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**CONTRIBUTO TEORICO**

## **The implementation of the school's educational mission through harmonious and global human development.**

## **L'attuazione della missione educativa della scuola attraverso uno sviluppo umano armonioso e globale.**

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### **ABSTRACT ITALIANO**

La "Riforma del sistema di orientamento" del Piano nazionale di ripresa e resilienza finanziato dall'UE - Next Generation EU 2022 sottolinea il ruolo cruciale della scuola e dell'istruzione obbligatoria. Questa è un'opportunità per la pedagogia contemporanea di riscoprire e adempiere alla sua primaria missione educativa e sociale. Ciò può avvenire attraverso lo sviluppo e l'attuazione di un progetto coordinato e strutturato di formazione intellettuale e umana globale nelle pratiche didattiche scolastiche. Per riflettere sulla funzione formativa dell'obbligo scolastico in termini personali, politici e sociali e sul valore educativo dell'orientamento, presentiamo gli esiti di una ricerca didattica triennale condotta tra il 2019 e il 2022 in alcune scuole pugliesi selezionate. Come da linee guida dell'orientamento, il testo dimostra l'efficacia pedagogica di un'azione educativa che si qualifica e si struttura come processo morale di emancipazione individuale. Ciò è in linea con l'obiettivo di raggiungere uno sviluppo umano armonico e globale.

### **ENGLISH ABSTRACT**

The 'Reform of the Guidance System' in the EU-funded National Recovery and Resilience Plan - Next Generation EU 2022 emphasises the crucial role of school and compulsory education. This is an opportunity for contemporary pedagogy to rediscover and fulfil its primary educational and social mission. This can be achieved through the development and implementation of a coordinated and structured project of global intellectual and human formation in school teaching practices. To reflect on the formative function of compulsory education in personal, political, and social terms, and on the educational value of orientation, we present the outcomes of a three-year educational research conducted between 2019 and 2022 in select Apulian schools. As per the orientation guidelines, the text demonstrates the pedagogical effectiveness of an educational action that is qualified and structured as a moral process of individual emancipation. This is in line with the goal of achieving a harmonious and global human development.

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### **Introduction**

This essay reflects on the results of a three-year educational research programme conducted on an experimental basis in the first cycle of education in some Apulian schools. The programme was inspired by the Global Affective Education paradigm, or Embodied Education, and was made possible through the collaboration and structured commitment between the University of Aldo Moro of Bari and the Regional Council of Apulia. The aim of the programme was to create a regional educational network capable of tackling some current and crucial educational emergencies.

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The Fied-Advanced-Program 2019-22, which stands for Future in Education-Advanced Program 2019-2022, addresses educational emergencies related to the attitudes and behaviours of younger generations in their daily lives. These concerns are often a source of apprehension for schools and families. The educational, professional, and life paths of new generations exhibit fragilities and inequalities that have significant repercussions on personal and social discomfort, mental health, and insecurity towards the future. In many cases, these issues translate into problematic behavior at risk of deviance, which is increasingly widespread and generates real social concerns.

The study of current educational poverty from a psycho-pedagogical and philosophical perspective aims to develop new pedagogical paradigms and effective teaching strategies. The goal is to improve the Italian compulsory school system, offer educational guidance, promote excellence, and support vulnerable students. This will promote the integral human and intellectual development of pupils, with the aim of constructing responsible and democratic active citizens. After three years of research, this study has produced important results for the scientific community.

These results are provisional and limited in scope due to the pandemic emergency faced in 2020-2021. However, they shed light on some of the complex educational relationships experienced in schools and virtual learning environments. They can be translated into new legislative guidelines, which correspond to new school practices. These practices are no longer entrusted only to the virtuosity, generosity, wisdom, and excellence of individual teachers, as is currently the case in schools. Instead, they should be institutionalised and translated into new training curricula that are preparatory for each cycle of compulsory education. These curricula are inherent to the school experience of teachers and pupils and their educational mission. Reflecting on the implicit results of this three-year research can be useful for re-reading the 'Reform of the Orientation System' of the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience, financed by the European Union - Next Generation EU 2022. The Guidelines for Orientation offer the possibility and institutional space to inaugurate a new season of Italian compulsory education and, if desired, to initiate a Copernican revolution in education in the post-modern era.

