



**Proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference  
of the Journal Scuola Democratica  
REINVENTING EDUCATION**

**VOLUME II**

**Learning with New Technologies,  
Equality and Inclusion**

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

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Via Francesco Satolli, 30 – 00165 - Rome, Italy

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***Title* Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” – Reinventing Education VOLUME II Learning with New Technologies, Equality and Inclusion**

This volume contains papers presented in the First International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” which took place at the University of Cagliari on 5-8 June 2019. The aim of the Conference was to bring together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate the concepts of “education” in a “post-democracy” era, the latter being a set of conditions under which scholars are called to face and counteract new forms of authoritarian democracy.

Populisms, racisms, discriminations and nationalisms have burst and spread on the international scene, translated and mobilized by sovereigntist political movements. Nourished by neo-liberalism and inflated by technocratic systems of governance these regressive forms of post-democracy are shaping historical challenges to the realms of education and culture: it is on this ground, and not only on the political and economic spheres, that decisive issues are at stake. These challenges are both tangible and intangible, and call into question the modern ideas of justice, equality and democracy, throughout four key dimensions of the educational function, all of which intersected by antinomies and uncertainties: ethical-political socialization, differences, inclusion, innovation.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and inter-disciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners’ mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 600 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on researches, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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## Premise

In recent years, an important debate has developed on the role that digital technologies are playing and can play in the transformation of education and its institutions. Digital platforms, distance learning, blended learning, online training technologies are part of a significant restructuring and reculturing of the educational worlds. Digital technologies have restructured learning practices, educational content and the forms of educational governance which are immersed in public spaces and global markets. On the one hand, the digital governance of education contributes to changing and reconfiguring educational practices and the management of education on a local, national, international and transnational scale. On the other hand, technologies make possible the interconnection of multiple modes and shapes of formal, informal and non-formal education and training, producing forms of re-spatialization of education, locating the classroom within a digital learning ecosystem and favouring the emergence of different models of blended or hybrid learning.

The pandemic scenario has accelerated these processes, making more visible the tensions between multiple worlds of education and the processes of digitalization, while triggering a complex restructuring of educational institutions whose directions are not yet easily predictable. Perhaps, we are entering a new era that will mark the end of education as we have known it so far. In such a scenario, it becomes more urgent to carry on and debate an informed educational research, that explores the realities of the relations between education and digital technologies. This is especially needed because technologies are far from neutral. They are a heterogeneous technical and social world in which possibilities to change education for the better and make education fairer can be encountered as well as risks can be run of reproducing social and educational inequalities. Therefore, key questions are: how and in what direction the processes of digitalization are changing education, its practices and its governance? What are forms of coordination between educational technology markets and the institutional and educational actors in the emerging transnational governance arenas? How do the professional and social actors (teachers, managers, students, families) that are involved in the digitalization of education react to and translate these transformations? How do digital technologies change the aims and the curriculum of contemporary educational institutions? How can the digital competencies learned by students beyond the educational spaces (school and university) become a resource for learning processes and educational socialization in educational contexts? And above all, what are the possibilities that digital technologies offer us to reinvent education and its governance that are worth to be explored?

Papers collected in the Volume try to give preliminary answers to those issues. Furthermore, contributions from a range of experts, specialists and scholars cannot avoid facing educational inequalities which haven't by any means disappeared. They have rather changed and (re)combined into new forms that challenge the resilience of educational systems in terms of both effectiveness and equity. Several contributions published in the Volume aims to address these issues from a theoretical and empirical point of view, as well as their implications for educational policies. In this sense, proposals linked to educational inequalities in relation to social stratification as a factor affecting cognitive results, educational choices, the attainment of educational qualifications and working careers are of interest for the reader. Comparative research on different scale (comparisons between national, regional or local cases) is

particularly relevant and much importance is attached to the analysis of institutional factors (tracking, comprehensive vs selective systems, accountability policies, private education, ability grouping) which can produce educational segregation dynamics affecting educational inequalities, intersecting extra-curricular factors, such as urban segregation, for example.

The intertwining and interconnecting of differences (gender, socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, cognitive, and motivational factors) often generate inequalities both for their effects in themselves and in relation to the policies implemented to address them in their multidimensionality and intersectionality. Therefore, specific tracks on how education systems and educational institutions try to manage differences and end up producing inequalities are welcome.

The links between education and the labour market are another central aspect of research: the debate on the inflation of educational qualifications and over-education, the differential returns to education according to the type of diploma, degree program or type of tertiary program attended and, more generally, the relationship between education and social mobility represent a pivotal set of phenomena to understand production and reproduction of educational inequalities.

The applications of randomized controlled trials to the assessment of policies aimed at reducing inequalities and improving cognitive and career results as well as empirically driven reflections on how educational policies intersect the complex relationship between equity (equality and inclusion), quality and excellence are one of the main focuses researchers have dealt with in the collected papers.

Gender inequalities are a key topic to understand educational differences. Educational contexts are marked by a significant gender gap in staffing and in the formative experiences of children, teenagers and young students. These differences reflect and often reproduce gender stereotypes and asymmetries in societies at large. How are gender issues addressed in classrooms? Where are they encountered in training settings? What models do teachers convey, and what are the emotional responses from students of diverse gender? How do educational institutions practice and reproduce gender stereotypes and asymmetries? Can school and university provide contexts in which to acquire gender awareness and tackle gender issues? What are the responsibilities of educational contexts in the representation of gender in society? What experiences and good practices have been activated to promote greater gender equity? What cultural resistances? Several questions are addressed in the Volume and many are the answers discussed.

Many forms of educational segregation persist, yet today a growing presence of women – which are in some cases becoming a majority – is found even in fields that have historically been a male domain; this is the case, for example, of medicine and biology in higher education. International and national data show that many things have changed in recent decades, and gender equity is rising in all spheres of education and training. At the same time, several initiatives have been launched to promote greater awareness of gender stereotypes and prevent phenomena such as discrimination and gender-based violence. However, much remains to be done – not least to prevent backlashes and the emergence of new inequalities alongside

established ones. This is the case, for example, of the asymmetries in accessing fields of knowledge that may become relevant for the future of work (e.g., digital skills), or the development of new practices of discrimination related to the use of new technologies (e.g., hate speech or revenge porn).

Younger generations have been challenging those constraints surviving from the past, but new challenges arise in a constantly evolving global environment, where the urgency of the climate crisis in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic call for societal radical shifts while populism, unemployment, artificial intelligence, remote education and communication are affecting the ordinary daily life as we knew it.

Some analysts fear the pandemic will spur a new kind of backlash against the very basis of global society, from migration to cooperation and interdependence, while others worry about younger generations' abilities to overcome mass unemployment and economic vulnerability. Economic, political and environmental crisis are now fully part of the youth horizon: how are formal, informal and non-formal education going to support young people in moving forward positively and purposefully in their lives while simultaneously ensuring space for their autonomy, decision-making and voice?

Such general question contains intersected and multiple issues and applies across contexts as diverse as the role and relevance of democracy as educational content, the changing landscape of non-formal learning/education, the forging of future visions on politics, digital technologies and the media, youth educational transitions, youth experiences at work, the relation between consumerism and environmentalism, the widening of opportunities and constraints stemming out from cooperative learning and digital exchange tools.

Social research and youth studies have been producing a wide range of analyses on these relevant issues, with the (re) emergence of broader theories and empirical inquiries directed towards the recognition and validation of non-formal education, the promotion of youth participation, and the deeper rethinking of youth policies.

Under the large umbrella of an education to be re-invented, papers in the Volume are dedicated to new generations, transitions and the future of education, with a broad, multidisciplinary, and internationally set of contributions focusing on a variegated platform of topics on youth studies theories, critical analysis of relevant societal debates surrounding youth in and out education; in and out the labour market; on youth transitions throughout and across cultures, statuses, roles, responsibilities and institutions; on the impact of the various initiatives to promote and enhance youth participation; on the role of youth organisations as well as on the strengths and weaknesses of youth policies at both a national and supranational level.



