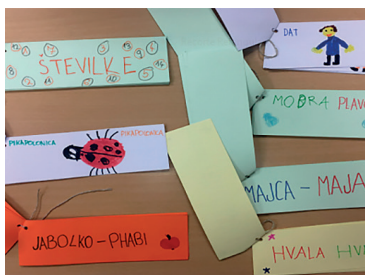
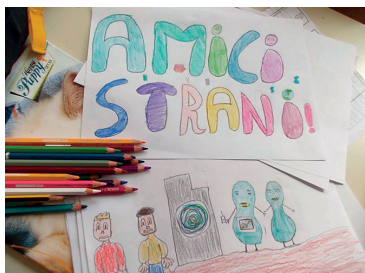


School Education, Minorities and Life Opportunities Roma Inclusive School Experiences



Edited by

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RISE
Rights, Equality &
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School Experiences



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INDICE

- 7 **Introduction**
Maria Teresa Tagliaventi
- 17 **Chapter 1. Societies and schools: towards a better humanity?**
Maria José Casa-Nova and Maria Teresa Tagliaventi
- 29 **Chapter 2. Basic concepts for a theoretically sustained practice**
Maria Alfredo Moreira , Maria José Casa-Nova, and Daniela Silva
- 41 **Chapter 3. Methodological approach**
Daniela Silva , Maria Alfredo Moreira and Maria José Casa-Nova
- 53 **Chapter 4. An inclusive perspective across Northern and Southern Italy**
Maria Teresa Tagliaventi, Giovanna Guerzoni, Luca Ferrari, Marco Nenzioni,
and Licia Masoni
- 101 **Chapter 5. An inclusive perspective across Southeast Slovenia**
Agnieszka Natalia Mravinec and Tina Strnad
- 129 **Chapter 6. An inclusive perspective across Northern Portugal**
Maria José Casa-Nova, Maria Alfredo Moreira and Daniela Silva
- 187 **Chapter 7. Internal evaluation: comparing and reflecting**
Francesco Chezzi and Alessio Arces
- 205 **Within and beyond the project: systems of thought and systems of action
in a moving society**
Maria José Casa-Nova and Maria Alfredo Moreira

CHAPTER 1. SOCIETIES AND SCHOOLS: TOWARDS A BETTER HUMANITY?

Maria José Casa-Nova¹ and Teresa Tagliaventi²

Introduction

The advance of Science has brought extraordinary developments to societies. Computational and robotic technologies, the biological at the interface with the digital, seem to promise a future of opportunities; a kind of “promised land” that looks like a “no man’s land”, and, at the same time, a land for the whole human species. But these technologies, which bring together people from all over the world, who get to know each other in the unknown, who interrelate without relating, globalizing the world more sharply, have not been able to bring people together, to deconstruct stereotypes, to humanize societies, thus making the human less inhuman. Where, then, are we all? What world do we paint, what mosaics do we build, instead of bazaars where everything is found, where everything is painted, where everything mixes, miscegenates for each one to find him/herself in his/her uniqueness built and painted by several hands, from various worlds? Where is the development of Science that makes us feel like spectators and expectants of a world of several worlds, where connections seem to disconnect instead of uniting in the differences? When inequalities become naturalized, invisible, what meaning can be attributed to Human Rights and to its effective implementation? When people look at the world and do not see inequalities and socio-cultural hierarchies, how is it possible to combat such inequalities? When everything seems to say “the world is just like that”, how can this fatality - transformed into human inaction - be questioned and deconstructed so that societies become humanized?

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The purpose of this text is not to answer these questions, but to highlight the degree of social commitment of its authors as social scientists to the construction of a better world. We draw attention to the fact that it is absolutely fundamental to see each and every human being as the human he/she is and not as an infra-human; to build solidarity in symmetry and not as goodness; to build human rights as the right for humanity to fulfil itself (Casa-Nova, 2013).

1. Social hierarchies and structural subordination

In an increasingly globalized world – marked by increased migrations to face the lack of material resources and to escape situations of armed conflict – inequalities of class, gender, ethnic-cultural, phenotypic, regional, tend to become more and more evident and often stronger. In such multifaceted, multiclassist, multicultural contexts, the perception of the multiple differences that intertwine in different daily lives tends to generate hierarchies of human beings. And although the norm is for such hierarchy to occur from socio-cultural groups with economic, cultural, academic and symbolic power, to groups without socially valued power, it also happens among socio-cultural groups that are deprived of those types of power. Such asymmetric relationships are guided by variables such as age, gender and position regarding one's profession, even if these are located in the same segment of undifferentiated professions, located at the base of the hierarchy of professions. In a "trajectory of employment in carousel" (Diogo, 2010, p. 32), even if individuals change jobs or professions throughout their lives, "they do not give up the same class location (p. 32)." And those who are dominated tend to develop relationships of domination within their sphere of relationships, in a logic similar to that of the domination to which they are targeted.