### **From the educational void of the post-modern school to the Reform of the Guidance System: a hermeneutic-pedagogical reading**

In recent years, some philosophical-pedagogical interpretations have highlighted the educational poverty of the post-modern school. The school is excessively formal, intellectualistic, and notionistic, with the main goal being the transmission of knowledge or notions through the practice of compartmentalisation and specialisation of curricular disciplines (Nussbaum, 2010; Mortari, 2017; Zagzebski, 2017; Elia et al., 2019; Elia, 2021; Recalcati, 2014; Zanniello, 2019;).

The current School Emergency is an unprecedented crisis in education that affects not only poor countries but also, increasingly, young generations living in opulent societies and the industrialised West. This crisis is caused by the effects of the epistemological inversion between subject and object of training theory and teaching practices.

The current educational crisis may be linked to the anthropological and existential crisis of the post-modern individual. This complexity is due to the psycho-pedagogical and epistemological universe of every human being, as well as the phenomenology of personal and family experiences. Unfortunately, the educational component is often deficient or even missing in these experiences. However, it is important to acknowledge that the lack of education in postmodern schools is a specific issue related to pedagogy and its guiding principles, including teaching practices and institutional policies.

Prominent experts from various fields acknowledge an epochal crisis that has affected all sectors of human society for the past decade. This crisis particularly affects the field of education, leaving both learners and institutions in a state of doubt and confusion (Zagzebski, 2017; Elia, 2021).

In his work 'Morality and Education', Brezinka criticised the younger generations' lack of education due to the breakdown of the natural family and the diminishing role of compulsory schooling. In his work 'Morality and Education', Brezinka criticised the younger generations' lack of education due to the breakdown of the natural family and the diminishing role of compulsory schooling. He argued that this has resulted in an educational vacuum. Brezinka's evaluation is objective and supported by evidence. In his work *For a Normative Philosophy of Education* (1994), the author expressed concern about the growing trend of educational deresponsibility in Western societies. This trend, which was evident in both schools and families, has resulted in a significant educational vacuum among the younger generations. The author argues that this issue must be addressed to ensure a better future for our society. The specific contribution of Brezinka's thought to this crucial issue - in the face of the uncertainty about values and ideals that makes it difficult to refer to common educational goals and to develop coordinated and structured programmes of formative orientation for the younger generations - is, we believe, his tenacity and assiduity in the search for common values and moral cornerstones, increasingly shared, on which to build the pedagogical intentionality of the orientation process.

Brezinka stated that it is impossible to become accustomed to the idea of a school that abandons the pedagogical intentionality of human education. He believed that this process was characterised by a strong moral value, with significant social and political repercussions, as the quality of future society and citizens would depend on it. It is important to maintain a clear and objective language, avoiding biased or emotional language, and using precise subject-specific vocabulary when necessary. The text should also adhere to conventional academic structure and formatting, with consistent citation and footnote style. Finally, the text should be free from grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and punctuation errors. For this reason, he sought the foundations of a normative philosophy of education until the end of his life. This philosophy could enlighten and support pedagogy in achieving its intended goals.

Brezinka presents a pedagogical idea that is both high and lucid.

This idea is reminiscent of another ethically connoted conception of educational orientation expressed in Dewey's masterly work on the philosophy of education, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920).

More than a century ago, the American philosopher qualified the educational process as moral, and on this structural equivalence, he laid the epistemological foundations for the construction of authentically democratic societies.

In light of the current social, educational, and international political crises in major western democracies, these philosophical insights are of great importance. In the past, there may not have been enough awareness of the risks associated with the impoverishment of a school's specific orientation and ethically connoted training intentionality.

