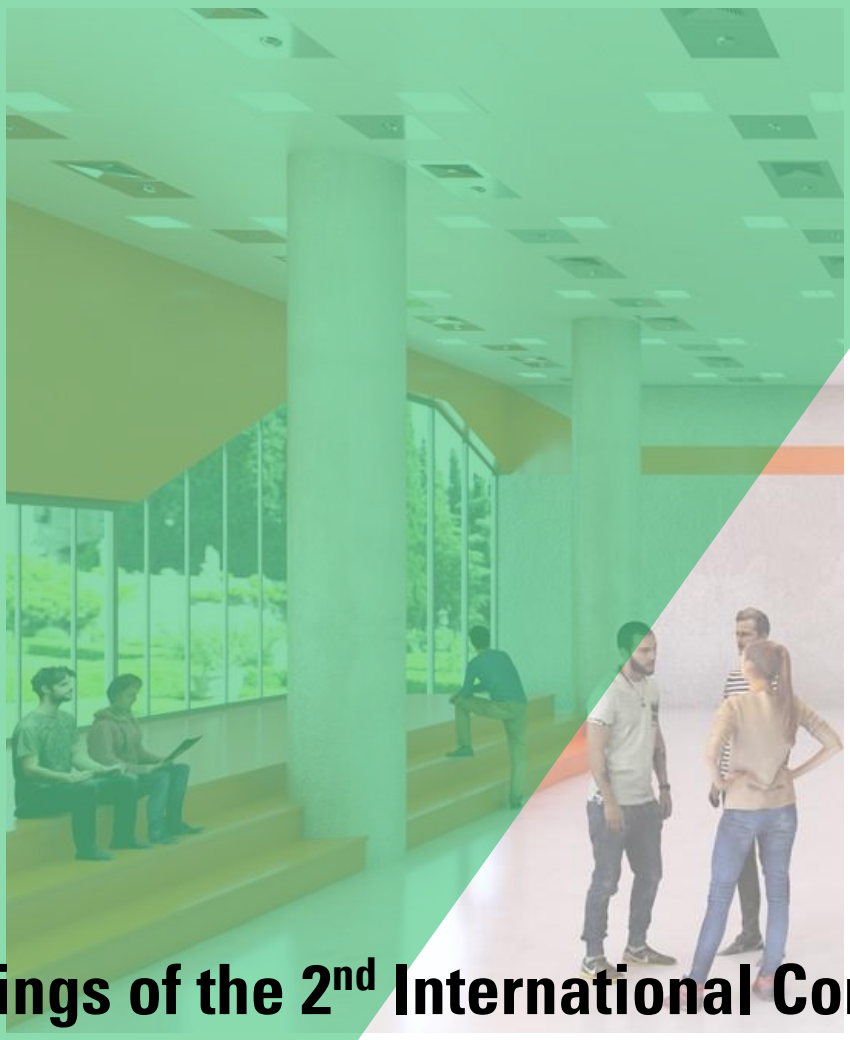

Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica

REINVENTING EDUCATION

2-5 June 2021

VOLUME I

Citizenship, Work and The Global Age

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

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Citizenship, Work and The Global Age

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"
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Title **Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" – Reinventing Education VOLUME I Citizenship, Work and The Global Age**

This volume contains papers presented in the 2nd International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place online on 2-5 June 2021. The Conference was devoted to the needs and prospects of Reinventing Education.

The challenges posed by the contemporary world have long required a rethinking of educational concepts, policies and practices. The question about education 'for what' as well as 'how' and 'for whom' has become unavoidable and yet it largely remained elusive due to a tenacious attachment to the ideas and routines of the past which are now far off the radical transformations required of educational systems. Scenarios, reflections and practices fostering the possibility of change towards the reinvention of the educational field as a driver of more general and global changes have been centerstage topics at the Conference. Multidisciplinary approach from experts from different disciplinary communities, including sociology, pedagogy, psychology, economics, architecture, political science has brought together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate constraints and opportunities for reinventing education.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and inter-disciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners' mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 800 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on research, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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Citizenship, Work and The Global Age
A Premise

What is education for? This philosophical question cannot be answered ignoring contributions from social and educational sciences. The growing focus on learning outcomes should have prompted discussion on the values and aims in defining policy objectives and developing accountability systems and evidence-based approaches. Whereas for years public discourse on education has most frequently been confined to a merely sector-based perspective, without addressing the relationship (i.e., interdependency and/or autonomy) with globalised societies or to face the new challenges of contemporary's world. The relationship between education and society and the issue of aims can be observed in a new context which has seen the weakening of the society-nation equation and the strengthening of global dimensions.

The crisis born of the pandemic is more and more global and multidimensional. It inevitably obliges to ask what the post-pandemic socio-economic scenarios could be and what challenges might emerge from the transformations of education and training systems and policies. Many researchers and observers think that the most relevant of these challenges is that of inequalities between and within countries. The medium-long term nature of many of these challenges poses a complex question: does the pandemic tend to widen or narrow the time-space horizons of people perceptions, rationalities, and decisions?

