

**As a conclusion, to the future. A discussion on trust, agency and the semantics of rights
in intergenerational relationships**

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Between the child and the pupil

One of the characteristics of modernity of European societies, as much as its global ramifications, is a socio-cultural process commonly known as ‘the discovery of the child’. Since the XVII century, a construct called ‘childhood’, has appeared, gradually but irresistibly, as a structural component of all social systems (Ariés, 1962, Cunningham, 2005). Social systems such as the arts, families, law, health, politics, economics and science have contributed, each one from its specific perspective and language, to the generation of a multidimensional, complex, often contradictory but nevertheless solid semantics of ‘childhood in society’.

Professional practices and discourses have been crossing, clashing, converging and diverging within and across social systems, mixing and overlapping. The result is a panoply of portraits of the same subject, the child, painted with a wide range of ideas and beliefs concerning its capabilities, the value of its agency and the possibility for its self-determination.

However, no other social system has been more fascinated by the child than education. Both as an external reference, the child in its journey to adulthood, and as an internal reference, the pupil to be educated, the child has invariably captured the attention of education, to a point that from the late XIX century, education has become, concurrently to the family, ‘the social system of childhood’.

It can be argued whether the tension feeding the education debate (and the debate on education in society) underpinning the perpetual condition of reform and self-reform of the education system (Baraldi and Corsi, 2016) is nurtured by education’s fascination for an object, the child, which is necessarily out of its reach. As a pupil, the child is not a product of education but a construct, a persona, to allow the construction of expectation and references for communication. The ‘true’ child, the individual psychic systems cannot be controlled by the educational intention, and there is always the possibility for them to avoid or subvert education, even at very young, pre-scholar, age (Dotson et al., 2015; Scollan and Gallagher, 2016).

The characteristic anxiety pervading the educational discourse is generated by the diverging forces of fascination and inaccessibility emanating from the child. Education advocates the function of *forming* children, creating cognitive abilities which are necessary to adapt to social

norms (Luhmann and Schorr, 1982), but the children cannot be formed, and pupils are a construct that allows expectations to be disappointed, and pleas for reform.

At the beginning, when mass education was being introduced, the educational discourse on childhood, that is, pedagogy, used to entertain a fairly secure relationship with its object on the one hand (the child) and its function on the other hand (the education of the child). Understood as a linear process which may be represented by a straight arrow between the avowed goal of actors and the achieved end-state, education and was based on linear logic, devising pedagogical means to achieve its goal. A more critical account of the traditional pedagogical discourse recognises it as a form of self-description where education is understood as means of correction for 'the sin of childhood' (Britzman, 2007). Within the traditional pedagogical discourse, therefore, the image of the child's capabilities and the space for its agency and self-determination was painted in the faintest colours.

Nevertheless, whether as social engineering or a means for correction of childhood, education has been facing a continuing situation of crisis, transforming the need for reform in its main form of self-description (Baraldi and Corsi, 2016). It was only in the early 1960s that the discourse in and on education came to terms to the understanding that 'the crisis of education' was the reconstruction as an item for pedagogical and political agendas of the structural limit of education (Arendt, 1993). Such limit concerns the impossibility for education, as for any other form of communication, to control the way in which the observer makes sense of the information and motivations, and therefore reacts to it.

As it is well known by any educational practitioners, from Early to Higher Education, no educational intention, even if enhanced by the most refined technology, cannot direct the development of children's personality. This claim might not come as a surprise, and it is underpinned by philosophical pragmatism already, and particularly by James' point that the development of a child's mind cannot be completely controlled by any educational technique, due to the independence of psychic processes of meaning-making, which are inaccessible from the outside (James, 1983). James' introduces the ideas of an inescapable role of the child in its own development, which it is here integrated by a reference to Portes' claim that in any social relationship, a possible derailing factor for intentions is that participants may react in contingent ways and devise means of by-passing the intended consequences of their actions (Portes, 2000). Even the clearest goal and the most advanced pedagogical means cannot secure that educators' actions will have the intended consequences (Vanderstraeten, 2004). Unintended, and often significant, consequences that the educators cannot control, and of which they are often unaware are a necessary companion to the educational intention.

