompanied and supported the trainee in his/her path of participative insertion in the management of teaching in the classroom.

The planning of the SSIS was therefore very clear: the university teachings, transversal and subject based, were integrated with the educational workshops for

each subject and completed the theoretical training of future teachers. In turn, specialist university education and workshop activities found a direct possibility for concrete experimentation in school practice thanks to the experience of teaching practice carried out directly in the classroom (Ulivieri, Giudizi & Gavazzi, 2002). From the organisational point of view, an interesting synergy was also achieved in this way between academia and the real school: right at the nerve centre of teacher training one of the major instances of renewal expressed in the two previous decades found important recognition.

At the end of two years of specialisation, and after passing the final tests, the student obtained the title of certified secondary teacher in his/her class of specialisation and rightfully entered the recruitment lists. As for the specialised skills expected on graduation, the Ministerial Decree of 26 May 1998 clearly stated the characteristics of the professional profile of the secondary school teacher: adequate knowledge of the subject area of competence, with reference to historical and epistemological aspects of the subject(s) and of teaching; ability to take on the training and psychosocial needs of students, through soft skills focused on listening, observation and understanding; availability and aptitude for teamwork and collegial collaboration with families; openness to the issues of gender difference and cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious difference; ability to cultivate their own scientific field of reference with emphasis on new acquisitions and new cognitive developments; know how to make the pupils participate in their own path to success at school, also focusing on self-orientation (Biagioli, 2004); organisational and planning skills (Trisciuzzi & Franceschini, 2001); reflective skills for self-evaluation, updating and improvement (Striano, 2001).

Simonetta Ulivieri, coordinator of the Florentine seat of the Tuscany SSIS from 1999 to 2007, recently expressed this opinion on the experience of the Postgraduate School, permanently discontinued in 2008 with Decree No. 112 of June 25, 2008 (2012, p. 25):

By linking teaching and subject contents, integrating in a synergistic way competences that come from academia and from the secondary school, the SSIS found its full and strong legitimacy and was recognised for its excellence in training. It should not be forgotten that thanks to the SSIS a different generation of more open and better prepared «teachers» made its entry into the secondary school, a generation that was trained in a new way thanks to the Postgraduate School and the key contribution found in it in the Science of Education.

The experience of SSIS having ended, the training of secondary school teachers remained *de facto* suspended until the adoption of the Regulations for the initial training of teachers with the Ministerial Decree no. 249 of 10 September 2010. Now the path of the secondary teacher training is organised as follows.

After obtaining a master's degree (two years), which completes the first level of higher education consisting of a three-year degree, after passing an entrance examination, one goes on to a further level: the Active Internship Training (*Tirocinio Formativo Attivo* or TFA) lasting one year. Attendance of the so-called TFA is the condition for issue of the certificate in secondary school teaching and thus passes through the attainment of a master's degree specifically aimed at teaching. The qualifying and vocational course lasts one year and has compulsory attendance; the number of places available is determined by ministerial decree and the role of organisation, planning and carrying out of courses is entrusted to a university, or a consortium of universities, for each region.

The curricular content of TFA envisages four different types of activities: teaching of subjects related to the science of education; indirect (observational) and direct teaching practice in affiliated schools with a specific number of hours devoted to teaching for students with disabilities; educational workshops and educational links between the courses and techniques observed/experienced during the teaching practice; courses and laboratories on the teaching of subjects. At the end of the course there is a final exam before certification.

Laboratory activities have a central function in the TFA's overall organisation and training of the secondary school teaching profession. This importance was also placed at the centre of the training of the very same SSIS. In the background there is obviously the concept of a school that aims to encourage the acquisition of critical and flexible skills, rather than linear transmission of packets of knowledge and preconceived notions. The teaching laboratory, if conducted with methodological rigour and awareness, is the mode that best allows the problematising and thoughtful approach to knowledge and active participation of pupils in the process of construction of knowledge, which is essential for its mastery (Traverso, 2015). In addition, within the activities of a workshop it is possible for the trainee teacher to experiment in an operational way with the link between the knowledge of the subject related to their field of teaching with its relative educational, general and specific didactic activities.

As has been seen, there are many consistencies between the two different proposals for the training of secondary school teachers that have been followed in Italy in the last two decades: both the proposal from the SSIS and that of the TFA were and are rooted in the positive synergy between the subject training side and the transversal one represented by educational sciences. In the background there is the idea of complex and systemic training, aimed at creating the profile of a teacher expert in scientific area of his/her own subject, capable of moving with awareness and mastery within the epistemological horizon of its relevance and capable of constantly performing reflective skills (Baldacci,

2015). Hence the strengthening of the subject component, moulded through a critical approach that links mastery of specialised content with teaching, methodological, organisational and cultural skills in the broadest sense of the term. An expert teacher of his/her own subject able to step into the shoes of a researcher (Macinai, 2012). This training aspect found and finds its completion in the transversal training of pedagogical-didactic skills, aimed at acquisition of equally essential skills of communicative, relational, planning, deontological and ultimately ethical type. A teacher aware of the importance of his/her social role and able to handle it with responsibility and rigour.