For decades, the field of education and training has witnessed continuous growth in globalization and internationalization: just think of the role of the large-scale assessment surveys and the increasing influence of international organisations. Phenomena and concepts such as policy mobility (lending and borrowing) or – within another field of research – policy learning, as well as global scaling up, global-local hybridization and policy assemblage might find a useful opportunity of debate and in-depth analysis in this stream. This might also be true of the related issue regarding how comparative research must be carried out and of the relationship between some government 'technologies' adopted in the latest cycle of policies – for example, quasi-market, evaluation, and autonomy of schools and universities – and the ever more criticized neo-liberal paradigm. In this framework, without any revival of the political or methodological nationalism, a critical rethinking of the national dimension, perhaps too hurriedly assumed to be 'obsolete', can be useful also for a comparative reflection. As to our continent we are in the presence not only of

globalization of educational policies, but also of their Europeanisation, due to the extent of the European Commission's strategy and its Open Method of Coordination. Beyond the official distinction between formal, non-formal, and unformal learning, it seems European initiatives and programmes shape a new policy world preparing the future of education, particularly through different expert networks, new ways of conceptualizing knowledge, and disseminating standards. On these issues there is no lack of reflections and research, some of which very critical indeed, whose results deserve to be broadly shared and discussed, too.

The equipping of the new generations with the tools – knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values – to live in a plural and interconnected world is delicate matter indeed in Europe. It is the issue at stake for the encounters – and at times clashes – between old and new visions and forms of pluralism and secularism. Around this theme are developed educational policies and strongly heterogeneous curricula. Such topic is linked also to the variability in young people's competences and attitudes towards 'cultural otherness'.

Life-long learning is another question of notable importance at international level as it implies both a diverse temporal horizon for education and its link to the dimensions of work. And a different approach to the relationship between school and extra-scholastic (life-wide) learning is also implied. From this stems the necessity of greater investment for example in both the early years (ECEC) and the adult education. We might ask, however, how much has been done to achieve this goal, and whether it risks remaining a fascinating but largely unfinished project for a long time.

Within a general rethinking of the aims and the means at the disposal of education systems, many papers ask whether until now enough has been done to educate towards citizenship and democracy and whether various national educational systems have adopted this issue as their core mission.

A second group of questions derives from some crucial challenges – such as the dramatic deterioration of the biosphere, the climate, and the health – which impose both the necessity of rethinking this mission in a planetary context and redefining the 'citizenship' as a concept not merely national, but multi-level, that is ranging from global to local; and in our continent European, too. How deeply are our nations presently involved in the task of educating their citizens in terms of knowledge of global and trans-national issues? And are they striving to build a collective common consciousness in Europe? What help is being given in this sense by proposals elaborated and experiences promoted by international organizations or the EU?

Finally, starting from infant and primary schools, what weight does citizenship education have in schools, what approaches are adopted and what have shown to be the most effective? What didactics are applied and what seem to be the most promising experiences? To what extent are teachers prepared and motivated and students interested in it? Universities and adult education should also play a role in citizenship education. What proposals and significant experiences can be described and examined?

The Volume also includes contributions on the relationship between education and economic systems which is a classic subject of social science. During the twentieth century, the functionalist perspective established a close link between 'school for the masses' and the construction of individuals personalities conforming to values and social objectives. Professions have then become more and more specialized and therefore requiring ever more targeted skills. Hence, the insistence on the need to train future workers in technical and technological skills, as well as more recently in the 'soft skills' climate, increasingly necessary in certain sectors of the economy (Industry 4.0). The alliance between the functionalist perspective and the neoliberal visions finds its conceptual and practical pivot in the employability conceptual frame. On the other hand, since the 1970s, critical research has highlighted that formal education system contributes to the reproduction of inequalities, confirming and strengthening hierarchies and power relations between different actors of the economic system. These lines of investigation have underlined the weight of cultural and social capital in determining school performance, but also the inflation of educational credentials as a combined effect of mass schooling and changes in the economic system. In more recent times, the fragmentation of the educational and training systems, because of the multiplication of public and private agencies in charge of training citizens, in addition to the explosion of the non-formal and informal as learning places (e.g., on the Internet), challenges the school to maintain its primacy as a place responsible for training workers. Moreover, it questions its ability to continue to represent a social elevator and / or a place of social justice.

The issue of the reproduction of inequalities and differential returns of educational qualifications fuels lively and stimulating interdisciplinary debates: economic stagnation, mass unemployment and job instability affect the inclusion of young generations in the labour market. Recently, in the context of lifelong learning policies, the relationship between training and work has become increasingly central, but the definition of the goals of these policies is not neutral: in the neoliberal mantra it is a question of guaranteeing the adaptability, employability and autonomy of each individual, so that one can occupy a place in society according to the dominant values. There is no shortage of critical voices about this individualistic and functionalist interpretation

of the Lifelong Learning vision. On the other hand, even the supporters of neoliberal-inspired policies want an inclusive training offer (from a meritocratic perspective), as it is essential for recruiting resources and supporting flexible production systems focused on knowledge.

The attention of scholars focuses on the effects of the 'knowledge society' in the educational system of European countries. In this perspective, several studies have focused attention on the orientation processes that contribute to the reproduction of inequalities as the students from the lower classes tend to orient themselves, and are oriented by their teachers, towards the vocational paths, stigmatized within the educational systems.