The reality is, therefore, much more complex than the variables that any research can predict. The absence of power and social prestige segregates individuals to the margins of societies, functioning as a guide of social and relational normativity ("we are not like them"). Social relations without parity of power lead to the absence of participation in the public sphere and to inhibiting the exercise of citizenship in its various dimensions, with the consequent loss of dignity by a significant part of human beings, who end up experiencing structural subordination. Such structural subordination means secular, naturalized subordination, embedded in societies; it means

the occupation of subordinate positions in the various spheres of society; worse paid jobs; living in so-called social housing neighbourhoods; “ethnic neighbourhoods”, living on the borderlines of society (Casa-Nova, 2020). It means the absence of power and participation in decision-making processes. The absence of economic redistribution, based on wages and not on state social benefits, plays an important role here, given that the wage value functions as an indicator of social well-being and power. And the people who perform the lowest paid jobs are the so-called working class and minority people, like the Roma³.

On the other hand, the lack of cultural recognition produces humiliation, lack of dignity and lack of respect. It is in this sense that Fraser’s theory (2000, 2010), with its emphasis on a three-dimensional model of justice, contains much potential for socio-cultural emancipation of social actors. According to Fraser (2010), economic redistribution, cultural recognition and parity of participation in the public sphere would place human beings on social and cultural parity, without institutionalized subordination of status. For this author, “overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction” (2010, p. 16). And to achieve this, Fraser considers that “theories of justice must become three-dimensional, incorporating the political dimension of representation, alongside the economic dimension of distribution and the cultural dimension of recognition (2010, p. 15). When explaining its three-dimensional theory of justice, the author states:

“(...) people can be impeded from full participation by economic structures that deny them the resources they need in order to interact with others as peers; in that case they suffer from distributive injustice or maldistribution. (...) people can also be prevented from interacting on terms of parity by institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value that deny them the requisite standing; in that case they suffer from status inequality or misrecognition. The third dimension of justice is the political (...) concerned chiefly with representation” (pp. 16-17).

3. Cheryl Harris, in a very interesting article entitled “Whiteness as Property”, reflects on a kind of natural rights that would be the privilege of white people. Quoting the author in her reflections on her grandmother’s life, “It was a given for my grandmother that being white automatically ensured higher economic returns in the short term and greater economic, political, and social security in the long run” (2003, p. 76). This means that being white automatically brings with it a set of formal and tacit rights that black and brown people do not access in the same terms throughout their lives. Then, whiteness appears as a property, a colour that becomes “having”

With regard to the Roma population, the stigma and racism they have been subject to over the centuries remain as strong constraints to living with dignity through access to the three-dimensional justice theorized by Fraser. The absence of material resources (a large part lives in poverty) and cultural recognition (their culture is not socially recognized as valid) have functioned as strong inhibitors for equal participation in the various social spheres, which means that these three dimensions are strongly articulated, functioning in an interdependent way.

And long and successful school trajectories also play a fundamental role, because without access to the academic knowledge that confers power and prestige in society, the Roma population will remain on the margins of society. It is therefore important to look at the School as a place of multiple learnings, and the access to it a way to fundamental knowledge and academic power that enhance life opportunities.

2. Educational inequalities: Old and new forms

Indeed, in contemporary society – known as knowledge society –, formal education is an essential immaterial asset, and a source of social power for both individuals and society as a whole. However, despite it being formally available for everyone, acquiring formal degrees is still not something consistent for the entire population.

Inequalities in educational processes were underscored with the advent of compulsory education, which makes the problem of the influence of social stratification in terms of access, attendance and marks clearly visible (Besozzi, 2017). As education becomes a source of social power, sought out by a growing number of individuals, its ‘distribution’ across different social classes makes various forms of social inequality much more striking. Widespread, free, mandatory schooling, operating through a deeply-rooted system of selection, paves the way for debate on opportunities for success (educational and social).

