

Education in a world of conflict and division

L'educazione in un mondo di conflitti e divisioni

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This special edition is focussed on the challenges that face education in situations of conflict and division in the contemporary world. Armed conflict has caused devastation in the past year in Ukraine and, over a longer period of time, in other parts of the world, notably Afghanistan, Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These armed conflicts have had a profound effect on the lives of children and young people and their school education. In some instances, schools have been damaged or destroyed or been appropriated for military purposes. Large numbers of children have been internally or externally displaced and, as a result, their schooling is limited or disrupted. There are serious challenges for the inclusion of externally displaced children in educational systems in terms of accommodating the language, culture and, in some cases, the religion of the children. There are other forms of political, sectarian, ethnic or cultural division that can impact on school education. Schooling can be divided on ethnic or religious grounds, children separated from the *other* because of historical conflicts or as a result of discriminatory political engineering. In some parts of the world children can be excluded from mainstream schools, taught in non-integrated classrooms or be assigned to special schools that are under resourced. This can be discerned, for example, in the treatment of Roma children in parts of Eastern Europe.

The articles in this special edition encompass a number of important topics. The impact of armed conflict on children and education and some of the underlying Human Rights to protect children are discussed by McKinney and Farrar. This article refers to some key examples of armed conflict in the world. This is followed by a specific focus on the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the article presented by Locatelli. Some of the points raised by McKinney and Farrar and Locatelli can be discerned in the ideas and activities of Angelo Patri in the United States during the Second World War (in the article by Petruzzi). The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bravi) demonstrates that, despite the long-term cessation of armed conflict, divisions, conflicts and discrimination continue to prevail and this exists at different levels including schools. Closed and introspective Identities (Zannoni) and polarization (Melacarne and Slavutzky) are key challenges in peace time and social tensions and conflicts are often manifested in educational environments. In some contexts, such as Brazil (de Lima Souza and Camargo Sena), social divides are constructed around ethnicity rooted in historical domination and oppression. This divide has continued in racist attitudes, violence and even genocide towards black children. These phenomena are strictly connected to inequalities and need to be negotiated through institutional and collective approaches at school (Ferrero) and in the community spaces through a perspective of participation in decision-making processes (Balloi).

Two articles directly address the impact of armed conflict on school education. McKinney and Farrar examine some of the key issues that affect different countries throughout the world and Locatelli focuses in on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The underlying context for McKinney and Farrar is the human right to education as it is developed in human rights legislation and, more recently, in the Sustainable Development Goals. They then provide an analysis of the consequences of armed conflict for school education and use Ukraine and Syria as contemporary examples. Child soldiers are next discussed followed by the impact of armed conflict on the education of girls. McKinney and Farrar highlight the suspension of secondary schooling for girls and lack of access to Higher education for women in Afghanistan. These have been imposed by the Taliban for religious-ideological reasons and this creates barriers for the intellectual and personal development of girls and young women. Finally, they address some critical issues, and this includes the inclusion of the protection of children in ceasefire and peace agreements.

Locatelli provides a short case study of the DRC which has one of the highest rates of children absent from school in the world. The DRC is one of the poorest counties in the world and has been stricken by conflict that has claimed approximately six million lives in the last twenty-five years. There are currently around six million displaced people in the country and in many places, parents are too scared to send their children to school. The school system is composed of two types of school: government schools and faith-based schools. The faith-based schools include *Maison de Paix*, funded by a Catholic organisation. *Maison de Paix* has invested in education and made teacher education a priority to ensure a higher quality of teaching. It also aims to strengthen their skills and knowledge in the field of peace and citizenship education.

Petruzzi offers a fascinating article that explores the historical legacy of Angelo Patri (1876-1965). Patri was of Italian origin but spent his life in the United States as a leading educator and popular writer on educational issues. His progressive and innovative approach to pedagogy was recognised and he spent the majority of his professional life as a school Principal. He approached education as a child centred activity, though always mindful of the external demands. This approach engendered a feeling of belonging in the children as he replaced the strict discipline of the American schools of that time with child responsibility. The article provides an overview of his work during the Second World War and his book *Your Children in Warfare* (1943). This book had sections for parents, teachers and children. Patri advocated resilience and forbearance in the face of reduced resources and, for the children, he encouraged them to prepare for the future.