To promote awareness of the need to restore a specific pedagogical intentionality in the orientation process in schools, it is essential to both internalise the pedagogical lessons of great masters such as Dewey and Brezinka, and to reflect on and correctly interpret worrying behavioural postures. These postures increasingly concern younger generations and express a great inner unease, to which one cannot remain indifferent.

If negative behavioural traits such as aggressiveness, individualism, immaturity, inability to communicate with adults, bullying, and deviant attitudes are prevalent among today's students, it cannot be denied that they are the result of a widespread lack of education and care on the part of adults, schools, and institutions. consequences of compartmentalising knowledge and the mismatch between culture and life.

### **Guidance System Reform in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan**

To address the current educational and social emergency facing younger generations, the Italian government has opted to cooperate with other members of the European Union. The 'Reform of the Guidance System' of the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience, which is funded by the European Union's Next Generation EU 2022, renews the formative mission of school and compulsory education in a clear and unequivocal manner. This presents an unprecedented opportunity for contemporary pedagogy to rediscover and revive its original mission.

The primary educational and social mission implies teaching for a good life, achieved through the development and implementation of a global intellectual and human formation project in school teaching practices. This project is increasingly widely shared and creatively structured and coordinated, referring to virtuous examples and good practices resulting from the intellectual and human generosity of some teachers who, in solitude or in small groups, have continued to work for social progress and the common good even before there was a specific orientation from institutional policies.

In 2022, the Italian Ministry of Education and Merit adopted new Orientation Guidelines in accordance with the 'Reform of the Orientation System' under Mission 4 - Component 1 - of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The Guidelines highlight the importance of avoiding a fragmented approach to orientation. Orientation is defined as a process that aims to facilitate self-knowledge, as well as knowledge of the educational, occupational, social, cultural, and economic context of reference.

It also involves understanding the strategies required to interact with these realities, in order to promote the development of skills necessary to independently define or redefine

personal and professional goals that align with the context. Additionally, it involves the ability to develop or rework a life project and make related choices. In the light of this definition, it is evident how orientation determines a precise educational role, as it pertains to the dimension of growth, i.e. that of accompanying training and learning processes in the contexts in which they take place. It is therefore of fundamental importance to promote a critical and in-depth reflection on the educational, formative and pedagogical value of guidance in the school context, necessary to support and promote confidence, self-esteem, commitment, motivation, and to recognise the talents and aptitudes of pupils, students and students.

The school environment should create conditions for students to work on their potential and exercise their ability to choose autonomously, while also allowing for the cultivation of new or unconventional directions for growth. Educational experiences in the school environment are central to acquiring intrapersonal and interpersonal skills necessary for making choices in life paths and dealing with uncertainties and difficulties.

The National Plan for Recovery and Resilience includes an ambitious project to reform the guidance system. This project provides an opportunity and mandate for pedagogy to renew institutionalised training.

The framework's analyses and perspectives serve as valid references for designing and implementing an effective system of permanent orientation.

At this point, it is reasonable to inquire about the direction of guidance.

This should not be based on the transient perspective of passing rulers, but rather on the intuition of a pedagogical foresight aimed at the search for and realization of the common good, which has significant personal, social and political implications. To pursue the four objectives (1) described in the European reference framework on guidance in schools, the permanent guidance system could identify a privileged access route to the world of youth.

This should be done without further burdening the activities envisaged in the educational curricula of schools. A socio-ethical-affective approach should be used across all disciplines.

Each school can develop a training project tailored to the needs of the territory and its users. The aim is to move away from abstract and purely intellectual programmes that only shape minds, towards a socio-ethical-affective programme that educates both reason and conscience, as well as emotions - in other words, the hearts of young people.

### **The Future of Education: Prioritising the Global Development and Well-being of Younger Generations**

To reflect on the formative function of compulsory education in personal, political, and social terms, and on the educational value of guidance, we propose pedagogical reflections based on a three-year educational research project: the FIED-Advanced-Program 2019-22.