In sum, unintended consequences are always possible in education, also with very young children, as convincingly demonstrated by Dotson and colleagues with regard to the strategies

implemented by toddlers to subvert meal-time discipline in American nurseries (Dotson et al., 2015), and by Scollan and Gallagher with regard to the use of 'forbidden' technological apparatuses (Scollan and Gallagher, 2016). It is true that unintended consequences are one of the building blocks of modern liberal economics: Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', maybe the most famous metaphor in social science, is an example of a unintended consequence. Smith maintained that each individual, seeking only his own gain, is led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention, that end being the public interest.

In the influential article titled 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action' (1936), Merton extends the analysis of the concept of unintended consequences from its economical original context to all social systems. In this article, Merton analyses and classifies types and determinants of unanticipated consequences of purposive action.

Since Merton's ground-breaking article, the problem of unintended and unanticipated has pertained not only to economic science, but also to the effectiveness of practices and the boundaries of social planning, with obvious implications for education. This seems of particular importance for education, which is the most ambitious social system, advocating to itself, among a number of others, the task to produce and preserve the presuppositions of social cohesion through a systemic socialisation of children. This is suggested by the relevant amount of pedagogical publications recognising education as the medium for the transmission of the moral values that represent the foundations of society (Kymlicka, 2008). For instance, Lawton and colleagues (2005), as much as Batho (1990), demonstrates, at least with regard to the English contexts, how education has been claiming the task of securing the development of the qualities of the democratic citizens through civic education. This concerns Early Years Education, as 'education to fundamental (British) values' has become a mandatory component for all Early Years settings (Lloyd, 2015, see also Discourses/6 in this collection).

Notwithstanding high hopes nurtured by education's self-description, pedagogical theories have been experiencing severe difficulties in avoiding the unintended consequences of educational intentions. For Merton, the functions of a social practice are its "observable objective consequences" (Merton, 1957). Manifest functions are those outcomes that are intended and recognized by the agents concerned; latent functions are those outcomes that are neither intended nor recognized. Although the distinction between manifest and latent functions has been the object of sociological critical accounts (Campbell, 1982), pedagogical research towards the unintended consequences of an educational system that aims to rationalize socialization still uses it as a basic analytic concept (see Kendall, 1998). However, classic sociological research on education has not always been concerned about the unintended consequences in the field of education; for Parsons and Bales (1965), socialization (which includes education) fulfilled a fairly unambiguous role within society. Moving from the

theoretical presupposition that human beings are open systems, exchanging input and output with the environment, socialization is understood by Parsons as input delivered to individuals by their social environment; the output of this operation would consist in the transformation of individuals' inner structure in order to fit with the norms and value orientations of the society in which they live. A concurrent theoretical approach to education, which is here advocated as more realistic, pays attention to the mutual operational closure of psychic systems and social systems; suggesting that it is not possible to describe socialization in terms of the transfer of a meaning pattern from one system (society) to the other (the individual) (Baraldi, 1993). In fact, the interaction between a psychic system and his or her social environment might or might not provoke particular structural changes in the 'inner sphere' of the individual (Vanderstraeten, 2000).

Within this theoretical model, the concept of 'unintended consequences' should take into account by a sociological analysis of education: when a pedagogically stylized act communicates its own intention, the person who is expected to be educated acquires the freedom to travel some distance, for instance, to pursue the intention out of mere opportunism or to avoid 'being educated' as much as possible (Vanderstraeten, 2006). The realism of the pedagogical models based on the transmission of knowledges from the adult to the child has been questioned also with regard to Early Years Education (Baraldi, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford, 2008). Thus, an interesting question for educators and educational scientists concerns the possibility of reducing unintended consequences of pedagogical action.

1. The problem of trust for education

Education "is action that is intentionalized and attributable to intentions" (Luhmann 1995: 244); the reference for the educational action is the pupil, and the standardised expectations about its learning allow to observe the effect of education and the need for reform, either of education or of the pupil. Whilst the socialisation of the child only requires the possibility of reading the behavior of others as selected information such as potential dangers or social expectations (Vanderstraeten 2000), the education of the pupil, from Early Years Education, aims to generate standardised learning patterns that cannot be left to chance socializing events, something that presupposes coordinating a plurality of efforts.