In sociology and sociology of education, starting from the 1960s, extensive scientific production⁴ has shown that children from the so-called working

4. See, among others, the classic studies of Baudelot & Establet (1971, 1975) Bourdieu & Passeron (1972), Benavente (1976), Benavente et al. (1994), Grácio & Miranda (1977), Young (1982 [1971]), Bernstein (1982 [1971]), Iturra (1990), Duru-Bellat (2000, 2002), Dubet (2001, 2003).

class - and from certain minorities - have greater failure rates at school, which means that school success and failure are unevenly distributed among different social classes and minorities. According to the sociological knowledge produced in this field until the 1950s and 1960s, school failure was attributed to deficient socialization and education in the family environment. Failure was justified by the *deficit* theory; by the socio-cultural *handicap* theory: the problem lay with families, who did not know how to educate children.

In the 1970s, with authors such as Bourdieu and Passeron, schools came to be seen as institutions that reproduce the social structure in their classes. The research conducted by social and cultural reproduction theorists in the context of conflictual approaches highlighted how compulsory education has not improved social mobility; it rather further amplified the inequalities already present when accessing education. School and education thus become a repository of the ruling class, which has ended up relegating all that is different into the category of 'subculture'. According Bourdieu (1978), school is the place in which privilege is transformed into merit (Bourdieu, 1978). Also, in the early 1970s, authors like Young (1982 [1971]), questioned the neutral role hitherto attributed to the formal curriculum, considering it a product of the cultural choices of certain social classes. Under the influence of the New English Sociology, some studies tried to show how school played its own, active role in the production of inequalities. In other words, it not only reproduced the inequalities mentioned by Bourdieu and Passeron, but it was also a producer of inequalities itself. As stated by Dubet (2001, p. 13), "several 'non-egalitarian effects' were evidenced: class effect, educational establishment effect, teacher effect. In this way, the school adds social inequalities to its own inequalities." In other words, schools, as institutions, although they have contributed and do contribute - through democratized access to education - to reducing economic and social inequalities, have shown to be effectively unable to change the structure of social inequalities. As institutions, schools are thus accused of being - in the words of Milani (1967, p. 20) - "like a hospital that treats the healthy and rejects the ill": in treating everyone equally, schools favour the children from upper classes, not questioning the background of their pupils, which means neglecting the person who inhabits the student, forgetting that it is actually schools that transform children into students. The classic variables that influence educational success are quite well known: structural invariants such as social class, gender, ethnicity and "race". These variables are located outside the school.

The educational system has not been able to deal with them so as to diminish its effects - although it has started an internal reflection that has led to educational policies more attentive to reproductive mechanisms (including pressure from the European Union).

In the late 1990s, social mobility studies highlighted how social equality in educational opportunities was still an issue in Europe (Breen, 2004). These discrepancies are even more striking in terms of graduation from upper secondary school and in obtaining a university diploma (Ballarino & Panichella, 2017). For example, in the 2000s, in Italy, the child of a manager or self-employed professional was five times more likely to get a university degree than the child of a labourer: 36.5% versus 7.3% (Barone, 2012).

The topic of inequality is again being examined as it applies to increasingly multi-ethnic classes with a student population that varies greatly in terms of social, cultural and economic origin, and diversity in terms of motivations, expectations, and requirements for learning (Besozzi, 2017). In Europe, inequality in education is loudly and clearly seen in the 'wastage' rate - i.e. the phenomenon that covers all failures, repeated academic years and drop-outs, and which describes the discontinuity of pathways with respect to the regularity required by law - especially for immigrant pupils not born in Europe.

According to one of the latest Eurydice reports (2019), in almost all European nations, early-dropout rates for students born abroad are higher than for native-born children, reaching the highest percentage in Turkey (over 60%), followed by Spain and Italy (over 30%). In general, the children of immigrants are particularly disadvantaged in terms of opportunities for school success, and are more likely than native pupils to achieve lower degrees and dropout or evade school obligations (Colombo, 2010), as is the case with the Roma minority. That disadvantage is made up mainly by economic vulnerability, and cultural, linguistic and social barriers (Barone, 2012), as well as other factors. In addition to the well-known variables at the root of inequality, presently there are new issues that intertwine with those of the past, in a pluralisation of areas that feed into differences in educational pathways. Qualitative research teases out the question of the actors' choice and intentionality, personal motivations for learning, and expectations related to school - all of this within a system of constraints and social conditioning (Colombo, 2010).