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How to Debate National Identity in Real Life and on Social Media

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ABSTRACT: *Thanks to the widespread diffusion of the Internet, the last few decades have been characterized by the growing importance of social media. Furthermore, phenomena such as globalization, gender studies, economic crises, climate change and migration flows have raised doubts regarding traditional identities and have favored the formation of different representations of individuals and communities. A specific intersection of the aforementioned trends is the conceptualization of national identity by users of social media, a topic with implications in various thematic areas, for instance the functioning of the Internet (including algorithms), its most dangerous communicative and cognitive dysfunctions (such as fake news and post-truth), the role of debate and the right to citizenship. The paper aims not only to reflect theoretically on the matter, but also to elaborate a multidisciplinary didactic proposal based on an inductive approach and addressed to upper secondary school students, who are likely to show interest in those issues: in addition to using social media and living in multicultural societies, they may study subjects such as law and philosophy and may start developing a social conscience. The goals of the project are to teach participants how to write on social media and to enable them to acquire critical thinking by analyzing authentic texts and pictures and debating constructively both in real life and online. In other words, the students are expected both to manage the semiotic complexity of social media and to carry out debates on fundamental subjects regarding civic education by not simply expressing their own opinions, but also acknowledging their opponents as interlocutors worth respecting and listening to. The paper is threefold in structure. The first part provides the theoretical framework: after explaining the main features of social media, it takes into consideration the most common representations of Italians and foreigners promoted in the media over the years. The second part analyses two Facebook posts and their associated comments focusing on the label of «Italian». The case studies prove to be particularly suitable for designing two learning units, which are sketched in the third part. The didactic activities fulfil two main objectives: firstly, they raise awareness of the importance of an ethical and effectively communicative use of social media, especially when debating (Mastroianni, 2017; Gheno, Mastroianni, 2020; Mastroianni, 2020); secondly, they problematize the concepts of national identity and of citizenship by showing the models of integration and the citizenship laws adopted in some multicultural societies (Colombo, 2011).*

KEYWORDS: *Civic education, Citizenship, National identity, Social media, Debate.*

Introduction

The current times can be defined as an era of complexity and heterogeneity because of the emergence of several interconnected factors having a radical influence on everyone's life. Thanks to the widespread diffusion of the Internet, the last few decades have been characterized by the growing importance of social media, which serve multiple purposes, often intertwined: they can be used as means for sharing information and knowledge (Ferrini, 2020), for example if an institution needs to reach a large audience in times of crisis (Delle Chiaie, 2020); they allow users to establish or maintain the social contact (Miller, 2008; Marrone, 2017); they are tools to exhibit one's features and signal their belonging to one or more online communities (Pistolesi, 2020); they offer ways to promote events, products, services or ideas, for instance political parties and figures (Bentivegna, 2011). Furthermore, phenomena such as globalization, gender studies, economic crises, climate change and migration flows have raised doubts regarding traditional identities and have favored the formation of different representations of individuals and communities (Arcangeli, 2007).

A specific intersection of the aforementioned trends is the conceptualization of national identity by users of social media. After conducting theoretical reflection on the main features of social media and on the most common representations of Italians and foreigners promoted in the media over the years, this paper presents two case studies from Facebook and elaborates a multidisciplinary didactic proposal based on an inductive approach and addressed to upper secondary school students. The project is aimed at teaching them how to manage the semiotic complexity of social media and carry out debates on fundamental topics regarding civic education both in real life and online.

This paper is threefold in structure. The first part provides the theoretical framework; the second part analyzes the two Facebook posts and their associated comments focusing on the label of 'Italian'; the third part presents the didactic proposal inspired by the two case studies.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. The main features of social media

In order to foster a better understanding of social media, it is necessary to adopt different scientific perspectives: considered synergically, the following linguistic (Gheno, 2017; Fiorentino, 2018; Pistolesi, 2020), semiotic (Marrone, 2017; Bartezzaghi, 2019) and sociological (Miller, 2008) studies demonstrate the predominance of what Roman Jakobson

defined as the emotive or expressive function and the phatic function. On the one hand, the egocentric and exhibitionistic nature of social media clearly emerges; on the other hand, these platforms are based on the social and relational dimension, which implies the need for creating and maintaining contact with one's friends. In other words, personal thoughts and emotions become meaningful only if shared and ideally liked, reposted, retweeted and commented. The identitarian expression, which according to Marrone (2017) is central to social media, both showcases one's personality and reinforces their belonging to one or more groups.

This raises three interconnected points. The first two points are observations. Social media's morphology and language are dialogical and promotional (Fiorentino, 2018), yet what often matters is only to signal one's presence, to state that 'you are there', which explains the aphoristic character of some online content (Bartezzaghi, 2019). The last point, briefly mentioned by Marrone (2017), corresponds to a fundamental question: if the referential function plays a minor role on social media, do the interactions between users yield constructive exchanges of information and opinions?

This question becomes even more relevant when analyzing some features not only of social media, but also of the Internet. Algorithms personalizing each user's experience on the web according to the content previously accessed may have dramatic effects: the so-called homophily, the human tendency to trust similar and close people who think alike, can be intensified until resulting in filter bubbles, echo chambers, cognitive bias and confirmation bias. These phenomena, together with fake news, post-truth and hate speech, could be defined as communicative and cognitive dysfunctions which, despite being strengthened online, tend not to be exclusive to the Internet. Their consequences are examined by Ferraris (2017), Gheno (2017, 2018), Gheno and Mastroianni (2018), Lorusso (2018), Prada (2018) and Ferrini and Paris (2019): in addition to being unable to identify what is accurate and reliable, Internet users prefer personal emotions and impressions to rational arguments and facts and become prisoners of their own certainties, which are obsessively repeated and excessively reinforced. To put it another way, if they conform to their tailored web surfing experience, users may just side with whoever is the most similar to them following the basic dichotomy agreement/disagreement, think that reality corresponds to what they already believe and even behave inappropriately without paying attention to the context. Under these circumstances it seems rather unlikely to carry out a productive debate.