This project was conducted in the first cycle of education in some schools in Apulia, in collaboration between the University of Bari Aldo Moro and the Regional Council of Apulia.



The longitudinal research on educational poverty among first-cycle pupils was conducted using both theoretical and practical approaches. The research involved a critical-hermeneutic analysis of sources and multifocal field research. Actions to combat educational poverty were directed in two ways.

1) The first objective is to develop a multifocal pedagogical paradigm that can accurately interpret and understand the growing phenomenon of educational poverty among younger generations, as well as the individual manifestations specific to each school context and environment.

2) The second objective is to design and experiment with a contrasting didactic strategy that can be modelled *ad personam*, known as socio-ethical-affective education - the SEA Curriculum or Module.

In order to gain a broader understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and to design and implement strategic orientation and contrast actions, it is important to review some of the main training gaps that have been analyzed longitudinally. The following points are highlighted:

1. The school curricula suffer from cultural fragmentation and an imbalance of content. They are built on an erudite, aseptic, and efficientist vision of schooling, which neglects the integral formation of the person. The aim should be to promote authentic human and educational relationality based on mutual trust and respect, develop pupils' potential, and encourage critical-reflective capacity. Additionally, virtuous individual and social practices and school wellbeing should be promoted.

2. Teachers' lack of personalised support for their pupils' growth processes, combined with the absence of significant adult role models, can lead to a fracture between mind and body (Cornacchia & Madriz, 2014). This is exacerbated by an inadequate and abstract approach to education that focuses solely on cognitive learning, failing to impact children's daily experiences and overall well-being. To address this, a more concrete and holistic approach is needed to promote happiness and virtue in children (Cornacchia & Madriz, 2014).

3. Pupils have experienced loneliness, bewilderment, and social withdrawal, which has been accentuated by the pandemic and misuse of digital mobility tools (Cantelmi, 2013; Lasch, 2020).

The research has produced recent scientific publications. Please refer to the specific entries in the final bibliography. It is useful to mention some positive results in the margins of these publications. These results are implicit in the long research work and cannot be analyzed but can enrich pedagogical reflection on educational orientation.

In all the contexts analysed, a humble and virtuous pedagogical approach has been found to be effective. This approach is socio-ethical-affective in nature and inspired by the classical *paideia* of virtues and Christian anthropology. The gentle pedagogy is attentive to the specificity and uniqueness of each pupil. According to Maria Montessori in *The Secret of Childhood* (1936), pupils, like children, have innate moral dispositions and can discern a teacher's true intentions. They can perceive whether a teacher is motivated and passionate about their subject or merely present to judge and punish. It is important for

teachers to approach their students with respect and trust, and to focus on teaching and explaining important concepts.

In light of the workshops and relational experiences conducted with teachers, pupils, and families, it is clear that many training subjects need to establish authentic, meaningful, and edifying relationships in schools. Additionally, they require clear and effective training guidance. This is the implicit essence and foundation of all types of disciplinary and curricular learning in the current historical context.

The educational research conducted between 2019 and 2022 within the framework of the Fied Advanced Program 2019-2022 revealed implicit educational needs that strongly affect the educational relationship and learning processes. The results suggest that a unified and structural rethinking of education is urgently needed.

### **Case Study: Skills Certification Form - Comparison between Two V Classes of the First Cycle of Education**

As part of the Field Advanced Programme 2019-2022 Project, we conducted qualitative-quantitative fieldwork to assess the implicit needs of the training subjects. Subsequently, a socio-ethical-affective pedagogical intervention was carried out by a group of teachers on two classes of primary school pupils to evaluate its impact (Mortari, 2015; 2017).

We investigated the emerging training needs of pupils in the first cycle of education by conducting semi-structured interviews with a random sample of 63 pupils in class IV and IV of an Apulian primary school. Additionally, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a group of 250 teachers from Italian schools of all levels to assess their pedagogical gaps and emerging training needs.