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## The Times They Are A-Changin' What is Meant by Reinventing Education in the Digital Era? 8

TOWARDS INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE USE OF PARTICIPATORY PLATFORMS. RESEARCH EXPERIENCES PROMOTED BY FONDAZIONE REGGIO CHILDREN <i>Maria Barbara Donnici, Lorenzo Manera, Elèna Sofia Paoli and Ilaria Cavallini</i>	9
THE FINNISH EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY AT THE TIME OF COVID-19, PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES <i>Eleonora Mattarelli</i>	19
HOW TO IMPROVE VISUAL-SPATIAL SKILLS THROUGH A DIGITAL ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM <i>Sergio Miranda and Rosa Vegliante</i>	31
TRAINING DIGITAL COMPETENCE OF FUTURE TEACHERS: THE eTWINNING TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTES PROJECT <i>Maria Sammarro</i>	47
THROUGH THE SCREEN: REFLECTIONS ON ONLINE TRAINING EXPERIENCE ABOUT DIDACTIC AND ASSESSMENT USE OF BOARDGAMES <i>Liliana Silva</i>	61
DIGITAL COMPETENCE SELF-ASSESSMENT IN FUTURE PRIMARY EDUCATION TEACHERS <i>Rosanna Tammaro, Concetta Ferrantino and Iolanda Sara Iannotta</i>	75
«EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING» IN ITALY AND NORWAY: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER TRAINING <i>Silvia Zanazzi and Cathrine Edelhard Tømte</i>	91

## Digital Education Design. Evaluation Approaches, Tools and Techniques 110

TEACHING THROUGH MOTION DESIGN AND TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO A CRITICAL EVALUATION <i>Valentina Faloni, Vincenzo Maselli and Giulia Panadis</i>	111
CREATING MEANINGFUL LEARNING PATHS WITH THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY <i>Jessica Niewint-Gori, Alessia Rosa, Daniela Bagattini and Sara Mori</i>	125
THE WHATSAPP CARES YOU <i>Gisella Rossini and Valentina Concia</i>	139
BEYOND THE CLICK. THE (POTENTIAL) CONTRIBUTION OF PLUG-INS IN THE EDUCATIONAL DESIGN OF ONLINE COURSES <i>Luca Ferrari and Stefano D'Ambrosio</i>	149
SMART EDUCATION THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE <i>Matthew Montebello</i>	161
A TRAINING PROJECT FOR TEACHERS THROUGH THE CREATION OF A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICES. THE CASE STUDY OF A SCHOOL IN ROME <i>Elisa Amato, Rosanna Labalestra, Antonietta Larocca and Patrizia Zucchetta</i>	173
WHAT THE HELL DO I DO WITH THE MOON? A DIACHRONIC LEARNING PATH OF READING AND INTERPRETATION, BETWEEN LITERATURE, ART AND SCIENCE <i>Caterina Inesi</i>	185
DISTANCE COLLABORATIVE WRITING BY FOLDING ORIGAMI <i>Filomena Taverniti</i>	195
SAY IT, DO IT, LEARN IT! DIGITAL EDUCATION AT THE MUSEUM: A THEORETICAL REFLECTION TOWARDS A REVIEW OF THE STUDIES ON THE APPLICATION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN MUSEUM EDUCATION <i>Patrizio Pastore</i>	205

## Reinventing the Digital Literacy of Teachers After COVID-19 Pandemic 222

EFFECT OF ONLINE TRAINING ON TEACHERS' TECHNOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE. THE CONCEPT OF E-LEARNING <i>Giovanni Ganino, Laura Sara Agrati and Ines Tedesco</i>	223
RETHINKING SCHOOL-FAMILY COMMUNICATION AFTER PANDEMIC: NEW PROTOCOLS, COMPETENCES, AND ALLIANCES? <i>Elena Pacetti, Alessandro Soriani and Manuela Fabbri</i>	237

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SCHOOL AND PANDEMIC. FOR A DIGITAL LITERACY OF TEACHERS IN THE INCOMING TRAINING <i>Maria Grazia Simone</i>	253
A STUDY OF «MISSION HUNDRED PERCENT» SUCCESS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH SELF-DEVELOPED STANDARDISED DIGITAL MODULES IN INDIA <i>Balwant Singh, Balwinder Kaur and Jaspal Singh</i>	263

## **Active Learning in Classes. Analysis of Technology-Enhanced Feedback in School and University Contexts** 278

THE USE OF DATA FOR THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OF STUDENTS IN ONLINE UNIVERSITIES <i>Giorgio Cecchi, Paola Nencioni, Chiara Giunti and Sara Mori</i>	279
‘CLASSI IN RETE’. RETHINKING EDUCATION IN SMALL SCHOOLS. AN EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH IN ABRUZZO <i>Giuseppina Rita Jose Mangione, Michelle Pieri, Stefano Cacciamani and Anna Tancredi</i>	293

## **Learning Ecologies. Educational Methodologies in the Relationship with The Space-Time of Learning** 304

RETHINKING THE SPACE-TIME OF LEARNING: A TRANSFORMATIVE AND DEMOCRATIC OPPORTUNITY FOR EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC <i>Francesco Bearzi and Daniele Rodolico</i>	305
DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP: REFLECTIONS ON SPACE AND TIME <i>Chiara Cavarra</i>	319
SPACE-TIME VARIABLE IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS: TECHNOLOGY AFFORDANCES FOR THE EDUCATIONAL/DIDACTICAL RELATION <i>Laura Fedeli</i>	329
THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE IN USING POTENTIAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR MASTER'S STUDENTS IN EDUCATION <i>Julija Kubova-Semaka and Palmira Jucevičienė</i>	339
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IN SPACE-TIME AUGMENTED BY TECHNOLOGY: TEACHING/LEARNING, BLENDED LEARNING, E-LEARNING <i>Paola Lisimberti</i>	353
NEUROSCIENCE FOR DIDACTIC CONTINUITY: REFLECTING ON TEACHING PRACTICES TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OF STUDENTS <i>Sara Mori, Silvia Panzavolta and Alessia Rosa</i>	369
THE MENTAL EXPERIMENT AS A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOL LEARNING <i>Marco Piccinno</i>	383
REINVENTING ADULT EDUCATION IN PRISON AT THE TIME OF COVID-19: EQUITY, INCLUSION, NEW PERSPECTIVES <i>Francesca De Vitis</i>	397
EDUCATING IN TIME OF GLOBAL PANDEMIC: PEDAGOGICAL CONSULTANCY AS A RESPONSE TO EDUCATIONAL DISTRESS <i>Maria Benedetta Gambacorti-Passerini and Alessandro Ferrante</i>	407
EDUCATIONAL POVERTY IN EUROPE: MIXING EDUCATION AS CERTIFICATION AND AS COMPETENCIES AMONG YOUTH AND ADULT POPULATION <i>Luca Salmieri, Orazio Giancola and Simona Colarusso</i>	419
EDUCATIONAL EXCLUSION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: SOCIAL INEQUALITY VIS-À- VIS UNIVERSITY CREDENTIALISM <i>António Raúl Siteo</i>	433

## **Young People of Foreign Origin and Educational Failures: Key-roles and Actions to Contain Dropout's Risk and Promote Inclusion** 448