However, education cannot be conceived of as the rational form of socialization, because it cannot eliminate the possibility of resistance, being children's psychic systems inaccessible, and the pupils nothing else than persona created by education itself. In fact, intentional communication with educational goals doubles the motives for rejection. In any communication, the meaning can be rejected if the addressee or receiver finds the information unsatisfactory and the intention unacceptable (Vanderstraeten and Biesta, 2004). Research

suggests that even at a very young age children actively participate to educational communication, selecting whether to accept it or not (Bjork-Willen, 2008). The addressee has the opportunity to reject the communication, if he or she refuses the role of someone who needs to be educated.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding improbability education happens and children, often from a young age, are included in educational organisations, and become object and subject of educational discourses. If pedagogy cannot secure the reproduction of the educational relationships, as it is even more so the case for the mere educational intention that pedagogy aims to refine and direct, what is the resource that support the reproduction of education? What supports children's acceptance of the educational intention, of teaching, of requests of learning and evaluation or correction?

The question is particularly intriguing, as it draws attention to the position of children in the education system, which represent for most of them a crucial context of social experiences. This discussion aims to emphasize the urgency and the challenge represented by a question regarding the possibility of children's acceptance of the educational intention. What can support such acceptance where children's position is one of exclusion? The answer reminds to the function of a specific medium of communication, a medium specialising in creating the conditions for the acceptance of communication. This medium is trust (Luhmann, 1988). A crucial theoretical claim, which is pivotal for the argument presented here, while underpinning all contributions, sometimes in an explicit way, is that children's trusting commitment in the interaction with adults is vital for the reproduction of education. More than any other social system in modern society, education needs trust of children for its reproduction in conditions of high improbability. Without children's trusting commitment, education could not exist. Lack of trust activates a vicious circle between lack of trust and social participation (Farini, 2012): it implies losing opportunities of children's action, reducing their preparation to risk trust, and activating anxiety and suspicion for educators' actions. One can describe these effects as secondary socialization, when "secondary" refers here to the consequences of the methods that are used to educate. Some of these consequences are of course currently fairly well known: distrust in interactions with specific educators can determine children's marginalization or self-marginalization in the education system, with possible drop-out and consequent reduction of effectiveness of education in society; these may be understood as unintended consequences of education. Education is particularly affected by lack of trust, which creates perverse effects as alienation, prevents commitment and leaves the floor to disappointment of expectations. The advancement of the discussion now demands undertaking reflection on the sources of trust as a medium of acceptance for communication.

Firstly, trust can guarantee basic presuppositions of action and relationships when it is referred to expertise. This is the case for classic pedagogy, and for the current revival of teacher-centred stance, postulating the dependence of children's commitment to education exclusively, or primarily, on their trust in adults' expert guidance, counselling and teaching (Vanderstraeten and Biesta, 2006; Britzman 2007). This source of trust is the foundation of the relationship between the pupil and the teacher, but has been questioned for failing to value the competences and autonomy of the child (Shapiro, 2002; Kelman, 2005). Trust in expertise, also, concern the participation in the organisational dimension of education, school-based learning, but does not support risk-taking outside of the classroom, with obvious implication for the quality of children's socialisation. Critical pedagogy and sociological childhood studies have questioned the effectiveness of teachers' expertise in promoting children's trusting commitment. In particular, according to childhood studies, in education, children's opportunities of participation are strongly reduced "by curricular and behavioural rules and structures" (Wyness 1999: 356), that is, by the latent functions of the system which are fulfilled alongside of the official curricula. In education, the reduced opportunities for participation available for the pupil, would result in less opportunity for the child to learning trust by taking risk and engaging in social relationships.

2. Trust based on categorical inequalities

Not included in the repertoire of sources of trust presented by Giddens (1990; 1991), therefore making its discussion a genuine contribution of this chapter to sociological research is a second source of trust connected to the organisational dimension of education: trust based on categorical inequalities. The theoretical underpinning of this construct may be recognized in Tilly's claim that inequality becomes embedded in the organizational structures (Tilly 1998). This is particularly true for education, which is a system where inequality among individual performances and among goal attainment is at the same time a basic structural feature and an expected output of the system. Tilly elaborates an inventory of causal mechanisms through which categorical inequality is generated by and sustained in organizations. Tilly argues that certain kinds of social structural relations are solutions to problems generated within social systems. This is not argument for a smooth, homeostatic kind of functionalism in which all social relations organically fit together in fully integrated social systems. The functional explanations in Tilly's arguments allow for struggles and contradictions. Nevertheless, his arguments rely on functional explanations insofar as at crucial steps of the analysis he poses a problem generated by a set of social relations and then treats the demonstration that a particular social form is a solution to the problem as the core of the explanation of that social form.