As mentioned, the SSIS terminated its experience ten years after its activation; one of the reasons, the main one that led to its ending, was certainly the growing opposition of the disciplinarian component to involvement of educational sciences in the transversal training of secondary school teachers (Ulivieri, 2008). It is the same risk that according to the most careful observers the TFA are currently running, which as we have seen, took over from the SSIS and relaunched this teacher training in a systemic way. One can see the warning light of this trend in the reduction process to empty out, when programming locally, the pedagogical-teaching content of training in favour of a more restrictive and unilateral interpretation of ministerial guidelines, resulting in marking out of the subject nature at the expense of transversal training (Cambi, 2014). Upstream of this orientation, there are obviously strategies that aim to revive a certain idea of a teacher and so a very precise idea of school and training, ultimately functional to a certain idea of society (Baldacci & Frabboni, 2009). I would like to expound on this topic by referring to a teaching experience of initial training that took place during the first year of the TFA at the University of Florence.

2. The sense of a reflective parenthesis within a training course

During the first cycle of activation of the course Active Internship Training (TFA) at the Department of Education and Psychology, University of Florence, I took part in the planning and carrying out of teaching activities for the initial training of future upper secondary school teachers. In particular, I taught the module on the history of education, entered in the total number of hours reserved for face to face teaching in pedagogy, common to all the classes for certification. I thought it would be an interesting opportunity to open up a dialogue with a heterogeneous group of teachers in secondary education on the figure of the secondary school teacher, on his/her cultural, social and political role in the context of an advanced democratic society, with a high level of complexity and shaken by the spectre of the crisis, «a catchy word» (Bauman, 1998) that in this introductory phase served as a provocation to launch a debate in the sense that

I will explain below. For the development of this reflective activity, I therefore brought to the attention of the teachers two sets of three authors, with reference to their teaching experiences (in the full or partial sense of the term) which I used to introduce, explain and support the figures that I was interested in tackling with the course participants: the figure of the teacher-researcher, on the one hand, and, on the other, that of the teacher-intellectual.

Education and the school are one of the clearest examples of the perverse process that has reduced fundamental aspects on the social level to pure economic calculation (Franceschini, 2008; Maltese, 2014). The end of the nineties really was a turning point, as was already perceived at that time (Semeraro, 1999): with the new millennium, reforms would finally shake up a school and education system blocked for decades, at least regarding the upper secondary school, and this would allow access to a long-awaited, new era. Fifteen years after that historic transition, it is possible to see the fruits of what has been kept of the promises contained in the reform. Many experts agree that what some had then referred to as one of the deadly risks for the school of the third millennium has indeed happened: the spreading of a company-like conception of the school and of formal training (Derrida & Rovatti, 2002).

Since 1999, in Italy, the implementation of school autonomy has resulted in a political climate determined by the weight of variables and economic-financial dimensions, absolutely predominant even in training (Bottani, 2002). The reorganisation of the school system has focused mostly on rationalisation; the language of efficiency applied to the school has produced a transformation of its own implicit goals, making the training subordinate or conditioned by economic and management aspects (Spini, 2014). Moreover, the training itself is treated as a commodity in the open market of training, and not as the fair, free and universal creation of a fundamental right (Grimaldi & Barzanò, 2014). Skills become the ideal currency through which receivables and payables of each individual are recognised, in a system that symbolically reproduces exactly the mechanisms of a social horizon where every experience, every interpersonal relationship, every need, aspiration and right receive an evaluation in terms of cost, price or revenue. In this perspective, knowledge therefore becomes a series of concluded and defined packages, training appears so when it can be spent and the school is required by the left and the right to have the ability to reward merit (Frabboni, 2015; Benadusi, 2006). To understand the folly of such thinking, I proposed a deliberately provocative argument: what was traditionally known as the right to education is today translated as the right to learning and is one of the fundamental human rights such as the right to health and receive medical treatment and healthcare. Nobody dares to argue that a health care system should treat more, better or even only those who deserve it, because health is indeed

an inalienable and fundamental human right. Unless you want to argue that fundamental rights should not be distributed in an equal manner for all citizens of the *polis*, and that there are a few better than many and that the school serves, today like yesterday, just to select them (Bottani, 2013).