YOUNG FOREIGNERS AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS: PROPOSALS FOR INTERVENTION THROUGH CHORAL SINGING AND READING ALOUD <i>Vanessa Candela and Damiano Periccioli</i>	449
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BETWEEN SOCIAL CLASSES AND MIGRANT BACKGROUND. SCHOOL INTEGRATION AND ATTAINMENT OF IMMIGRANTS' OFFSPRING IN UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ITALY (2015-2019)	
<i>Gabriella D'Ambrosio and Pasquale di Padova</i>	459
SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL IN THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH MIGRATORY BACKGROUND	
<i>Giada Prisco and Clara Silva</i>	471
INCLUSION, WELLBEING, SHARING: STORYTELLING AND LISTENING IN A CIRCLE. HOW TO BUILD INCLUSION IN A CLASSROOM SETTING	
<i>Greta Bellando</i>	481
THE EDUCATIONAL CHOICES OF ADOPTED STUDENTS	
<i>Monya Ferritti, Anna Guerrieri and Luca Mattei</i>	493
TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL BELONGING IN ADOPTED PUPILS	
<i>Eleonora Scalzo, Concetta Panarello and Leonardo Luzzatto</i>	503
SCHOOL-FAMILY CO-RESPONSIBILITY. GOOD PRACTICES FROM TRAINING COURSES PROMOTED BY AN ASSOCIATION OF ADOPTIVE FAMILIES	
<i>Alessia Tabacchi</i>	515
OLD HABITS DIE HARD? SCHOOL GUIDANCE INTERVENTIONS AND THE PERSISTENCE OF INEQUALITIES	
<i>Camilla Borgna, Dalit Contini, Stella Pinna Pintor, Roberta Ricucci and Nathalie Vigna</i>	529
DESPITE THE BEST INTENTIONS. EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN HIGHLY STRATIFIED BUT CHOICE-DRIVEN TRACKING SYSTEMS	
<i>Camilla Borgna and Dalit Contini</i>	545
PRE-COVID-19 CAREER GUIDANCE ACTIVITIES IN MIDDLE AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF TRENTINO: A STUDY ABOUT COLLABORATION NETWORKS AND SCHOOLS' PRACTICES	
<i>Paola Menapace</i>	559
GENDER SEGREGATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS' SCHOOL GUIDANCE	
<i>Giulietta Zanga</i>	571

## **The Disability Studies Approach in the Analysis of Educational Inequalities and in the Structuring of Contrasting Measures** 584

LIVED EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATION AND RELATIONSHIPS FOR ITALIAN ADOLESCENTS WITH DYSLEXIA DURING ONE YEAR COVID-19 PANDEMIC	
<i>Giulia Lampugnani</i>	585
DISABILITY STUDIES PERSPECTIVES ON MUSIC THERAPY AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS. REVIEWING APPROACH AND OUTCOMES	
<i>Matteo Maienza</i>	597
UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING IN NORWAY: A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO PROMOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	
<i>Cristina Paupini and G. Anthony Giannoumis</i>	607
INTEGRATION/INCLUSION. WHAT CONCEPTUAL MODEL IN THE DOCUMENTATION PRODUCED BY THE SCHOOLS?	
<i>Marianna Piccioli</i>	617
HIDDEN EPISTEMOLOGIES. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE VULNERABLE SUBJECT IN THE ITALIAN EDUCATIONAL IMAGINARY. A GROUNDED APPROACH WITHIN THE DISABILITY STUDIES PERSPECTIVE	
<i>Alberto Quagliata, Michela Baldini, Lavinia Bianchi, Giovanni Castagno, Ines Guerini and Fabiola Scollo</i>	633
MISPERCEPTIONS IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE DISABLED BODY. A RESEARCH IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF DISABILITY STUDIES	
<i>Alessandra Maria Straniero, Gianmarco Bonavolontà, Valentina Domenici and Fabio Bocci</i>	647

## **Inclusive Science Education with and for Society** 658

CO-CONSTRUCTING AND SHARING STEAM KNOWLEDGE THROUGH A CULTURALLY RELEVANT LITERACY-BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP	
<i>Lori Caudle, Frances K. Harper, Margaret Quinn and Darelene Greene</i>	659
EDUCATIONAL ROBOTICS AND ADOLESCENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED CONTEXTS. A RESEARCH PATH ON COMMUNICATIVE MEDIATION	

<i>Valeria Cotza and Monica Roncen</i>	671
CHILDREN AND THE LIVINGS. INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES IN ECEC	
<i>Antonella Pezzotti and Petar Vasilev Lefterov</i>	685
SCIENCE DISCIPLINES AND SCHOOL FOR ALL, A CHALLENGE	
<i>Matteo Schianchi and Roberta Garbo</i>	697
READING NARRATIVE FICTION SHAPES SOCIAL COGNITION	
<i>Emanuele Castano</i>	707
READING IN BIOGRAPHIES: REINVENTING LIFE THROUGH LITERATURE	
<i>Daniele Garritano</i>	715
READING ALOUD AS A TOOL FOR INCLUSION	
<i>Valerio Luperini and Benedetta D'Autilia</i>	721
READING ALOUD AND ITS EFFECTS ON CLASSROOM CLIMATE AND INCLUSIVITY	
<i>Renata Martinčić and Eliana Bucchi</i>	735
EARLY READING PROMOTION: DIFFICULTIES AND CHANCES	
<i>M. Elena Scotti</i>	749

## **Schools as a Potential Source of Inequalities Reproduction: How, Where and Why? 760**

SOCIETAL COMMITMENT TO DEVELOP PEOPLE'S POTENTIAL: THE ITALIAN CASE	
<i>Chiara Cavarra</i>	761
READING PRACTICES AND 'INSTITUTIONAL HABITUS'. PILOT RESEARCH ON 19 TO 20-YEAR-OLD <i>LICEO</i> GRADUATES	
<i>Elena Gremigni</i>	773
HELPING MY ROMANI PUPILS ALSO WHEN THEY DO NOT NEED IT. A RESEARCH ON TEACHERS' BENEVOLENT OVER-HELPING	
<i>Alessia Mastropietro and Giovanna Leone</i>	787
DROPPING OUT, GETTING POOR? EARLY-SCHOOL LEAVERS AND ECONOMICAL ENTRAPMENTS	
<i>Orazio Giancola and Luca Salmieri</i>	797
ACHIEVEMENT, GIFTEDNESS AND INCLUSION: ANALYSES AND PERSPECTIVES REGARDING INEQUALITY	
<i>Simone Seitz, Michaela Kaiser, Petra Auer and Rosa Bellacicco</i>	811
CHALLENGES FOR THE BRAZILIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: BETWEEN SCHOOL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY	
<i>Antônio Raúl Siteo and Carlos Alberto Leite da Silva</i>	823
DIDACTICS OF LAW AND GENDER-BASED HATE SPEECH	
<i>Annalisa Verza</i>	835

## **The Impact of the Anti-Gender Movement on Educational Contexts: Resistance, Resilience and Redefinition 848**

SEXTING: MINISKIRT IN CYBERBULLISM? A DIFFERENT WAY TO PREVENT AND COMBAT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL	
<i>Elisa Maurizi and Daniela Bagattini</i>	849
CAN DEBATING GENDER VIOLENCE BE 'A BOY THING'? ROLE-DISTANCE STRATEGIES AND MASCULINE PERFORMANCES IN A SCHOOL SETTING	
<i>Paolo Gusmeroli</i>	861

## **The Academic Work in Neoliberal Times: Exploring Gender, Precarity and Emerging Forms of Solidarity 872**

ACADEMIC WORK DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ITALY. STRUCTURAL FACTORS AND THE REDEFINITION OF SPATIAL, TIME AND RELATIONAL BOUNDARIES	
<i>Annalisa Dordoni and Anna Carreri</i>	873
PHD RESEARCHERS ENGAGING WITH ACADEMIA: FOUR GENERATIVE METAPHORS	
<i>Cecilia Ficcadenti and Leonardo Piromalli</i>	887
BETWEEN AND BETWIXT: EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC PRECARIETY AND RESISTANCE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC	
<i>Lito Tsitsou and Claire Sedgwick</i>	897