Debates on the topic of equality have consequently developed around the issues of acceptance, inclusion, active and conscious participation in the

teaching/learning process, and citizen rights (Besozzi, 2017). National policies play a fundamental role in this – and not just policies relating to education, but also those covering receptiveness, health and well-being, workplace policies, social security, and housing regulations.

In the last decade, the topic of inequality has been dealt with in part through qualitative analyses on the efficacy of the educational system. Carried out since 2000, the OECD-PISA surveys have brought important indicators to light: in addition to establishing how scholastic learning and achievements after mandatory schooling are closely correlated to the students' social and economic background, they have also highlighted how the 'performance' of educational systems is correlated to the organisation of the school system (nationally and locally) and to its structural features. The different ways in which studies are programmed and organised in various nations play an important role in terms of the degrees of inequality between students, and thus in the construction of social reproduction mechanisms. Even if reproduction lingers as the general 'law' of education systems, the degree of reproduction depends on how schools are organised, the way their classes are composed (if there are ethnically segregated classes) (Dubet, Duru-Bellat, & Vêrétout, 2010), the teaching styles adopted, and the methods used.

Fighting inequality in education takes place through the identification of teaching methods, the choices and abilities of teachers, and their specific training, policies, styles, strategies, techniques, and relationships, which define everyday educational contexts (between students, students and teachers, members of the teaching staff and other school actors), relationships with families, and relationships with the local context. For change to occur, one must also intervene on the interactive mechanisms within the school and on the role of the teaching staff. When working with diversity, it is important to be aware of the degree to which social actors are bearers of prejudice and assimilationist perspectives, often disguised behind welcoming attitudes. The existence of prejudice or racism towards Roma students, for example, by teachers, school staff, and other students or family members, is one of the main issues that precludes and discourages their success at school, at work, and in social life (FRA, 2018a).

The most alarming data reporting strong discrimination in education are those concerning the Roma younger generation. Indeed, "school segregation is still an unfortunate reality in Europe today. Its negative consequences affect in particular Roma children, children with disabilities, children with a migrant

background, and other children due to their social or personal circumstances” (Council of Europe, 2017, p. 5). This is how the Council of Europe 2017 Report begins, according to which school segregation keeps affecting Roma children in most EU countries, where a disproportionate number of children attend *remedial classrooms* and *special schools*, receiving an education according to a minimalist curriculum (p. 8). Such evidence means denying access to knowledge regularly conveyed at school, lowering the level of academic demand, and, consequently, contributing towards maintaining a situation of educational and social disadvantage, which, consequently, keeps feeding the vicious circle of poverty and stigmatization. Channelling Roma children to so-called special education often means transforming cultural difference into mental disability (Casa-Nova, 2006), that is, what is unknown and appears outside the standard is judged according to the norms of mainstream culture, with society determining that certain people be called “disabled” or “abnormal”, a clinical judgment based on social norms and, often, on IQ tests where the cultural dimension associated with mainstream culture is very strong.

FRA’s Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) results, conducted in nine EU Member States⁵ in 2016, showed that Roma children lag behind their non-Roma peers on all education indicators. Only about half (53 %) of Roma children aged between four and the age for initiating compulsory primary education actually take part in early childhood education. The proportion of Roma early school-leavers is disproportionately high compared with the general population. Among young Roma aged 16–24 no longer in education, more than three quarters have completed at most only lower secondary education. Half of the Roma youth aged between 6 and 24 years do not attend school. Of those who do, only 1 % attend school at a higher level than the one corresponding to their age; 18 % attend at an educational level lower than the one corresponding to their age, either because they repeated classes, started school later, or both. This share is higher (20 %) among Roma in the age of upper secondary education.

5. EU-MIDIS II – Transition from education to employment of young Roma in nine EU Member States (FRA, 2018b) collected information from over 25,500 respondents from different ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds in all 28 EU Member States. The findings summarized in this paper are based on 7,947 individual interviews with Roma respondents in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. The data are representative for Roma living in geographic or administrative units with density of Roma population higher than 10 %, who self-identify as “Roma” or as members of one of the other groups covered by this umbrella term.

Against this backdrop, the contribution of the RISE Project in the fight against different forms of inequality in education is clear: if given the proper support, schools can actually mitigate the impact of social inequality on educational inequality⁶. RISE worked at the micro level, but articulating with the meso and the macro, proposing a change of perspective for the schools involved, starting with the action research method, teacher training, and the use of inclusive teaching methods, namely the development of pedagogical devices and cooperative learning, which this book deals with largely in its latter part.

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6. In this regard, see Teresa Seabra (2008), among others.

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