What shape will the adolescent minds take on if they are accustomed to thinking and think of themselves in terms functional to the survival of a system that reduces a human to a cost and existence to a merit (Maltese, 2014)? What language is it that reduces the outcomes of learning processes to mere accounting of credits and debts? What kind of culture is fed if the places of education are designed and organised as companies that call their pupils and their families users? Starting from these, perhaps too rhetorical (Franceschini, 2014), questions we have introduced a reflection that is pointed in the direction of a civil revaluation of the figure of the teacher, proposed as an opportunity for dialogue with those who embody this role of responsibility in the school and in today's society. We will speak about a professional responsibility, no doubt, but above all cultural and political that emerges fully in the figure of the dissident teacher so dear to Derrida, of that teacher, that is, willing to take on the role of the researcher, willing to investigate the knowledge that feeds the subject of teaching, and that of the intellectual, able to exercise his/her teaching role in a human relationship that in pedagogical terms we define educational while in philosophical terms we would define it political. In the passing examination, graduate teachers were given the possibility of elaborating a possible response to these solicitations according to their own sensitivity.

2.1. *The teacher-researcher: reflexivity as resistance*

The first basic element on which to build a critical reflection on the teaching profession appropriate to the responsibilities that the contradictions of contemporary life lay on those involved in education, is the rethinking of knowledge: the «what» is taught. Going back to thinking about the what, after five decades in which attention has been paid, if not entirely reserved, to how to teach. The issue is not knowledge of the subject, because it is clear that on this point the epistemological and didactic rethinking has been deep and fruitful, if we think of modularity, of inter- and trans-disciplinarity, or, on another front, of technologies, environments and multimedia, just to name a few (Domenici, 1999; Baldacci, 2003; Rossi, 2011; Calvani, 2001). I refer rather to knowledge itself: not so much to «what» is taught, but to «what is it» that is taught. Teaching is precisely this: practicing an exercise of knowledge. The objectives of this exercise

and the ways in which to accomplish it are the subject of reflection of pedagogy, didactics and general educational subjects: «why», «what» and «how» to teach entwined together. The reflection solicited does not pertain to this level, it is located in the background, where the epistemological question meets the world of values: in this perspective, research becomes an interrogation of meaning and creation of meanings (Goodson & Hargreaves, 2003). It is there that we meet the figure of the teacher-researcher.

To expound on the figure of the teacher-researcher I have drawn inspiration from three articles that the same number of intellectuals delivered to contemporary culture, at different times of the twentieth century. Each of them give opportunities to practice reflective skills.

A) *Responsibility*. The famous conference of Max Weber, held in 1917, *Science as a profession* (Weber, 1922) offers a clear and ever topical summary of the profound significance of scientific and intellectual research linked to the carrying out of the teaching profession. The fact of the matter is all summed up in the German term *Beruf*. The recovery of its precious semantic ambiguity allowed me to grasp the risk indicated by Weber faced with the unstoppable process of rationalisation that the European culture of his time was running, not too dissimilar to what is happening today: namely, of thinking that scientific research can or should be considered a profession like any other (Di Giorgi, 1996). A risk that the twists and turns of historical eras, today has returned to overshadow and threaten the intellectual professions, subjected to the processes of bureaucratisation, of disenchantment and efficientisation which impoverish the human and personal meaning of research that is born from inspiration and inner necessity. Anyone who teaches, then, is bound to socialise the results of his/her scientific research in respect of the authenticity to which the vocation calls him/her. *Beruf* precisely, vocation and profession: responsibility towards oneself is expressed in intellectual honesty towards others, that is, in the public exercise of their vocation through teaching.

B) *Antidogmatism*. Few better than Thomas Kuhn have highlighted this last aspect of scientific knowledge, namely its historical authenticity. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* of 1962 is the work of the American philosopher that constitutes the real epistemological break centred on a radical revision of the very concept of knowledge, which anticipates many of the reflections that as of the next decade will form the strong core of postmodern thought (Kuhn, 1962). Historicising knowledge basically means two things: on the one hand, weakening the metaphysical notion of truth to replace it with the more pragmatically manageable validity; on the other hand, introducing the dimension of plurality, of perspectivism and negotiation in an area of human experience

that has always been traditionally marked by the reduction of multiplicity to one, by the distinction between facts and values and an abstract ahistoricity that essentially put the ultimate goal of research on an external horizon compared to the concrete experience of man. Historically relative knowledge allows one to have doubt, to dispute and to deconstruct beliefs, and in this way releases the inexhaustible revolutionary potential of research itself, but not in a scientifically anarchist sense, because the clash between theories, or between antagonistic versions of reality that competing theories draw, will emerge through the most valid consensus, namely the one better able to give an answer to the conundrum, to the contradiction from which the clash arose.