1.2. The most common representations of Italians and foreigners

It is difficult, if not impossible, to define Italian identity. In her historical study, Patriarca (2010) posits that the virtues and the vices selected to represent the Italian character vary according to the periods, the geopolitical contexts, the international relationships and the objectives

to achieve. In other words, not only are the representations of national character built relationally and affected by the other nations' narratives, but they are also aimed at reaching a consensus and justifying political and economic decisions or even war actions. Moreover, Patriarca warns against traditional representations, which tend to reify a community on the basis of a common past, usually whitewashed, and an alleged uniformity: Italy is now a multicultural country which needs to produce inclusive discourses and distance itself from its old national myths and stereotypes centered on victimization and virilism.

Similarly, Bianchi and Scego (2014) call for a new collective image not only of Italians, but also of foreigners. The starting point should be setting aside the self-absolving myth of the «Italiani brava gente» (Italians are decent people), openly criticized also by Patriarca (2010): it is crucial to retrieve the memory of the Italian colonial past, which has been disregarded, and tell history adopting the perspective of the oppressed ones. Bianchi and Scego set an example taking the reader on an emotional journey across «Roma negata» (neglected Rome), the capital's monuments, buildings, bridges and squares which keep a trace of the Italian past domination in Libya, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Raimo (2019) mentions the two previous texts, however he draws an open conclusion which demonstrates a different view. Despite sharing their observations about the lack of critical thinking and appreciating their reflection on an alternative Italian identity, he advocates for a shift in the interpretative paradigm: possible solutions would be the passage from the concept of identity to the one of analogy or the preference for ethics over ontology.

Whereas the conceptualizations of Italian identity vary depending on the authors, the representation of foreigners has been seemingly consistent in the last few years. Turchetta (2020, 92) argues that in contemporary Italian society the words 'straniero' (foreign/foreigner) and 'immigrato' (immigrant) have acquired negative semantic connotations opposed to those of «italiano» (Italian) and «emigrato» (emigrant); 'immigrato' in particular has become synonymous with interpretations based on acrimony, mistrust and fear.

The discourse on migration is one of the main research interests of Paolo Orrù, who has written various contributions adopting several methodologies, such as discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, corpus assisted discourse analysis and politolinguistics. In Orrù (2014, 2019, 2020), the linguist analyses the discursive strategies employed in the Italian press in the 21st century, drawing attention to the tendency towards an alarmist narrative which relates migrants mainly to desperation and criminality and emphasizes the thematic frames of invasion, danger and insecurity. Other features are the use of negatively connoted and often scarcely appropriated lexicon such as 'clandestino' (illegal immigrant) and the presence of dehumanizing metaphors and rhetorical strategies, for example the insistence on the word «ondata» (wave), as well as numbers, quantifiers and collective terms.

The aforementioned thematic and rhetorical trends are widespread. Evidence is found by Orrù (2020) and Orrù and Mamusa (2018) respectively on some Facebook pages providing alternative information and on the official social profiles of Matteo Salvini (Facebook and Twitter) and Beppe Grillo (Facebook). Despite using a different methodology, based on manual analysis, Ferrini and Paris (2019) report similar results in their study of 2.347 Facebook posts in which hate speech is addressed to foreigners: the posts derive both from the official profiles of political parties and figures (Forza Nuova, CasaPound Italia, Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni) and from informal pages publishing racist and xenophobic content. A different perspective on migration is offered linguistically and visually by three television documentaries, which investigate some aspects often overlooked, such as the suffering endured by migrants during their journeys, the complexity of the European bureaucratic apparatus and the flaws in the Italian welcoming process (Orrù, 2016). Furthermore, they try to encourage empathy, yet they sometimes reveal a simplistic, banalized, stereotypical or ethnocentric point of view. In a nutshell, these publications outline that, since language shapes our thought and the reality which we experience, we need to use it appropriately and responsibly, especially when addressing complicated and delicate issues such as identity and the representation of 'the Other'.

2. Analysis of two case studies

In the light of what has been said so far, the two following Facebook posts reveal to be particularly relevant. They are analyzed comparatively for two reasons: *i*) the authors are two politicians who promote an inclusive national and local identity; *ii*) many comments are characterized by stark juxtaposition between the polar opposites of agreement and disagreement.