For instance, categorical forms of inequality among pupils through selection are created in education through selection; categorical distinctions make easier to discern who and when to trust and who and when avoiding risks. As Tilly puts it: “organizational improvisations lead to durable categorical inequality”. Pupils are categorized according to their performances, and such categorical distinctions become stable features of organization as references for the allocation of trust commitments, therefore enhancing the stability of educational communication. Tilly distills the core explanation of categorical inequality to three positions: (1) Organizationally installed categorical inequality reduces risks. Categorical inequalities support the decision-maker in the risky choice whether to accord trust or not in any specific situation. This is a claim about the effects of categorical inequality on the stability of organizational relationships: the former stabilizes the latter; (2) Organizations whose survival depends on stability therefore tend to adopt categorical inequality. This is a selection argument: the functional trait, categorical inequality, is adopted because it is functional, (3) Because organizations adopting categorical inequality deliver greater returns to their dominant members and because a portion of those returns goes to organizational maintenance, such organizations tend to crowd out other types of organizations. Tilly’s model is readily applicable to educational organization, where the categorical inequalities offer a references for the allocation of trust, as a form of self-constructed mechanism to reduce anxiety. In educational situations, categorical distinctions make it easier to know whom to trust and whom to exclude.

Categorical inequalities become stable features of organization because they enhance the survival of organizations that have such traits, and that as a result over time organizations with such traits predominate. The adoption of the organizational trait in question may be a conscious strategy intentionally designed to enhance exploitation and opportunity hoarding, but equally it may result from quite haphazard trial and error. However, whilst stabilizing social relationships, they also stabilize position of marginalization for some pupils. The stabilization of educational organizations based on categorical inequalities and differentiated allocation of trust commitments support their reproduction in condition of improbability. Nevertheless, it presents a paradoxical consequence: categorical inequalities reduce the potential of educational organizations in accomplishing their institutional goal, that is, the planned socialisation of all children. Taking into account Tilly’s inventory of causal mechanisms through which categorical inequality is generated and sustained by organizations, it appears clear that trust based on categorical inequalities can be understood as a condition, and a consequence, of the reproduction of the educational organisations. However, trust based on categorical inequalities is only one side of the picture, that necessarily bring dis-trust based on categorical inequalities with it. The problems of institutional distrust are well known, and described in terms of a

spiralling relationship between marginalization of some pupils and their alienation from educational communication.

Not surprisingly, in light of the limitations of trust based on expertise in motivating children's trusting commitment, and the cost of trust based on categorical inequalities in terms of exclusion of children, a concern for education has become to reflect on other possible sources of trust to sustain children's acceptance of education.

Trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities are intertwined: while educators' expertise legitimizes them as evaluators in institutionalized selective events, selective events produce the material references to build and develop categorical inequalities. The two sources of trust are coupled: the effects of one form are the presuppositions of the other. In the education system, educators' expertise creates the material foundations of categorization, and trust based on categorical inequalities builds systems of social closure, exclusion and control, where children may experience anxiety about the future outcome of present actions, favouring risk-avoidance behaviour and conformity.

3. Affective trust in education and its relationship with children's agency

Both trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities leave the floor to problems of institutional distrust. However, and this introduces a third sources of trust in education, trust can also be generated through interpersonal affective relationships, which mobilize it through a process of mutual disclosure. In this second case, trusting commitment concerns the relationship in itself, a 'pure relationship' (Giddens 1991), and trust results in a demand for intimacy. Interpersonal affective relationships seem to be much more motivating than expertise. Since the 1980's, childhood studies have been challenging the ontological foundation of adult's expertise and control as a source of trust in the relationships between children and adults. According to a rich, and already classic, literature children cannot be considered passive recipients of adults' information and command (Jenks, 1996); on the contrary, they are social agents who actively participate in the construction of social systems (James et al, 1998). The continuity with the pragmatist philosophy of the early 20th century is evident here. Children have their own agendas and concerns which may go beyond the institutional scopes of education and the mere self-interest in educational career; the educational relationship is a different environment for adults and children, who may take into account risk which are neglected by adults. Therefore, social attention moves towards children's trusting commitment and necessity of building trust in their relationships with adults (Holland and O'Neill, 2006), also with regard to Early Years Education (Burger, 2013). Whilst the sociological research on education continues to reveal that mainstream educational practices are still centered around standardised role performances (Parsons and Bales, 1965; Sinclair and

Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979; Vanderstraeten, 2004; Farini, 2011; Walsh, 2011), other strands of sociological research, either theoretical or focused on pedagogical experiments and innovation, emphasize the importance of agency in the construction of children's trust in education, from a pre-scholar age (Baraldi, 2015, Harris and Kaur, 2012). Developing person-centred approaches in critical pedagogy, it is suggested that adults should risk interpersonal affective relationships with pupils, listening to their personal expressions and supporting them empathically (Rogers, 1951). In other words, childhood studies advocate the inclusion of the child in the education, from its early, pre-scholar, stages (Károly and Gonzales, 2011), questioning the measure in which trust can be built between the adult and the pupil.