The precipitate of this open, flexible, uncertain and humanly historicised mindset is the strengthening of the responsibility that lies with the person who practices the exercise of knowledge: teaching is not pure transmission of pre-built and pre-arranged knowledge packages, with which to build in the pupil's empty mind a building a knowledge made up of notions squared off like bricks and modular according to a diachronic schematicness and ideologically oriented from the simple to the complex towards goals purely instrumental to their external marketability, or to the satisfaction of market expectations. The responsibility of the teacher is similar, from this point of view, to that of the research scientist: it is a work of reflective interrogation of the subject, of contestation and problematisation, of selection, interpretation and humanisation of knowledge; it is a research path that moves out from the centre, from true certainties, toward the frontiers, where doubt, uncertainty, aporia and possibility reside. Carl Rogers wrote about the meaning of education (1983, p. 104):

The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. Changingness, reliance on process rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for education in the modern world.

Doing research and teaching the exercise of knowledge is a key contribution that teachers can make to the reform of minds and the transformation of values that guide thinking, feeling and living.

C) *Dissidence*. Through Weber's text, on the one hand, and Kuhn's, on the other, it is interesting to read a shrewd contribution on the topic from Jacques Derrida. In his essay of a few years ago, written with Pier Aldo Rovatti, *The University without condition*, the French philosopher expressed in a very concise and clear way his own definition of the teaching profession (Derrida, 2002). Starting from the simple question that the French philosopher asked himself, he retraced his reflections in order to reach our provisional conclusion. Derrida

wondered: what does teacher (professor) mean? Of course, the root of the word is the Latin verb *fateor*, which means to speak; the prefix *pro* gives more meaning to speak: it expresses a commitment and makes speaking a statement, a testimony, a promise. Derrida argued, that in showing himself in public discourse a professor cannot trivially claim to be an expert of knowledge: what the professor can realistically and responsibly offer is the promise of striving to be one. The trust that the teacher (professor) asks from his students cannot be obtained with the presumption of already knowing the answers even before questions have arisen; trust can derive if anything from an anti-dogmatic and anti-authoritarian attitude implicit in the promise of practicing together the exercise of knowledge. But this means a constant, daily effort, which springs from a decision to dedicate one's life to research in a specific field of knowledge. You cannot claim to be an expert, you can show that you are one. And that, for the teacher, is objectively not easy: in fact, any craftsman has the opportunity to publicly demonstrate his technical ability in the work that he produces.

Conversely, in our long cultural tradition, the teaching profession is not included among those seen as productive: teacher do not create any material object on which to place a stamp or a signature that will allow him to be recognised as the author of any article to be used or, worse still, consumed. Therefore, in a society in which production for consumption not only supports the economic system, but directs the political choices, social customs and subjective aspirations, a profession that is materially unproductive goes from being regarded as ancillary and therefore elitist, to being perceived as unnecessary and therefore annoying. The price of this difficult public recognition of the professionalism of the teacher is particularly high during a time like the present: they pay the teachers in full, especially, called not so much and not only to publicly express their promise, but to certify, account, objectify, and monetise the sense of their profession like the notaries or bankers of training, lavishing loans or inflicting debts, rationalising time and reducing it to a mere container, eventually finding in the number the product that give an appearance of solidity to the work of a *sui generis* worker. Well, even in training, it could be concluded that quality can finally be measured by the amount. The potential for a teacher's dissidence therefore lies here: in the daily act of a profession of loyalty to their own intimate vocation, with the stubborn insistence on reaffirming the dignity and the value not economic but human of knowledge exercised according to the growth of minds to be habituated to the search for meaning and significance in what is around, to be accompanied along a path of growth that starting from a subject reaches the world, from facts to phenomena and finally to values.

2.2. *The teacher-intellectual: the school as agora of the polis*

The last phase of reflection with teachers regarded the link between education and politics.

The political significance of education emerges in the definition of education as an «aid to life» that addresses and is expressed in multiple dimensions that constitute the irreducible complexity of human existence (Bertin, 1968; Frabboni & Pinto Minerva, 2003; Baldacci, 2004). A school with this systemic view of education and that is able to grasp the full meaning of the learning experience in the intersection of all the complex human dimensions (cognitive, intellectual, bodily, sentimental, emotional, social and relational, ethical and civil), and sets itself up as a political community: a community, since education, by its very definition, is a relationship; a relationship that is built over time by building negotiable and acceptable meanings on a level that is not merely intellectual or cognitive, but more completely and densely human.