The first post (Figure 1)[1] was published by Davide Baruffi[2] on 29 May 2017, on the occasion of an institutional visit to Mirandola, a town in the province of Modena, by the President of Italy Sergio Mattarella[3]. Baruffi, who was then Deputy of the Italian Parliament as a representative of the Emilia-Romagna region[4], posted the photograph of a young student of Senegalese origin wearing a dress reproducing the Italian tricolor and holding the Italian flag; he also added a short text containing a couple of hashtags which refer to the event. The second post (see Figure 2)[5] was published on 7 February 2020 by Matteo Macilotti[6], who has been the

1 https://www.facebook.com/davide.baruffi.5/posts/10213209396531056
2 https://www.facebook.com/davide.baruffi.5
3 https://www.quirinale.it/elementi/6012
4 https://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/giunta/davide-baruffi
5 https://www.facebook.com/matteo.macilotti/posts/10157756132070309
6 https://www.facebook.com/matteo.macilotti

mayor of Chiampo, a town in the province of Vicenza, since 2013[7]. Macilotti posted the photograph of a model of Senegalese origin which appeared on the cover of the magazine *Vogue Italia*[8]: the young woman was portrayed holding a sign reading «Italia» (Italy) as an example of Italian beauty. The picture was accompanied by a longer text providing information on the model and the photograph. The two post texts have been translated into English.

FIG. 1. *Davide Baruffi's Facebook post*

A beautiful girl dressed in the #tricolor welcoming the President of the Republic #Mattarella this morning in Mirandola.

FIG. 2. *Matteo Macilotti's Facebook post*

Vogue Italia, a leading Italian magazine, depicts Maty Fall Diba on the cover this month. Maty was born in 2001 in Senegal, where she stayed with her mother until the age of 9, she then joined her father who was already living and working in Chiampo. Maty has lived here for many years. She became a legally valid Italian citizen when she turned 18, and she is our fellow citizen... an Italian beauty, but mostly a Chiampese beauty!! Proud of you Maty!! #chiampoonthecoveronVogue

The protagonists of the two posts are young women of African origin, who are celebrated as representatives of Italy and of the local

[7] https://www.tuttitalia.it/veneto/50-chiampo/storico-elezioni-comunali/

[8] https://www.vogue.it/moda/article/vogue-italia-febbraio-copertina-vittoria-ceretti-maty-fall

communities where they live. The posts have a strong symbolic value, embodied by the tricolor dress and the Italian flag in the first photograph and by the toponym («Italia») and the ethnonym («Italian») in the second photograph. Ironically, these inclusive messages spark off dynamics of separation in the comments.

As anticipated above, a relevant number of comments could be classified into two separated groups according to the polar opposites of agreement and disagreement, since many users clearly align themselves with a side or another: the members of the former group appreciate the inclusive messages, whereas the members of the latter openly criticize them suggesting that who symbolizes Italy should have different somatic traits in order to be typically Italian. Moreover, the two groups object to each other's positions: the ones in favor of an inclusive identity point out that the concept of 'typical' is arbitrary, whilst their opponents maintain that the representative of a community should share the physical characteristics of the majority of its population. Users are interested in reinforcing their own beliefs by stating their partisan belonging to a side, yet they do not get to the heart of the matter. On the one hand, the ones supporting the posts' messages do not clearly explain what should be valued instead of racial origins to define someone as 'Italian'; on the other hand, those disagreeing do not clarify the features of the people they identify as representatives of Italy or Italian beauty, since they generically refer only to white skin color.

These tribalistic dynamics emerge clearly when taking a closer look at the reactions. Various users reply to comments expressing contrary views, however they do not seem to consider their opponents' argumentations: the interaction only leads to a polarized debate, since people mainly tend to reiterate their previous ideas and ignore the points raised by their opponents. Despite these common characteristics, the two sides do not have the same weight, as the agreement front makes up the majority in numerical terms of members, comments and likes; however, some members of the disagreement group are backed up by a significant number of likes and comments of endorsement and interact frequently with different opponents.

A selection of comments is presented below in Tables 1 and 2. Users have been identified through anonymous alphanumeric codes (A stands for agreement, D stands for disagreement and each number refers to a user). The tables reproduce Facebook's layout, which distinguishes between direct comments to the post and replies to the comments (the latter are indented). All the comments have been translated into English with the intention of keeping the original meaning.

TAB. 1. *Some comments to Davide Baruffi's Facebook post*

- D1: I don't want to sound racist, which I am not, but honestly I don't get it, weren't there any Mirandolese girls?
  - A1: Why, do you know her? Do you know that she is not from Mirandola?
  - D1: A1 no, I don't know her, but she's for sure not representative of the typical Mirandolese beauty
  - A1: Ahhhhhh, ok... You don't know if she was born or if she's lived in Mirandola, but "she's not representative of the typical Mirandolese beauty". That's fine
  - A2: From where did you infer the idea according to which the President of Italy should be welcomed by a "typical beauty"? ..... maybe you're confusing it with the beauty contest "miss padania"
  - A3: However, what is "typical"? If it had been a girl from the south, daughter of people who migrated to Mirandola in the 70s, would she have been so? Or the daughter of people from Rovigo or Mantova who moved here in the 50s or 60s, would she have been so? Or a girl from Cavezzo or Massa, arrived here even before? We are the results of thousands of movements of populations, there are traces of Barbarians, of Germans, of Asians, of Etruscans, of Greeks, of Spaniards in our genes. And the whole genus "homo" comes from the same strain, which is African. Isn't it enough to reflect on how the concept of "typical" is arbitrary and how only human family exists, composed of people who live in the same place?
  - A2: Relating the concept of "typical" to the archetype of the local life; due to the fact that during the Precambrian era there was the open sea in Mirandola, and so with the reasoning of "typical" we should have welcomed the President with a giant sponge or a scale model of an Anomalokaris.
  - D1: A2 of course maybe even a dinosaur!
  - A2: I was joking,...however the dinosaur appeared later in our area and the giant sponges which preexisted by millions of years could raise a doubt about the dinosaur being typical of Mirandola
  - A4: and if she had been of Langobardian origin, could we have considered her as typically Mirandolese??
  - A5: The Mirandolina by Goldoni was an inn-keeper and behaved a bit like a whore*. Typical? It would have been improper to introduce someone like her to Mattarella, don't you think?
- A6: Who told you she's not Mirandolese ?
  - D1: That's not the point, but I see that unfortunately, as I feared, my comment has been misunderstood so I'm done here
  - A6: actually I didn't mean to misunderstand but I personally think that anyone living and/or born in Mirandola is Mirandolese.
  - D2: D1 you are misunderstood.. Believe me, many people share your thought!