WATCHING PORNHUB: GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE REPRESENTATION OF PORNOGRAPHY CONSUMPTION <i>Antonia Cava</i>	909
GENDER ISSUES AS A POLITICAL RESOURCE: REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN, STEREOTYPES AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE <i>Fabio Mostaccio and Milena Meo</i>	917
'UNA SUPER MADRE AL PODER'. REPRESENTATION AND POSITIONING OF A WOMAN POLITICAL LEADER IN THE BOLIVIAN CASE OF THE EX-PRESIDENT JEANINE AÑEZ <i>Antonella Cammarota and Valentina Raffa</i>	927
FROM FACE-TO-FACE TO ONLINE INTERVIEWS: AN EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTION ON UNIVERSITY MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS <i>Lisa Brambilla, Brunella Fiore, Silvia Luraschi and Laura Zampini</i>	939
BEING MOTHERS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC. REFLECTIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS <i>Valentina Guerrini</i>	951
FEMALE WORKFORCE IN THE RETAIL SECTOR: WELFARE POLICIES AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING PERSPECTIVE <i>Arianna Marcolin and Beatrice Bianconi</i>	965
GENDER SEGREGATION IN HIGH SCHOOLS' TRACK CHOICES: A CRUCIAL STEP IN THE REPRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITIES <i>Giulietta Zanga</i>	977
BREAKING BARRIERS: UNDERSTANDING THE OBSTACLES FACED BY AFRICAN WOMEN IN STEM IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO <i>Roshnie Doon</i>	991
BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE. FEMINIST PEDAGOGY AS INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM <i>Barbara Dynda</i>	1005
WHAT MATTERS MOST TO MATH GENDER GAP? EVIDENCE FROM PISA DATA IN ITALY <i>Valentina Ferri and Giovanna Di Castro</i>	1015
FEMICIDE IN ART. AN EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL <i>Claudia Gina Hassan</i>	1027
COGNITIVE AND NON-COGNITIVE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE NUMERACY GENDER GAP IN HIGHER EDUCATION <i>Maristella Lunardon, Tania Cerni and Raffaella I. Rumiati</i>	1037
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN WORK AND LIFE PATHS AMONG PHD HOLDERS IN ITALY <i>Luisa De Vita, Antonio Corasaniti and Orazio Giancola</i>	1049
GENDERED LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN COLLABORATIVE DESIGN PROJECTS WITH VEHICLE INDUSTRY <i>Pinar Kaygan</i>	1063
GENDER AND SOCIAL BARRIERS TO STEM EDUCATION AND TRAINING AMONG CHILDREN IN SITUATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL POVERTY IN ITALY <i>Elisa Rapetti, Barbara Giovanna Bello, Matteo Delmonte, Massimo Merlino, Maria Palumbo and Valeria Pivetta</i>	1075
RETHINKING DIGITAL SPACES THROUGH FEMINISM: INSTAGRAM AS AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT <i>Ludovica Rubini and Letizia Zampino</i>	1089
GENDER BIASES IN MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE: FROM EDUCATION TO DAILY MEDICAL PRACTICES <i>Camilla Veneri and Camilla Gaiaschi</i>	1101

## **Youth (Not) On The Move 1114**

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' NARRATIVE IMAGINARIES: ITALY, FINLAND AND THE COSMOPOLITAN ELSEWHERE <i>Pierluca Birindelli</i>	1115
(IM)MOBILITY: THE CALABRIAN YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE IN THE 'WAITING ROOM' DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC <i>Mauro Giardiello and Rosa Capobianco</i>	1127
THINKING THROUGH ADOLESCENT SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY AND THEIR ROLE IN SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE NEW UK'S MENTAL HEALTH ACT <i>Danilo Di Emidio</i>	1139
A STUDY ABOUT GENERATIVITY IN INTERGENERATIONAL CARE IN PANDEMIC TIME <i>Maria Vinciguerra</i>	1151
INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL MOBILITY: IS IT AN OPTION FOR PROMOTING THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION? <i>Cristina López-Duarte, Jane Frances Maley and Marta María Vidal-Suárez</i>	1165

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YOUNG PEOPLE, IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCE IN EUROPE <i>Alessandra Polidori</i>	1177
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND IN-BOUND MOBILITY IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD ORDER <i>Raghvendra Singh and Dylan Rust</i>	1187
SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION IN ITALY AND ROMANIA: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION SYSTEM <i>Gabriela Neagu and Antonella Rocca</i>	1201
THE EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL CREDENTIALS FOR YOUNG REFUGEES INCLUSION: AN EXPLORATIVE RESEARCH <i>Marianna Colosimo and Anna Fausta Scardigno</i>	1215
WE ARE STILL HERE! SCHOOL-VET ALTERNANCE BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT AND DROPOUT RISK. EVIDENCE FROM EUROPEAN PRACTICES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC <i>Maddalena Bartolini and Valentina Lamonica</i>	1225
TOWARD UNDERSTANDING POTENTIALS, LIMITS AND CHALLENGES OF COOPERATION BETWEEN YOUTH WORK AND SCHOOLS DURING THE PANDEMIC <i>Daniele Morciano and Fausta Scardigno</i>	1235
FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION: INTEGRATION IS POSSIBLE <i>Nunzia Vezzola</i>	1249
INFORMAL LEARNING IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. THE TESSERA CULTURA PROJECT <i>Giambattista Bufalino, Gabriella D'Aprile and Cristina Lo Presti</i>	1263
INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK: ASSETS AND CHALLENGES <i>Horta Herranz, Andreas Karsten, Ashley Pitschmann, Cara Lee Roth, Sümeyra Akarçesme and Tanja Strecker</i>	1273
SERIOUS GAMES AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM: THE EXPERIENCE OF <i>SICURI SI DIVENTA</i> <i>Pina Lalli and Claudia Capelli</i>	1289
IT'S EVEN MORE COMPLICATED! THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA PRACTICES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS' IDENTITY <i>Elena Pacetti, Alessandro Soriani and Paolo Bonafede</i>	1303
SURVIVING THE PH.D.: THE USE OF MEMETIC CREATIVITY IN INFORMAL NETWORKS <i>Roberta Bracciale and Junio Aglioti Colombini</i>	1317
PANDEMIC AND SELF-REPRESENTATION. BOYS AND GIRLS DESCRIBE THEIR REALITY THROUGH DIGITAL IMAGES <i>Maria Adelaide Gallina, Tania Parisi and Valentina Rosso</i>	1331
EMPOWERING DIGITAL CREATIVITY DEVELOPING CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH A UNIVERSITY BLOG, SOCIAL MEDIA AND PODCASTS <i>Pina Lalli and Michela Zingone</i>	1341
<i>FUTURI (IM)PERFETTI</i> . SOCIAL FORESIGHT AND DIGITAL CREATIVITY AS PRACTICES TO EXTEND THE ABILITY TO ASPIRE <i>Claudio Marciano, Domenico Morreale and Alberto Robiati</i>	1353
FOCUS ON THE FUTURE. AN ORIENTATION PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF L'AQUILA <i>Geraldina Roberti and Antonella Nuzzaci</i>	1365

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# It's even more Complicated! The Influence of Media Practices in the Development of Adolescents' Identity

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**ABSTRACT:** *Social media have long been considered both a strong driver of peer-to-peer social relationships (Caron, Caronia, 2007) and an important ground for the constitution of participatory cultures that promote informal learning and opportunities for the construction and negotiation of one's identity path (Boyd, 2014; Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins et al., 2015). Particularly in the last decade, the infosphere (Floridi, 2017) has been traversed by a development that, while expected, has surprised in terms of rapidity and profound transformation of teenagers' online practices (Riva, 2012). The research, which involved 1657 students (14-19 y.o.) from ten secondary schools of different curricula in the metropolitan city of Bologna, intends to investigate, from an exploratory-phenomenological point of view, the influence that adolescent online practices (video-social platforms, gaming, etc.) have on the development and negotiation of their identity. Has the transversal and pervasive change generated by digital tools and environments affected the ways in which adolescents perceive themselves, negotiate their identity and their role in the peer group? What challenges and critical issues emerge for identity development from digital consumption? What emerges is a picture in which technologies are mediators of fundamental importance in the relationships of young adolescents; a situation that has been further emphasized by more than a year of health emergency with consequent lockdown and closure of schools. The figure of peers, even those known and frequented exclusively online, as well as that of influencers, play a very important role in the negotiation of the identity of young people and in the construction of their relational dynamics.*

**KEYWORDS:** *social media; media practices; adolescents; identity development.*

## 1. Theoretical preliminaries

The theoretical assumptions of this contribution are modulated according to three concentric circles. Starting from a macro-cultural perspective, we intend to focus more and more on the central question of the identity transformations of adolescents.

