

Editorial

Educating for Complexity: Intersectionality, the Decolonisation of Teaching, and Practices of Care in Educational Contexts

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In recent decades, the field of education has been marked by profound epistemological, social, and cultural transformations that have radically questioned the aims, contents, and practices of teaching. Growing social inequalities, migration, colonial legacies embedded in curricula, implicit forms of exclusion within educational dispositifs, as well as the emergence of new individual and collective vulnerabilities, have placed the need to rethink education as a space of social justice, recognition, and care at the centre of pedagogical debate.

Within this scenario, perspectives such as the decolonisation of teaching, intersectionality, and the ethics of care are now able to offer theoretical and operational frameworks for critically analysing contemporary educational contexts and for designing more equitable, inclusive, and responsible practices.

Intersectionality, for example, enables us to understand educational experience as the result of multiple axes of power and diversity: gender, class, origin, disability, language, migration status, and so forth. Decolonisation, in turn, invites us to question epistemic hierarchies, disciplinary canons, and Eurocentric and Western models of knowledge, and to engage with both concept-based and relation-based ontologies. Finally, care points to a distributed pedagogical and social responsibility, capable of holding together learning, well-being, relationships, and subjectivities.

This issue therefore brings together several theoretical and empirical contributions that critically explore these perspectives, placing educational research, teaching practices, and educational policies in dialogue with one another.

The issue is thus composed of the contributions listed below, which, taken as a whole, address the above-mentioned themes. These are accompanied by four additional contributions in the *Alia* section.

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The first two contributions, by Pier Giuseppe Rossi, Lorella Giannandrea, Francesca Gratani and Lorenza Maria Capolla, from the University of Macerata, address the transformation of contemporary school experience from decolonial and intersectional perspectives, questioning the idea of knowledge as stable, neutral, and centralised. The first contribution develops a theoretical reflection on the conditions of estrangement and alienation that run through the school context, interpreting them in light of the concepts of polycrisis and scalarity, and emphasising the need to rethink the relationship between knowledge, power, and participation. The second contribution presents the outcomes of a collaborative training and research pathway carried out in the academic year 2025/26 with around one hundred teachers from Central Italy. It highlights how teachers' observational stance, educational *dispositifs*, devolution, and the redistribution of decision-making power can make visible situated competences that often remain unrecognised in ordinary educational practices. Taken together, the two works identify micro-spaces of freedom and the redistribution of agency as concrete, albeit non-systemic, possibilities for rethinking the production of meaning and building more democratic and liveable forms of educational coexistence.

The transformations affecting educational contexts, marked by social inequalities, cultural diversification, and new vulnerabilities, call, in the argumentative approach developed by Sabrina Lucilla Barone of Pegaso Telematic University, for a reconsideration of teacher education in relation to complexity and pedagogical responsibility. Within this scenario, the emotional dimension of teaching thus acquires a structural significance that models of professional development still struggle to translate into adequate training *dispositifs*. The study therefore analyses the relationship between emotional-reflective competence and orientation towards educational practices of care among pre-service teachers, drawing on an exploratory quantitative design based on questionnaire data. The work is thus configured as a pilot study with a primarily descriptive purpose, conducted on a sub-sample of nine participants for the module that proved most quantitatively coherent in relation to the indices constructed. The results describe a positive associative tendency between the two dimensions, to be interpreted as an exploratory indication rather than as generalisable inferential evidence. Finally, orientation towards care emerges as a component of an articulated professional profile, grounded in reflexivity, inclusion, and relational attentiveness. This contribution therefore offers a situated reading of emotional competence and provides elements for rethinking the pedagogy of care in initial teacher education.

The contribution by Maria Grazia Verbicaro and Patrizia Oliva, from the University of Catanzaro, analyses a training workshop conducted within the framework of the TFA-Sostegno programme for lower secondary school,

focusing in particular on the teaching of the anthropological area. Grounded in a situated epistemology, the pathway engaged participants in the collaborative construction of low-cost teaching materials through a relay structure among small groups, while operationally integrating three theoretical frameworks: intersectionality applied to teacher education, the ethics of care as a relational pedagogical orientation, and the decolonisation of disciplinary knowledge. By adopting the methodology of practice analysis, the contribution documents, in particular, three emerging transformative dynamics: initial resistance to the intersectional complexity of pupils' profiles, the systemic tensions that emerged during the collaborative design phase, and the shift from a diagnostic to a narrative register in the professional language of pre-service teachers. The results indicate that training pathways designed with critical intentionality can activate epistemic revision processes within the professional dispositions of pre-service support teachers.

The essay by Ferdinando Cereda, from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, proposes the concept of embodied vulnerability to interpret a specific form of professional exposure that emerges in the initial training of Physical Education teachers. By integrating a structural conception of professional vulnerability, occupational socialisation theory, and *body pedagogics*, the contribution clarifies how the transition from an identity grounded in physical and sporting competence to a pedagogical identity may constitute a particularly intense biographical interruption. This interruption does not concern Physical Education alone: every teacher is called upon to transform disciplinary knowledge into didactic mediation. The specificity of Physical Education, however, lies in the fact that the body is simultaneously an instrument, an object, and an implicit criterion of professional legitimation. The essay therefore explores the role of the bodily dispositif, normative expectations surrounding the "athletic teacher", and the defensive strategies that future teachers employ to protect their professional image. Embodied vulnerability is ultimately interpreted as a possible formative resource, provided that it is supported by reflective spaces, mentoring, and practices oriented towards care, inclusion, and pedagogical responsibility.