[…]

- D1: As it always happens in Italy, if you share your thoughts, which are innocent anyway, about people of color, you're immediately accused of every obscenity! Thank goodness You are all the democrats!
  - A6: Actually your comment makes room for thousands of interpretations and not all of them are respectable
  - D1: A6 actually my thought was that the girl in the picture is not representative of Mirandola, but I would have written the same if there had been a blonde boy with blue eyes in a Tyrolese dress
  - A6: Exactly.
  - A6: In your opinion, what is a Mirandolese like?
  - D1: A6 For sure now I'll be insulted to death, but obviously white, but only because the majority of people here are like that, it has nothing to do with racism, but of course there's no room for this kind of argument.
  - A6: Are we still stuck on that? White Mirandolese? No no, not even close.
  - D3: A real racism against the Italians. . poor Italy what an end ..

[…]

- D4: tangible evidence of what we'll become if we want to stay in our land

[…]

- Davide Baruffi: D4 I fear that even with your best you wouldn't be able to become like that: because of the age (she's a child), because of the gender (she's a woman), because of the beauty (be brave), because of the color (she's black). Unfortunately the 4 reasons also apply to me 🙂

However don't worry: it's just a student from Mirandola. And dressed like that, she is a vision.

  - D4: it wasn't meant to be a racist joke but seriously because of their behavior and number they start to have the chain down and I don't want to put it back up .It is necessary to set a clear and respected limit to all these disorganized and halfass migrations (as Guccini sang)**

  […]

- D5: Shame on you! Italians are white

* The original is "La Mirandolina di Goldoni faceva l'ostessa e un po' la mignotta".

** The original is "non voleva essere una battuta razzista ma davvero per comportamento e numero cominciano ad avere la catena giù e io non la voglio rimettere su .bisogna porre un limite assoluto e rispettato su questi arrivi disorganizzati alla boia di un giuda (come cantò Guccini)". The expression "alla boia di un giuda" comes from the song *Eskimo* by Francesco Guccini.