### *1.1 Infosphere and Network society*

First, at the macro-cultural level, it affirms the central role in the contemporary world of digital devices. They are homeostatic artifacts, capable of communicative interaction and self-regulation through processes determined by internal algorithms (Rivoltella, Rossi, 2019, 26-28). The relationship between human beings and technology is therefore experiencing a new phase (Longo, 2006): it is no longer the exclusive world of humans, but it is a world inhabited by men and machines, interacting beings characterized by a symbiotic and interdependent relationship (Latour, 2005; Law, 2007). There is symbiosis because the machine cannot exist without man, and at the same time human life is almost totally conditioned by machines. Therefore the pervasiveness of digital devices makes their presence indispensable (CENSIS, 2018).

This is especially true for information machines, which collect, process, communicate and connect (Castells, 1996) a quantity of information regarding the exponentially growing human world (Lyman, Varian, 2003; Floridi, 2014). As Paul Valery wrote, this rare commodity – the information – will be prepared in malleable or edible forms, will be distributed to an increasingly numerous of people; it will become a thing of commerce, something that is exported, something that is imitated and reproduced almost everywhere (Longo, 1998). The passage of information from the functional-communicative level to the ontological level (Floridi, 2010, 10-15), which makes it the substratum of the phenomenal real, is happily expressed by the term infosphere (Floridi, 2002, 2014).

It designates the semantic space made up of the totality of information and agents – uniquely designated as informational entities – and their operations. ICTs, with numbering and binarization, make each one of us «informational matter», within a perennially interconnected reticular structure. We therefore speak of a network society, an expression that does not merely refer, trivially, to the diffusion and importance that computer networks have acquired in the contemporary social system. Network society rather designates a more general reticular paradigm in the interpretation of the morphology of society itself (Castells, 1996). In this case, therefore, the concept of «network» embraces much more than the internet, indicating a social model organization that tends to be horizontal, flexible, capable of adapting rapidly to changing environmental conditions with all the economic, symbolic and relational flows and exchanges.

### *1.2 Adolescents, social relationships and digital culture*

If the network society represents the widespread paradigm to interpret the dimension of contemporary social systems, it is necessary verify it by observing the daily experiences in the lives of individuals. With this contribution – entering a more specific level, the second theoretical circle – we intend to investigate the relationship between teenagers and social media. In the second decade of 2000 this relationship became unavoidable.

Through the smartphone, which has become the main device for accessing the internet by pre-adolescents and adolescents in many industrialized countries (Mascheroni, Olafsson, 2016), a horizon of media practices has opened up which was previously confined to television consumption, telephone conversations or via chat / forum, and face-to-face meetings. The convergence operated by the smartphone in terms of multi-modal multimedia has contracted the times of relationships, languages and forms of socialization (Jenkins, 2008).

For this reason, international scholars agree in delineating that Social media have long been considered both a strong driver of peer-to-peer social relationships (Caron, Caronia, 2007) and an important ground for the constitution of participatory cultures that promote informal learning and opportunities for the construction and negotiation of one's identity path (Boyd, 2014; Jenkins, Ito, 2015; Ito et al., 2019). In Italy this trend has manifested itself from 2010 onwards with the consequence of sparking a debate about the dangers that young people are exposed to by using smartphones and other technologies. This debate has been followed by a reflection about the impacts that these devices can have on the development of adolescents. An increasingly unavoidable controversy, given that currently almost 99% of Italian teenagers owns a smartphone and with it can enter the world of the infosphere (Gui et al., 2021).

The debate was amplified by academic contributions that reached a wide audience: Sherry Turkle's two books (2011, 2015) described the loneliness of hyper-connected young people; Manfred Spitzer showed the neuropsychological risks of life online (Spitzer, 2012). *iGen* by Jean Twenge instead read the data on the decrease in the well-being of adolescents in relation to the arrival of digital media (Twenge, 2017).

### *1.3 Media practices of adolescents: a Media education analysis*

Compared to these critical reflections, the pedagogical literature, grafted onto Media Education, has highlighted the cognitive and relational opportunities favored by smartphones and their use by adolescents. Instead of the danger of the instrument itself, we should focus on the way in which these devices are managed on a personal, school and family level (Pachler et al., 2010; Boyd, 2014; Bachmair, 2015; Rivoltella, Rossi, 2019).

To do this, we need to go into the third circle, the more specific, taking on the task of carrying out an analysis of the ways in which adolescents use ICT and verifying the media practices they activate in the context of the reticular society. This is because, as an essential part of Media research, the consumption analysis is a theoretical and methodological component of research in Media Education. In fact, it allows the identification of the real recipient of certain consumptions and it generates possible forms of self-reflexivity, thus acquiring greater awareness on media consumption practices (Aroldi, 2019). It is difficult to understand how the needs of a generation can be identified, hoping to answer them without knowing which media that particular target uses. In

other words, dealing with adolescents means knowing and sharing the social places, the profiles of the sub-cultures and the media environments that are experienced by them (Rivoltella, 2020).

If the phenomenon of technological mediation has been largely investigated for childhood, especially when considering the cognitive impacts on learning dynamics, local and specific studies on relational dynamics in adolescence are few (Bissaca et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a need to analyze the ways in which young users of digital technologies stage themselves as a function of a multifaceted and plural social paradigm and of the opportunities offered by the communicative environment generated by ICTs.

We will therefore analyze the media consumption and the networks of relationships that the high schools students activate in the horizon of reticular individualism. In other words, what kind of media interactions can be observed? Is it actually true that more and more often we choose the networks we belong to (networks of friends, colleagues, fans of particular themes or sports)? What effect do the so-called publics have in the structuring of identity?

#### *1.4 Philosophy of education assumptions*

Within this analysis that we intend to make, the philosophical-educational assumptions that fall within the theoretical framework now presented are essentially two:

1. If the human being is an emerging phenomenon of interacting subjects, ICT must also be included in the category of interacting subjects, which are devices that at the same time capture and develop forces and energies by promoting interactions, multiple connections and assemblies (Braidotti, 2014). In this sense, speaking of human identity can no longer evade the reference to the dimension of *techne*, actualized in digital devices and in the computerization of existence, as an inter-agent subject and which generates relational spaces and identity remediation.
2. If identity does not constitute an original *datum* that is the fruit of self-determination of the ego, but the result of the incessant dialectic between self and other, this constitutively implies the recognition of otherness. Knowing oneself means recognizing oneself through the mediation of otherness, in the different ways in which it manifests itself (the you, the historical context of belonging, the language, the institutions), and getting through a phase of being extraneous to oneself (Ricoeur, 1991). In today's context, inhabited by the pervasiveness of ICTs, identity cannot be separated from recognizing digital technologies and the consumption they activate as otherness. ICTs must therefore be understood in the dual sense of narrative devices (which allow the propagation of self narratives in the network) and social mirrors (which return

feedback on oneself thanks to the largely dominant social functions in this age of the Internet) (Balbi, Magaudda, 2018). On this front, the effects that this relationship can generate on the forms of identity construction of adolescents are all to be studied.