The study titled 'Well-being, resilience and prosociality at school: new frontiers for teachers' professional development' published in the LLL Pedagogical Journal in 2023 presents the results of an investigative exploration of teachers. The study emphasises the relational and socio-ethical-affective training gaps among Italian teachers and the beneficial impact of certain pedagogical interventions. These interventions were designed, calibrated, and implemented on an experimental basis in Apulia between 2019 and 2021 to address these gaps (De Angelis & Rubini, 2023). De Angelis & Rubini's study suggests that the two-year pedagogical intervention, the Areuma CPD Programme 2019-2021, had a positive impact on teachers. It is possible that this intervention also had an indirect positive impact on the pupils whose teachers participated in the training course.

In order to answer this new question, we conducted a case study, comparing the exit certification forms of two classes V of the first cycle of education of a school in Apulia.

**TAB. 1 – EUROPEAN KEY COMPETENCE SCORECARD.**

European Key Competence	Competencies from the student profile at the end of the first cycle of education	Level
Communication in the mother tongue or language of instruction	The student has achieved a high level of proficiency in the Italian language, enabling him/her to comprehend spoken language, narrate personal experiences, and use appropriate linguistic registers in various contexts.	A: +10.1% B: +5.1% C: -1.2% D: -5.2%
Communication in Foreign Languages	The student is capable of effectively communicating in English for basic everyday situations	A: +12.0% B: +7.2% C: -2.3% D: -8.8%
Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology	The student applies mathematical and scientific-technological knowledge to identify and justify solutions to practical problems	A: +7.1% B: +4.1% C: +0.5% D: +3.2%
Digital skills	The student uses Technologies in specific communicative contexts to search for data and information and to interact with various subjects	A: +6.5% B: +3.1% C: +0.7% D: -4.3%
Learning to Learn	The student has a strong foundation of knowledge and is capable of conducting independent research to acquire new information and skills	A: +13.1% B: +8.1% C: -3.2% D: -9.2%
Social and civic skills	The student demonstrates self-respect, respect for others, and respect for the environment. Adheres to shared rules and collaborates effectively with others. Commits to completing tasks independently or as part of a team	A: +12.5% B: +7.1% C: +0.7% D: -5.2%
Spirit of initiative	The students shows originality and initiative. Is able to carry out simple projects. Takes responsibility, asks for help when in difficulty and is able to give help to those who ask for it	A: +14.1% B: +6.7% C: -0.7% D: -8.7%
Cultural awareness and expression	The student can orient oneself in space and time by observing and describing environments, facts, phenomena, and artistic productions	A: +12.1% B: +7.3% C: -1.3% D: -5.4%
	The student recognises different identities, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs with the aim of promoting dialogue and mutual respect.	
	In terms of potential and talent, the student demonstrates his/her abilities in the areas of motor skills, art, and music that he/she finds most enjoyable	



**TAB. 2 – DEFINITION OF SYMBOLS USED IN SKILLS EVALUATION FORMS.**

A – Advanced	The student completes tasks and solves complex problems, demonstrating proficiency in the application of knowledge and skills. They propose and defend their own opinions and make responsible decisions
B – Intermediate	The student demonstrates the ability to perform tasks and solve problems in novel situations, while making deliberate choices and utilizing acquired knowledge and skills
C – Basic	The student is capable of performing basic tasks in novel situations, demonstrating a fundamental understanding of knowledge and skills and the ability to apply basic rules and procedures that have been learned
D – Initial	The student can perform basic tasks in familiar situations with proper guidance

### **Mastery Levels of Competence**

The certification form for the exit competences of the first cycle of education (Table 1) displays the percentage differences in the level of competences achieved by two groups of pupils. One group was taught by the semi-prevalent teacher in the two years prior to the study (2019-2021), while the other group was not. The study involved two groups: one group underwent a two-year professional training course with a socio-ethical-affective focus (Areuma CPD Programme 2019-2021), while the other group (control group) did not receive any training on the topics covered by this research during the same two-year period.