TAB. 2. *Some comments to Matteo Macilotti's Facebook post*

- D6: [She's] Definitely a beautiful woman. But saying that she's an Italian beauty is a different thing. Political correctness and the fear of being racist have led us to completely lose our common sense and become out of touch with reality. And while she's definitely a beautiful woman who is worthy of such an important cover, she is a beautiful Senegalese woman, just as there are beautiful Italian, Swedish, Chinese and Brazilian women. If a Chinese woman with Italian citizenship is a beautiful woman, I think that she would be proud of her origins and would like to represent them. Compliments to her again, but my dear Matteo this time you got it wrong
    - Matteo Macilotti: Dear D6, she definitely has Senegalese origins, but she's also a beautiful Chiampese... Because Chiampo wouldn't be what it is now if Maty's dad, as well as many other dads, hadn't come here to our beautiful valley. They're part of our common history, this is the present and future Chiampo.
    - D6: You're rather confused. And racism doesn't have anything to do with it. The world is beautiful because it's varied, with its nuances and wonderful differences. A Chiampese or a Mediterranean would never be a Senegalese and vice versa. Come to terms with it, and I repeat, politics doesn't have anything to do with it.
    […]
    - D6: Why try to define someone as Chiampese who is not. In fact, I don't think this is out of a lack of respect. But I'll leave you to your radical chic conversation since you're capable of accusing me of being racist
    - A7: Since no one decides where they are born, everyone is free to call "home" wherever they feel most comfortable living. From a legal point of view, a person becomes part of a country when they acquire citizenship, as in this case. So I would say she's a Chiampese beauty.
    - D6: A7 I feel like I am Norwegian 🙂
    - A7: D6 Good for you
    […]
    - A8: D6 and what would a typical Italian beauty be? A South Tyrolean blonde? A Venetian red? A Neapolitan black? I'm curious
    -D6: A8 Actually, all that you mentioned are Italian beauties. How come you didn't mention Burkinese chocolate?
    […]
    -D6: Thank God ius soli does not exist. Who is born in Italy is not Italian at all. Thank God (that's the law)
    […]
- D7: Beautiful will be beautiful, Italian will be Italian, but to me she looks more Senegalese 🤔 Who knows whether she feels more Senegalese or Italian but to me Italian women look slightly different... The world is beautiful for its differences and it's also nice to acknowledge them [those differences] rather than consider everyone as one because being an individual is beautiful...
    - A9: D7 This is all "Italian" reasoning. Black people are all Africans based on ancestral origins, but no one would ever come up with the idea of asking a Black American, French or English person whether they feel more African or more connected to the country they were born in, or maybe even where their grandparents and parents were born. What do Italian women look like? If you go to the South they mostly look Arab and if you go to the North they look Nordic and in Central Italy it's a mixture, which is proof that Italy doesn't have any pure people since it's a mixture of people. Are you going to ask the children of mixed marriages if they feel more Italian or more connected to the country of origin of their foreign parent?! They'll have two cultures understandably so, but all the children of foreigners or mixed marriages who are born and brought up in Italy will feel Italian since they have mostly been around this culture, just as the children of Italians born abroad feel more connected to that place than Italy. So these are just senseless questions.
    - D7: A9 when I meet a person it is normal for me to ask them where they're from and talk to them about their culture; and I find it fascinating and beautiful to find people who are connected to their story and family so much; and when I ask these things to friends they're the first ones to tell me "I am and I feel…"... And I find it beautiful... Of course if I go to either America or Asia or Africa and someone asks me I reply Italian... Also because I wouldn't feel differently... many friends of mine say that they're Italian even after spending decades abroad... I don't think it's nice to tell people who they are... If anyone feels a certain way it should be welcomed. I doubt there would be an Italian saying "I'm Chinese and I look Chinese" or anyway I've never heard of it... What do you think?
    […]
    - A9: D7 the singer Madonna has Italian origins, but she's American and she feels American and she's not the only person with Italian origins who recognizes their origins, but she feels she belongs 100% to the place where she was born. When you meet a person and you introduce yourself and ask him/her about his/her origins and he/she replies that he/she's Italian he/she tells you so because he/she feels that way, asking about his/her origins makes you rude since you're basically saying that you don't recognize that person as a compatriot. An English, American or French person wouldn't ask senseless questions about origins when meeting someone with different somatic traits because it automatically takes away the sense of compatriotism; when I was in the Netherlands, people used to speak to me in Dutch because they took it for granted that I was Dutch even though I'm of mixed race, so these questions and this reasoning are just typical of Italy. Just stop asking about people's origins, because they do not even know sometimes and you can already understand what a person feels they are by their answer.
    […]
    - A9: D7 if I tell you that I'm Italian Egyptian and you reply "ah Egyptian", how is Egypt?! I will say that I don't know a damn thing since I was born and grew up in Florence and it is possible that you know more about Egypt than I do, so once I've answered like that what do you get out of it?! You asked something to a person who doesn't know anything and you've intruded their space; So when someone tells you "I'm Italian" you'd better ask from what town/city, because if they do know something about one of their parents' country of origin, it will be them talking to you.

As noted earlier, the exchange of views does not yield a fruitful debate because of the lack of clear argumentations and explanations and a general indifference to engaging with the opponents' ideas, which prevents the interlocutors from finding a meeting point. Several interventions contain unnecessary examples (A4, A5) or peremptory statements (D5, D6 when saying «Thank God ius soli…»), which do not contribute to defining or clarifying the substance of the discussion. Not even the effort of deepening the knowledge of the matter is guarantee of pertinence and efficacy: firstly, although some people problematize the issue, they do not help to comprehend what defines a person as Mirandolese, Chiampese or Italian (A3, A7, A8); secondly, some ironic or

technical remarks are not appreciated or derail the conversation (the second and the third intervention by A2); in addition, other exchanges of opinion try to articulate ideas with clear reasoning and practical examples, yet they end up generalizing or drawing too much attention to the personal dimension (D7, A9); finally, there are interventions presenting unverified information or alleged theories devoid of scientific foundation (D4). The members of the two groups accuse each other of misunderstanding the point of the question or disapproving of contrary ideas: by doing so, they express indignation and stress their cognitive, emotional or moral superiority (particularly D1 and A6, but also D6 when saying «I'll leave you to…»). Generally speaking, the atmosphere does not seem particularly tense and the tone of the comments is not aggressive or frightening, yet there are a few offensive expressions (A5 says «like a whore», D4 uses the expression «halfass», A9 accuses D7 of being «rude» and employs the expression «a damn thing») and some users openly condemn their opponents keeping them at a distance (D3, D5).

What stands out from analyzing the data is not only the inappropriate modality of the discussion, but also the weak quality of its content: it is hypothesized that these issues may also derive from the communicative and cognitive dysfunctions previously outlined (see section 1.1.). Furthermore, national identity and citizenship are very complicated topics which are central to healthy democracies and deserve careful reflection and debate because of their implications in each person's perception of themselves and in each community's decisions regarding the acknowledgement of important rights. These observations serve as the starting point for designing the two learning units sketched in section 3.

3. The didactic proposal

3.1. General information on the didactic proposal

The two case studies prove to be particularly suitable for designing a multidisciplinary didactic proposal addressed to upper secondary school students and made up of two learning units, dedicated respectively to teaching how to debate appropriately on social media and problematizing national identity and citizenship. It is believed that an inductive approach can be particularly effective, since it implies involvement, participation and cooperation through the direct and practical contact with the linguistic and visual material: the teacher should be a facilitator who guides the students across the two learning units, drawing the participants' attention to some specific aspects yet at the same time allowing them to have an active role in learning. Instead of simply being taught, the students feel motivated to discover empirically and cooperatively by formulating hypotheses, doing

autonomous research and interacting. The didactic proposal is implemented according to the following pattern:

- elicitation activities based on the guided analysis of linguistic and visual material;
- frontal instruction by the teacher, aimed at providing the theoretical and methodological framework;
- assignment of tasks to workgroups, which perform them collaboratively and present their results through flipped teaching.