## **2. The research**

### *2.1 Objectives and research questions*

The research aims at investigating, from an explicative-phenomenological point of view, the influence that adolescents' online practices, especially those related to social networks, online video-streaming platforms and video gaming, have on the development and negotiation of their identity.

To investigate this dimension, the researchers identified two main research questions: what are the media practices of nowadays' adolescents? In which terms adolescents' online media-practices have an impact on the way they socialise and negotiate their identity?

### *2.2 Methodology*

The hereby presented research can be considered as an explanatory study conducted by following a phenomenological research approach. Seen the complexity of the phenomenon addressed the researchers opted to adopt a mixed method approach (Creswell, 2015) by following an explanatory-sequential strategy of inquiry (Trincherò, Robasto, 2019). The phases of the research consisted in two main moments: in a first moment, a quantitative study devoted to collect – by the mean of an online survey – the general situation from the students and, in a second moment, a qualitative study – structured as a series of online focus groups – aimed to deeply understand the results of the quantitative phase.

The research was conducted in 9 upper secondary school located in the area of the Metropolitan City of Bologna.

The online survey (1657 collected, 15 minutes to complete on average) was structured in four parts: general information, online practices and consumers' habits, relationship's dynamics connected to the media practices and impacts of media practices on identity. Five online focus group (average duration: 1 hour) took place with a group of 8-12 volunteer students grouped by school year; the semi-structured backbone of questions that guided the focus groups aimed to deeper explore the results of the questionnaires.

In the present contribution we present some of the data emerged from a preliminary analysis. More specifically we will tackle the first three parts of the survey and some of the most relevant parts of the focus groups. The research, particularly the data analysis, is still a work in progress.

**TAB. 1.** *The numbers of the research<sup>1</sup>*

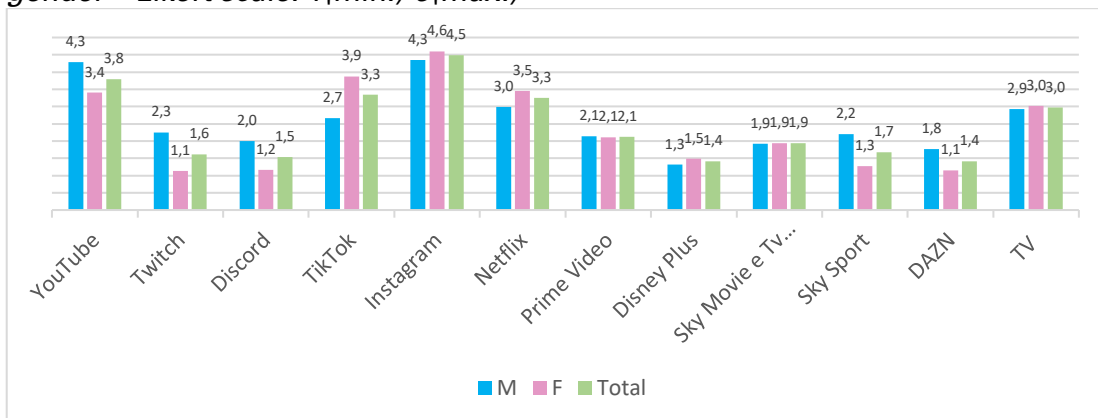
	<i>N</i>		<i>N</i>		<i>N</i>		<i>N</i>
Schools	9	School #1	133	First year	327	Males	707
Classes	88	School #2	377	Second year	336	Females	930
Surveys collected	1657	School #3	30	Third year	323	Empty	15
Focus groups recorded	5	School #4	214	Fourth year	313	Other	5
		School #5	109	Fifth year	358		
		School #6	146				
		School #7	128				
		School #8	121				
		School #9	399				

### 3. Data analysis

#### 3.1. Adolescents' online practices and consumers' habits

In the following graphics are shown the adolescents' practices related to different entertainment platforms per gender (Fig. 1) and per school year (Fig. 2). The most preferred platforms are Instagram (Likert value: 4,5), YouTube (3,8), TikTok (3,3), Netflix (3,3) and traditional TV (3,0). By carefully observing the first graph (FIG. 1) it can be remarked that YouTube, Twitch and Discord (platforms more related to video gaming) and SkySport and DAZN (platforms more related to sports) are considered more appealing by males; on the other hand, TikTok, Instagram (platforms more related to the world of other adolescents, and to influencers) are more appreciated by females.

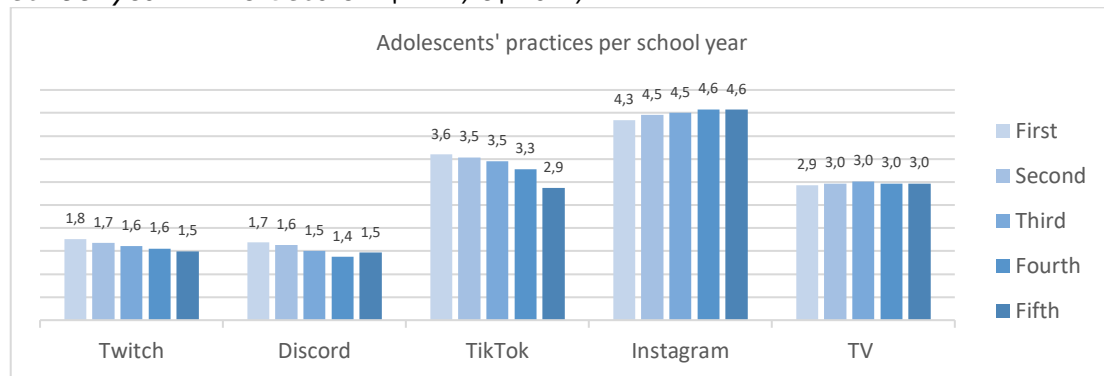
**FIG. 1.** *Adolescents' practices related to different entertainment platforms per gender – Likert scale: 1(min.)-5(max.)*



<sup>1</sup> Upper secondary school in Italy lasts 5 years, from 14 to 19 years old, corresponding to ISCED 2011 level 3, high school.

If one observes the data about adolescent's media practices organised per school year (Fig. 3) it becomes evident that TikTok is more appreciated by younger students: the Likert value for first year's students is 3,6 and it lowers until it reaches the 2,9 of the fifth year's students (the same trend, with less intensity, can be observed also for the levels of appreciation of Twitch and Discord). With Instagram the situation is reversed: the lowest value is in first year's students (4,3) and raises until it reaches the fourth and the fifth year's students (4,6).

**FIG. 2.** *Adolescents' practices related to different entertainment platforms per school year – Likert scale: 1(min.)-5(max.)*



These numbers may be interpreted as the manifestation of a general trend, recognisable especially among younger students, to prefer TikTok over Instagram. This tendency is supported by the focus groups but also by marketing researches which show a continuous growth of TikTok<sup>2</sup> and which foresee that it will become more and more popular as youngster will tend to prefer the Chinese platform over the American one.