Table 1 displays the indirect positive effects of pedagogical intervention on various competence indicators. The most significant percentage differences are related to the development of human competences, including individual, relational, and social skills. This suggests that pupils whose teachers consistently provide pedagogical and relational training are more likely to develop strong socio-ethical-affective competences (see Tab. 1).

### **Discussion of Results and Conclusions**

Research indicates the importance of rediscovering and promoting the educational mission of schools in the current historical context. To achieve this, it is necessary to modernise schools and plan new educational intervention strategies enriched by innovative teaching practices. Solid pedagogical paradigms are necessary to support the emerging educational needs and to interpret them correctly.

Pedagogical interventions should be modulated and adapted to the observed cognitive and affective specificity of the subjects of training, without compromising the cultural, disciplinary, ethical, and political aims of teaching. Compulsory education needs to rediscover the centrality of the art of education, which has strong ethical and political connotations. Through teaching and direction, it is possible to decide on the future of society and predict the identity profile of tomorrow's citizen, as Dewey stated. Pedagogy

can play a decisive role in defining its mission and proposing an identity model of humanity that is realized both individually and communally. To achieve this, it is important to maintain objectivity, use clear and concise language, adhere to conventional structure and formatting, avoid biased language, and ensure grammatical correctness.

In addition to recognising its mission and determining the direction of educational action, pedagogy can also utilise the evidence from the field research proposed here. The research shows the effectiveness of a socio-ethical-affective approach in developing individuals' soft skills, reflective capacity, maturity of judgement, and strengthening the learning processes of disciplinary scientific content (see Table 1).

In recent national pedagogical literature, the concept of caring has been introduced in the context of the educational relationship and in some teaching experiences proposed in Italy for pupils in the first and second cycles of education. Ensuring the cognitive development of pupils is important, but it should not come at the expense of their happiness and overall fulfilment. Affective and moral development, as well as identifying and developing individual talents, are also crucial aspects of education. This approach can lead to a more edifying and humanising educational experience.

Luigina Mortari identifies the care of otherness as the specific essence of an effective pedagogical attitude and existential posture that should be re-acknowledged and assumed by teachers in their ordinary teaching practices. Recent research conducted in the field suggests that this approach could renew human relations and improve schools (Mortari, 2015; 2017).

It is not a coincidence that institutions are also working towards the same goal. To counter the prevalent educational poverty among younger generations and promote individual and societal empowerment, the new National Plan for Recovery and Resilience aims to reaffirm and revitalize the school's primary educational function and intentionality. This function can no longer be neglected or left to improvisation or the generosity of individual teachers.

To improve the school's orientation and training, a structured regional and/or national coordination is necessary to redirect teacher training and promote knowledge that develops high-quality skills, attitudes, and profiles. The Guidelines for Guidance's first paragraph addresses this issue:

1.11 The purpose of these guidelines is to implement the guidance reform designed by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The reform aims to strengthen the connection between the first cycle of education and the second cycle of education and training. This will help students make a conscious and well-considered choice that enhances their potential and talents. Additionally, the reform aims to reduce school drop-out rates and facilitate access to tertiary education and training opportunities (p. 1).

The legislators' vision encourages and promotes appropriate legislative interventions and decrees to implement the guidance reform, with a view to strengthening the progressive development of the individual, especially at the delicate transition between the first cycle of education and the second cycle of education and training. This means

empowering teachers with new human and relational skills, which are indispensable for personalised guidance of pupils at all stages of growth.

In order to humanise teaching and make it more suitable to the profound expectations of each pupil's intelligence and heart and to the needs of a society in crisis, in need of moral, relational and affective renewal, it is therefore necessary to re-propose the Humanities, as Martha Nussbaum states, but also the *paideia* of virtues, as Alasdair MacIntyre argues (Nussbaum, 2011; MacIntyre, 1981).

Is pedagogy ready to accept the responsibility of promoting global and harmonious human development, along with rational and cognitive development, by implementing positive teaching experiences and good practices of socio-ethical-affective education in light of the current legislative and political contingency?

### Note degli autori

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### Note

(1) Orientation Guidelines, page 2.

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