In other words, the teacher arouses the students' curiosity with the guided analysis and then addresses several topics more specifically with theoretical explanations and targeted activities. This way, after encountering concrete and authentic examples in their context, the students gain a better understanding of the subjects involved and acquire critical thinking by studying and debating. Furthermore, the specific topics, namely social media and civic education issues, are probably relevant and captivating for upper secondary school students: in addition to using social media and living in multicultural societies, they may study subjects such as law and philosophy and may start developing a social conscience.

The two learning units are presented below.

3.2. The first learning unit: how to carry out a productive debate on social media

What is posted on social media can easily become viral, so it is necessary to understand how to write on those platforms, especially when debating delicate issues shaping the public opinion. Mastroianni (2017), Gheno and Mastroianni (2020) and Mastroianni (2020) intend to fulfil this goal by raising awareness of the importance of an ethical and effectively communicative use of social media. Drawing on both theoretical knowledge and actual experience, the two authors provide examples and tools enabling the readers to gradually improve their communicative skills with the 'learn by practice' method. In addition to verifying the reliability of the sources and doublechecking the truthfulness, the correctness and the appropriateness of what is posted, users of social media should pay attention to Paul Watzlawick's second axiom, according to which «every communication has a content and relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a metacommunication». This entails a decisive paradigm shift. Who engages in a debate does so not to 'win', but with the objective of deepening the knowledge of the topic discussed and improving the relationship with their opponents: communicating means focusing on the other and trying to understand their point of view. As Mastroianni (2020) explains, on the one hand it is fundamental to consider all the argumentations which enable to comprehend the matter better or contribute to the debate; on the other hand, what is only aimed at placing the interlocutor on a superior position, disturbing the exchange, derailing the debate, judging or even offending should be ignored. To

put it another way, the only way to render an exchange of ideas fruitful is to concentrate on the substance of the discussion and acknowledge the opponents as interlocutors worth respecting and listening to.

The learning unit starts with the guided analysis of the two Facebook posts (see section 2.). Then the teacher employs the texts by Gheno and Mastroianni to illustrate the main features of social media (see section 1.1.) and to facilitate a better use of these platforms. Finally, the students are divided into workgroups: after acquiring knowledge on a divisive topic, they are expected to discuss it, with the aim of carrying out a productive debate, firstly orally in real life and secondly in writing on social media.

3.3. The second learning unit: problematizing national identity and citizenship

Contemporary societies are multicultural (Colombo, 2011) and characterized by super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). Therefore, it is inevitable to carry out profound reflection on issues such as national identity, citizenship and intercultural contact, which are central to civic education. The ideal objective would be to facilitate not only tolerance, but also interaction, so that, instead of living separately inside the same territory, the different groups would feel to be part of an only community and contribute cooperatively to its wellbeing. Nevertheless, as Colombo (2011) posits, it is problematic to find a compromise between apparently incompatible needs: for example, national unity and equality before the law should coexist with the respect for the differences, as well as views on private life matters should not be in contrast to universal rights. Accordingly, multicultural societies have elaborated several models of integration and citizenship laws. As regards the former, some famous examples are the French, the British and the German models, based respectively on assimilation, pluralism and labor integration, while the basis of the latter is usually either ius sanguinis or *ius soli*. The models of integration and the citizenship laws can be combined and implemented differently, as exemplified by the widely used metaphors of the melting pot, the salad bowl and the glorious mosaic (Colombo, 2011, 51-60; see also Arcangeli, 2007).

The learning unit starts with a guided discussion on topics such as the difficulties of migrating and integrating into a new community, the perception of one's identity in multicultural societies and the relationship with 'the Other': the teacher helps the students to compare and contrast their ideas with the most common representations of Italians and foreigners (see section 1.2.) and the data provided by the two Facebook posts (see section 2.). Then the teacher reads some extracts from Colombo (2011) to provide general explanations regarding multicultural societies. Finally, the participants are divided into workgroups: their task is to elaborate an original proposal to ensure a pacific coexistence of the different ethnic groups present in Italy taking

into consideration their social, cultural and linguistic characteristics and necessities.

Conclusion

The conclusion is devoted to a brief reflection on the learning impact of the didactic proposal presented above. The multidisciplinary project tackles topical subjects and provides essential knowledge and skills concerning language education and civic education. Participants are expected to manage the semiotic complexity of social media, carry out productive debates and acquire critical thinking on subjects which, despite constituting the basis of our societies, tend to be banalized. Firstly, social media have a central role in shaping people's opinions and therefore deserve careful attention. Secondly, reconsidering common stereotypes and oversimplistic positions is the starting point to improve the quality of democracies. Furthermore, the identitarian expression is extremely relevant, since everyone who has integrated into a society should be entitled to feel part of that community. Finally, the official recognition represented by the concession of citizenship guarantees some rights which can change an individual's life.

The methods employed and the issues addressed allow teachers to propose a wide range of activities, including Power Point presentations, oral discussions, written essays and narrative and autobiographical techniques. More detailed specifications are purposely left out, because it is believed that the didactic proposal could be easily implemented, expanded and modulated according to different needs.

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