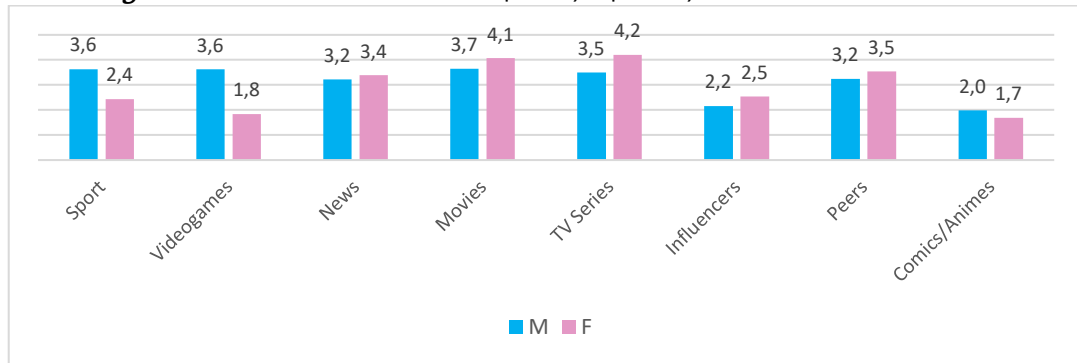
From the focus groups the researchers registered also the following considerations:

- TikTok is perceived as a platform where students feel free to express themselves and where it is possible to receive endless entertainment but also occasions for learning about interesting matters;
- students refuse to use Facebook, which is considered the social media of their parents and they do not want to expose themselves there.

The differences in the preferences according to the gender become more visible by looking at students' answers to the question «How much I appreciate the following contents» (Fig. 3).

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <https://digitalagencynetwork.com/tiktok-vs-instagram-who-is-winning-at-social-media/> (Last access: 12/07/2021)

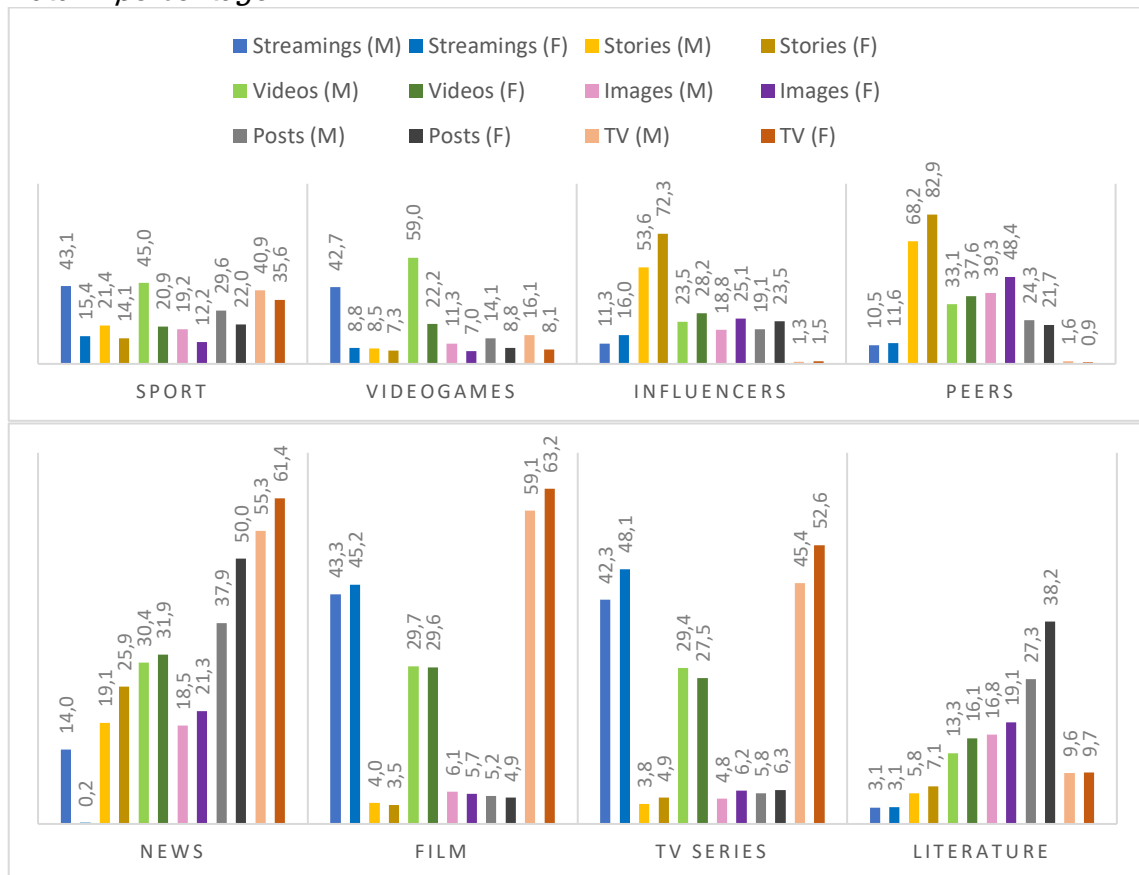
**FIG. 3.** Adolescents' answers to the question «How much I appreciate the following contents» – Likert scale: 1(min.)-5(max.)



Sports (M:3,6 – F:2,4) and videogames (M:3,6 – F:1,8) are definitely more appreciated by males rather than females; narrative contents like movies (M:3,7 – F: 4,1) and TV series (M:3,5 – F:4,2) are more appreciated by females; social-relational elements like contents form influencers (M:2,2 – F:2,5) and peers (M:3,2 – F:3,5) are, once again, more appreciated by females.

In the graphic printed in Fig. 4, are represented more details concerning the preferred platforms for different kinds of contents.

**FIG. 4.** Adolescents' practices to different entertainment contents per gender – Data in percentage





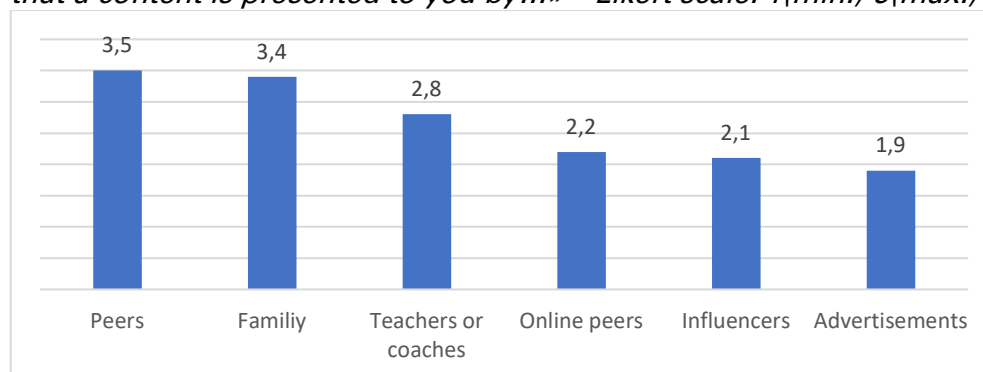
We would like to underline three considerations:

- Video-streaming platforms are more used for sports contents, video games (in these cases, especially by males) movies and tv series;
- Stories and reels are the preferred channels to benefit from influencers and friends' contents (and in these cases, we have a confirmation of the females preferences of these kinds of contents). About this, during the focus groups, students reported that, despite they are aware of being «somehow addicted» by social medias, they often do feel «captured by the social media's stream of contents» as they are somehow feared «of missing out contents»;
- Classic TV is still one of the most preferred platforms (with a balance of gender) to watch contents like news, movies and TV series.