Agency is key to the development of trusting commitments that are stronger and more complex than trust based in expertise and more inclusive than trust based on categorical inequalities. A certain degree of agreement within childhood studies is observable, with regard to the semantic of agency. Agency is observed when individual actions are not considered as determined by another subject (James, 2009; James and James, 2008, Baraldi, 2014). However, the concept of agency implies that individuals '... interact with the social conditions in which they find themselves' (Moosa-Mitha, 2005: 380), acknowledging limitations imposed by social constraints (Bjerke, 2011; James, 2009; James and James, 2008; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Valentine, 2011; Wyness, 2014).

Agency and its social conditions are visible in social interactions (Bae, 2012; Baraldi, 2014; Baraldi and Iervese, 2014; Bjerke, 2011; Harré and van Langhenove, 1999), where agency can be observed in the availability of choices of action and the agent's possibility to exercise a personal judgement and to choose according to it (Markstrom and Hallden, 2009; Moss, 2009). In other words, adults are invited to consider that children are social agents who can and must tackle important issues, "dancing" with them (Holdsworth, 2005: 150). This claim is both ideological and theoretically founded, with a clear reference to constructivism and the postulate of the unavoidable independence of psychic systems as processors of communication and communicative intentions (Luhmann, 1995). These ideas have inspired the concept of promotion of children's agency in education, supporting children's self-expression, taking their views into account, consulting them, involving them in decision-making processes, sharing power and responsibility for decision making with them (Hill et al., 2004; Matthews, 2003). It is argued here that the transformation of the cultural presuppositions of education towards the recognition of children's agentic role is important for the construction of children's citizenship in the education system (Percy-Smith, 2010), which requires the recognition of their personal rights and their empowerment as contributors of different ideas and perspectives (Invernizzi and Williams 2008). This is true also for Early Education, which has been approached by young but flourishing research as a possible context for children's citizenship,

centred around the recognition of the child as an agent (Kjørholt and Qvortrup, 2012; Lansdown, 2004; 2005). Based on a critical assessment of the theoretical presuppositions foundation of pedagogical tradition, a discourse on the child in education has emerged, colouring an image of the its capabilities and agency in the brightest shades of self-determination.

4. From the pupil back to the child?

Positioning the child as agent in the education system, entails important consequences for the reproduction of the system itself, because it allows building trust based on the experience of active citizenship (Lawy and Biesta, 2006, Pascal and Bertram, 2009, Seele, 2012), therefore avoiding the risk of marginalization and feelings of alienation which among the unintended consequences of education and trust based on categorical inequalities. Promoting children's agency can be seen as a way to build trust through agency (Farini, 2012). However, the promotion of children's agency may meet important obstacles in conditions of radical distrust, which prevent from the construction of person-centred relationships and affective expectations (Farini and Baraldi, 2013; Farini, 2014). According to Luhmann (1995), while trust enlarges the range of possible actions in a social system, distrust restricts this range, in that it requires additional premises for social relationships, which protect interactants from a disappointment that is considered highly probable. When distrust is established, building trust appears very difficult because the interaction is permeated by trust in distrust. This is the condition of education, where trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities generates distrusts on an interpersonal level (for a case study on the connection between categorical inequalities on the marginalisation in education see O'Connor and Angus, 2013).

Ultimately, the challenge for education is to establish the conditions for mutual trust, that is, mutual humanization and mutual reassurance, based on acknowledgment of participants' needs and fears and on responsiveness to them. Using Buber's powerful language (Buber, 2004), the challenge consists in the transformation of educational relationships from and 'I to It' model, where the 'other' is the project of our expectations and planning (the pupil), to an 'I to Thou', model, based on the acknowledge of the incommensurable alterity of the 'other' (the child). The challenge for education, if an inclusive and complex form of trust should be created, is to substitute the pupil with the child, as the internal reference of the education system.

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