Bravi's article is concerned with schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the post war context. A measured and more unified approach to school education collapsed with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Within the emerging constituencies, introspective curricula were introduced that reflected nationalistic discourses and identities. Bravi critiques the supposition that the territorial divisions are representative of clean divisions between people of different ethnicities and religions. One solution to diversity in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the *Two schools under one roof* strategy which separates Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats in different classrooms. While some integration has been introduced, there has been a tendency for this separation to encourage strong and exclusive ethnic religious identities that can lead to polarisation. Bravi concludes with an account of a positive project entitled *Srebrenica, City of hope*. This involves the reconstruction of an ancient village that is a meeting place for survivors of the war and for those who have returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim is to transform a site that is often best remembered for genocide.

Federico Zannoni argues that children should be taught in schools to recognise the insidious nature of some forms of nostalgia. He provides some excellent examples, including an account of the use of nostalgia by Umberto Bossi, founder of Lega Nord. Bossi constructed a mythical past for the *peoples of the Po valley* and created a territorial entity that never existed: Padania. This helped support racist and xenophobic rhetoric that aimed to place all the blame for social and economic woes on the other, the outsider, the person who did not have authentic roots in (the inauthentic) Padania. This recourse to constructing a mythical past or forming a selective historical narrative to serve a group's goals and serve a particular ideological purpose is not unique to Bossi. The hardening of boundaries between the *group* and others leads to divisions in societies that can lead to conflict. Zannoni rightly warns of the dangers of the rise of nationalist and xenophobic populisms that have arisen across Europe and contribute to democratic recession.

Melacarne and Slavutzky focus on strategies to deal with the increasing polarisation in classrooms – a reflection of the polarisation in society. They explore some of the different ways in which society has become polarised on issues such as immigration and vaccination campaigns. The article then considers two theories that can help teachers negotiate this polarisation in the classroom: the deliberative and the critical reflexive approaches. The deliberative approach is clearly not adopted to consolidate the positions of the children on a set topic but rather the children should learn to understand different points of view. The critical reflexive approach encourages children to justify their positions in a more rational way and be more critical about their stance. Both approaches encourage the development of communication.

de Lima Souza and Camargo Sena provide a deeply disturbing article to this special edition. They review the plight of black children in Brazil. The authors report that 63 black children (aged between 15 and 29) are killed every day in Brazil. That means that one black child is killed every 23 minutes. This is set within a culture of endemic racism against black people. A bitter legacy of slavery and oppression. Black people have been infantilised, considered as inferior – suitable for work but inferior. Black children are essentially denied a childhood and are deemed to be dispensable. The police attack and murder black children with impunity. de Lima Souza and Camargo Sena highlight two murders that have attracted considerable attention and are catalysts for the cries for justice. These two children provide faces and names to this ongoing unofficial war of attrition on black children. A 14-year-old boy (João Pedro Mattos Pinto) was shot in his home during lockdown and a 5-year-old boy (Miguel Otávio) was killed in an elevator shaft while his mother worked (the mother was forced to work on that day). The boy was supposed to have been supervised by his mother's employer.

Ferrero investigates the role of school leaders in guaranteeing equity in school education in Italy. There is a disjuncture between the aspiration for equity in schools in Italy, as highlighted in the Constitution and education laws, and the ways in which this is actualised in the schools. There is a high level of autonomy in these schools, aimed at ensuring greater equity at local levels. This means that the role of school leader is crucial. Ferrero examines some discomfiting examples of ways in which wealthier parents can advantage their children. For example, they can pay for private music tuition which will allow their children easier access to musical middle school. Another example is where the school requests voluntary donations and the wealthier parents can donate money that can enhance the school resources. Ferrero argues that these examples contradict the spirit of the ideal that all children should have access to a quality education and that there should be no discrimination and no advantages for the more wealthy.

Balloi looks at the inclusion of minorities in education and their participation in decision making. This is an article that probes commonly accepted terms and

assumptions. For example, the article includes a forensic examination of what constitutes a minority and the complexity of including minorities in educational systems. The article continues with an equally probing examination of what constitutes participation. Participation is highly problematic: there is a lack of clarity about what would constitute genuine participation and how it can be achieved in top-down systems. While sharing decision making is one of the ways in which domination can be reduced between majority and minority groups it is notoriously difficult to enact. There are various ways in which effective participation in decision making can be encouraged in education and these are explored in some depth.

Our thanks are extended to the journal for the kind invitation to co-edit this special edition. We take this opportunity to thank the contributors for the very insightful and thought-provoking articles. We also thank the peer reviewers who were very thorough and professional in their reviews. Finally, a heartfelt thanks to Elisa, the editorial manager, for her meticulous work on preparing the articles for publication.