### 3.2. Relationship's dynamics connected to the media practices

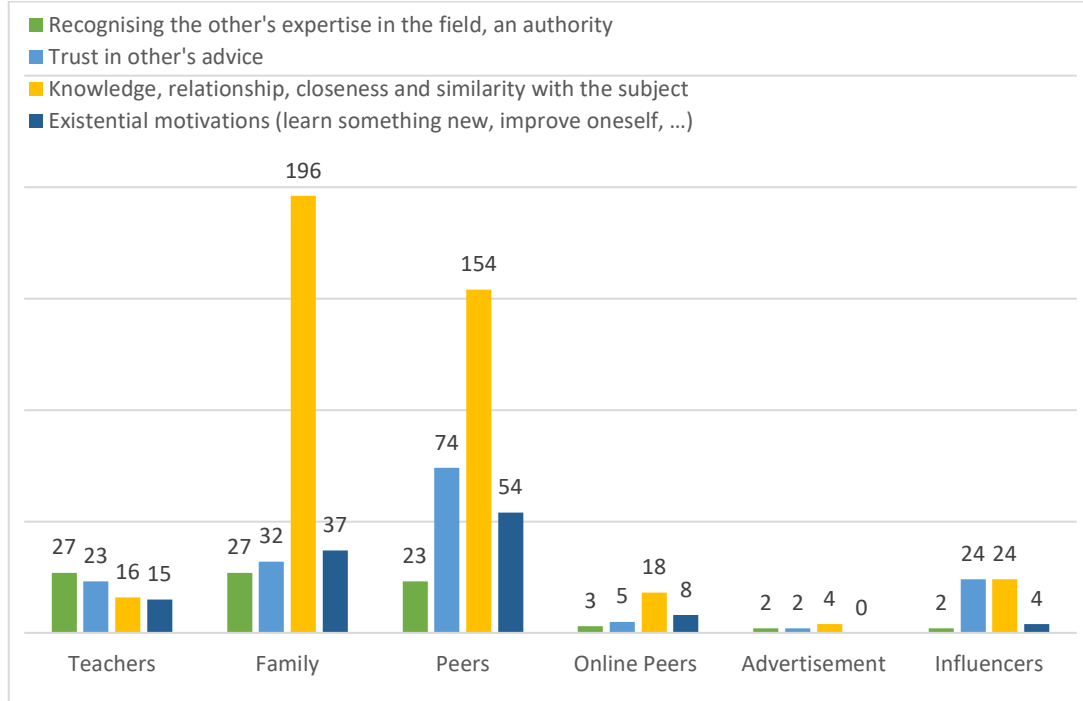
By analysing the answers to the question «How much is important for you that a content is presented to you by...» (FIG. 5) it is clear that the kinds of people more considered and listened are the closer ones: peers (Likert: 3,7), family members (Likert: 3,4) and teachers or coaches (Likert: 2,8).

**FIG. 5.** Adolescents' answers to the question «How much is important for you that a content is presented to you by...» – Likert scale: 1(min.)-5(max.)



More insights about these dynamics can be found in FIG. 6 where are schematised students' motivations to the previous question: while teachers are considered more because of their authority and expertise in fields that are recognized as useful, family members and peers are considered more because of a direct contact. These categories of people are those with whom the students share a more direct relationship: they know them personally and have with them strong and long relationships which is also accompanied by a sense of trust.

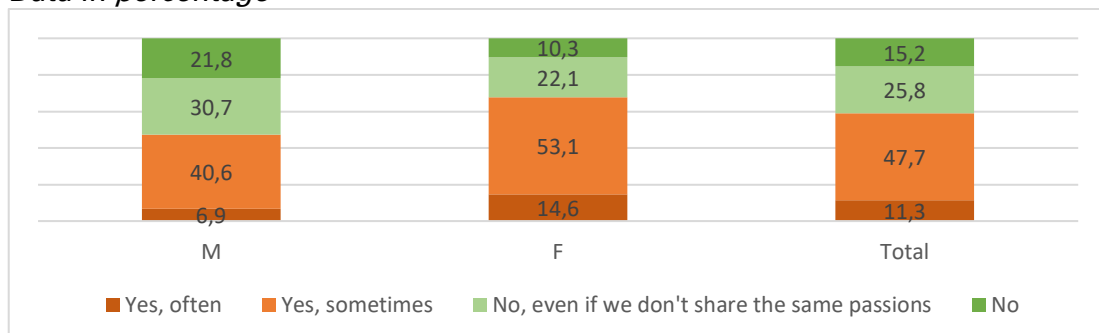
**FIG. 6.** *Adolescents' motivations to the question in FIG. 5 organised in categories*



It is interesting to remark the fact that, among the motivations that students provided for listening and considering influencers' advices, one can find «trust» and «closeness of relationship/similarity with them» with the same value (N=24). From both the surveys and the interviews it did emerge a strong sense of trust and closeness not only with their friends, but also with social media's influencers: in other words, influencers are considered as persons who can be trusted and with whom students have a sense of close relationship. This can be explained with the presence of a para social relationship dynamic (Horton, Wohl, 1956).

In FIG. 6 are represented the answers to the question «Have you ever felt excluded from a group because you didn't know what media content they were looking at?»: by taking a closer look at it, it is possible to note that the number of students that answered positively («yes, often» and «yes, sometimes», 59%) is impressive, especially among female students (67,7%) over the males (47,5%).

**FIG. 6.** *Adolescents' answers to the question «Have you ever felt excluded from a group because you didn't know what media content they were looking at?» – Data in percentage*



The five focus groups conducted with the students offered insights about the motivations behind these answers. The presence of such a number of students who feel excluded can be explained by the simultaneous presence of different peers sub-groups. Thanks to social media, these groups are in constant contact: this contribute to create, among the students, seamless streams of communication exchanges which produce, on one hand, a strong sense of belonging and friendship but, on the other hand, also dynamics of exclusion between peers.

Three possible categorisations came up from the interviews:

- students who are shy and not too much part of social life of the class: these boys and girls do not share the same media practices of the majority of their peers and tent to have their niches where they feel listened, appreciated and comfortable;
- students feeling excluded by given conversation topics and believing that they need to «catch up» in order to participate to the group: these category of boys and girls expressed the need for being up-to-date about the latest development of social/entertainment media to better be a part of their peers;
- students trusting their friends but feeling sometimes excluded by certain topics: these young boys and girls know that having different interests is enriching and this is not representing too much of a problem for them.

#### 4. Conclusions

What emerges in this research is a picture in which technologies are mediators of fundamental importance in the relationships of young adolescents: the daily and constant use of ICTs in their lives is recognized as a possible source of addiction but also as an indispensable tool to communicate, connect and learn. If technologies are a right that cannot be renounced, the last year of health emergency due to COVID-19 directly has showed the benefits and the risks of the use of media in adolescents' time: this situation of lockdown and schools' closure forced young people to mediate most of their relationships only through digital devices and made them aware of opportunities and threats. Lockdown and the consequent massive use of ICTs was also a possibility to explore more content and to experiment new media practices, like the use of Clubhouse, Discord, Houseparty to listen and converse with others' voices and for their personal narrations.

Very few teenagers use «actively» social medias (in the sense of being content creators), but they perceive their friends who do it in a positive way: «they are normal people expressing themselves»; «he do have a talent, I don't see why mocking him»; «if I were talented in something, I would do it!».

Media practices play an important role in the way adolescents behave, interact, and act with their peers. In particular, the figure of peers, even

those known and frequented exclusively online, as well as that of influencers, contribute to the shape and negotiation of the identity of young people and to the construction of their relational dynamics. These peers and influencers might be very different one from another according to adolescents' interests and curiosities; music, fashion, videogames, street art, movies and tv series, news are the contents they follow and media experiences can be varied and multiform, suggesting the heterogeneity of practices. This variety might be the key to give voice and engage young people as active citizens in schools, communities and society: if we, adults, are able to listen to them and valorize their thoughts and competencies, to consider the time they spend online as an essential aspect of their lives and a right to express themselves, we could support them in better understanding these practices and reflect on them. «The relationship with the other and with his representations are fundamental aspects for building a satisfactory self-image, capable not only of serving as a presentation but also of being a fundamental point of reference in the process of identification and self-affirmation in which young people are engaged» (Bissaca et al., 2021, 12). As adolescents said during one of the focus group, there is always something to learn from our peers, if we give them space and time to express and confront without judging them.

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