Even in this last sentence, the proposal covered three authors, starting from John Dewey.

A) *Democracy*. It is significant that in the conception of the school the ideas on politics and society made by the American philosopher find their best synthesis, such as for example in his work of 1916 *Democracy and Education*. The teacher of a democratic school plays an explicitly political intellectual role through the exercise of the educational profession: abandoning pre-established content, focusing on the critical method, refusing to impose values and rather promoting research, comparison and development of the students' critical skills, he embodies and promotes the idea of education as a process that leads to the emancipation of the individual (Dewey, 1916). But the liberation of the individual can only take place within a broader educational project which is crowned in his independent commitment to the values that animate the democratic community, one in which the welfare of the individual contributes to the good of all.

B) *Emancipation*. In Italy, the educational experience that is closest to the idea of school theorised by Dewey was in the late nineteen sixties and came to characterise a historical period marked by a profound criticism of the school, clearly unable to accept the progressive pleas of a society in turmoil and to respond to the needs of democratic literacy from the lower classes who were still largely excluded from active participation in the cultural and political life of the country (Betti, 2009). The reference is to the figure of Lorenzo Milani, the school of Barbiana and its text-manifesto *Letter to a (female) teacher* (Scuola di Barbiana, 1967). Here is expressed the revolutionary power of a

pedagogical and political vision of an true master-intellectual convinced that, even if exercised in the most remote village in the Florentine Apennines, or perhaps more so right there, teaching is a work of emancipation and social criticism (Ulivieri, 2001, p. 334). The teacher who proclaimed his/her moral and civic obligation to address not the first, not the deserving by birth or by choice, but the last in line, the deserving by need, is a teacher who practices the highest form of politics understood, in the manner of Hannah Arendt, as care of existence, as a protection of life (Arendt, 1995, p. 28). Believing, as Milani believed without any doubt, that it is not only possible but necessary to teach the use of the word to those who do not have it, to show the voiceless and excluded the meaning of all possible words to tell others and to be with others, is a concrete translation of utopian policy par excellence, which shakes up philosophical thought from the days of Socrates and Plato to the time of Gramsci or Pasolini (Santoni Rugiu, 2009): namely that it is possible, and therefore necessary, to give shape to a just society through education, teaching and the school.

C) *Utopia*. With regard to political utopia, Noam Chomsky was introduced with the intention of proposing one of the most convinced of the emancipatory role of education and the civil appreciation of the intellectual role of the teacher in today's society, what Chomsky calls the modern industrial civilisation, placed highly at risk by the immanent force that pulls it along: material profit. In more than a part of his production of essays on human nature and knowledge, Chomsky argues that the essential characteristic of human nature is freedom, understood as creativity, autonomy and responsibility. In *Language and Politics*, for example, Chomsky states (1988, p. 251): «It is conceivable that such an instinct for freedom exists and is deeply rooted in human nature and is related somehow, in ways that we don't know, to the elements that we can already discover by studying some aspects of human nature, such as cognitive achievements».

Having stated this premise, the answer that the American intellectual offers to the question regarding the purpose of education becomes easily understandable: encourage the development of human beings able to think critically, to formulate, communicate and justify their ideas peacefully, to cooperate together for the construction of a world in which for each and every one it is worth living. The school, from pre-compulsory education to upper secondary, is the place where this kind of apprenticeship takes place for the free and informed exercise of thought: Dewey is explicitly referred to as the thinker who more than any other was able to indicate the true essence of a school as a «training ground for democracy» (Chomsky, 1994).

Most problems of teaching are not problems of growth but helping cultivate growth. As far as I know, and this is only from personal experience in teaching, I think about ninety percent of the problem in teaching, or maybe ninety-eight percent, is just to help the students get interested. [...] Typically they come in interested, and the process of education is a way of driving that defect out of their minds (1998, p. 191).

Showing the importance of knowledge every day, and that it totally worth all the effort it requires, is not a trivial task, especially at a time when the education system continues to be instrumentally thought out, organised and managed in function of the creation of passive and submissive individuals dominated by an approving culture capable of conforming minds and souls to purely economic interests. The teacher's role is therefore crucial in the promotion of alternative values than those of accumulation, consumption and waste, of domination and abuse. As an intellectual, the teacher has a privilege that society underestimates: he/she has access to knowledge and information, he/she can filter, mediate and humanise them; and more importantly, he has recognised the right to speak on vital issues that animate knowledge itself in a place where the exercising of this right may be proposed in a critical, creative, cooperative and original: the school, that is, a gym of democracy for the autonomous exercising of free thought, an authentic, political *agora*.

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