In the essay by Paolo Sorzio and Caterina Bembich, from the University of Trieste, complexity theory offers a transdisciplinary epistemological perspective for discovering the laws that govern the global behaviour of systems, whether natural, social, or cultural. Multidimensional phenomena can thus be studied by reconstructing the network of interdependencies and reciprocal relations among variables, rather than by isolating linear cause-and-effect relationships, as occurs within a reductionist perspective. For the Authors, an orientation towards complexity is fundamental for analysing educational phenomena. In particular, the contribution focuses on the

reformulation of the concept of “educational poverty” in relation to the multidimensional characteristics of individual learning within society. The aim, therefore, is not to isolate a limited number of variables and place them in causal relation, but rather to investigate the complex system that connects different dimensions of formal and non-formal development, to recognise the growth opportunities that arise within it. Finally, collected data are interpreted in light of the complexity paradigm, highlighting how so-called “educational poverty” should be understood in relation to interactions among different dimensions of personal identity and learning contexts.

In the essay by Valeria Piras, Alice Valenza, Susanna Chiulli and Emanuele Falcolini, from ITD-CNR in Genoa, while the international scientific community recognises the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as an integrated approach to sexuality and affective education, the Italian context is characterised by a complex interaction of cultural and political factors that hinder its widespread and structured implementation. Through a theoretical framework that brings together CSE and trans-feminist pedagogy, the article explores the perspectives of twelve secondary school teachers actively engaged in promoting access to sexuality and affective education. The study highlights how school contexts are marked by structural tensions, showing how the implementation of sexuality and affective education is hindered by an institutional climate perceived as hostile. At the same time, strategies of resistance and negotiation emerge, helping to keep open educational spaces oriented towards care, critical reflexivity, and the recognition of diversity. Ultimately, the study offers a situated reading of teachers’ experiences and contributes to a limited thus urgent debate on sexuality and affective education within the Italian school system.

The contribution by Chiara Borelli, from the University of Bologna, analyses some findings from a broader qualitative study conducted in a municipality in Northern Italy on the needs of contemporary families and on the educational alliance in 0-6 services, focusing on educators’ and teachers’ representations of their relationships with families with a migrant background. The article rereads, through an intersectional and postcolonial lens, data emerging from twelve focus groups with educational staff, focusing in particular on communicative, linguistic, and cultural difficulties codified as factors of dis-alliance. The analysis shows how these difficulties are connected to assimilative expectations, processes of infantilisation, and cultural stereotypes concerning migrant families, which may at times also take forms that can be traced back to femonationalism. Finally, the contribution highlights how organisational shortcomings in linguistic and cultural mediation also contribute to the production of inequalities. In conclusion, the article emphasises the need to strengthen both research on implicit forms of racism in

educational contexts and the training of educational staff on critical intercultural, postcolonial, and intersectional perspectives.

In the contribution by Giuseppe Liverano, from the University of Chieti-Pescara, the complexity of school contexts, characterised by phenomena of educational exclusion, hegemonies, and discrimination, calls for a radical rethinking of didactic action. The article introduces the paradigm of necro-didactics to highlight how, within didactic action, micro-aggressions, standardised micro-actions, and ambiguous gestures and words may be generated. These micro behaviours, thanks to the invisibility granted to diseducational micro-mechanisms, are capable of producing identity-related and educational annihilation, thus configuring themselves as a silent form of symbolic violence. In opposition to this educational drift, the article proposes and epistemologically grounds a care-based didactics, understood as an antidote capable of restoring teaching's vital, emancipatory, and democratic vocation. Through an analysis that integrates the intersectional approach and the decolonial perspective, the article outlines the three constitutive foundations of this proposal: the grammar of care, which defines its processual structure; the semantics of care, which orients the meaningful content and significance of didactic action towards equity and justice; and the technique of care, which translates it into situated and reflective implementation. Based on this epistemology, care-based didactic action, understood as an intentional political and moral choice on the part of the teacher, may represent a valid option for countering hegemonic and colonising logics, promoting students' existential transformation, and restoring centrality to inclusion, well-being, and the democratic construction of knowledge. Finally, the article identifies the indicators and tools to be used in an empirical research design aimed at scientifically validating the theoretical pillars of care-based didactics.

In the contribution by Tommaso Santilli, Catia Giaconi, Noemi Del Bianco and Ilaria D'Angelo, from the University of Macerata, the social and cultural transformations affecting contemporary society highlight the need to rethink educational processes as dimensions of care, ensuring equitable opportunities for participation for all students. In this context, immersive learning environments can be interpreted not as mere technological settings, but as genuine pedagogical ecosystems in which knowledge creation, participation, and accessibility are co-constructed through situated approaches. This contribution therefore proposes the application of a co-design protocol grounded in the frameworks of Special Pedagogy and aimed at developing inclusive training pathways that involve immersive technologies as inclusive educational and didactic dispositifs. The pilot study presented in this paper thus makes it possible to reinterpret immersive learning environments as places that

can activate new processes of supportive educational relationships and new opportunities for self-determination.

In their article, Gabriella Aleandri and Samira Paradiso from Roma Tre University highlight how the current educational landscape calls for timely responses to the complexity of learning and Special Educational Needs. Neurodevelopmental disorders, such as specific learning disorders, ADHD, and ASD, involve critical issues relating to attention, emotional regulation, and social participation. From the perspective of pedagogical innovation oriented towards care, music therapy is therefore configured as a functional intervention tool for fostering processes of self-regulation and interpersonal synchronisation through non-verbal channels. The sound mediator thus offers a framework of intersubjective support to promote development in neurodivergent profiles through “communicative musicality”. In particular, this contribution analyses a research-intervention project conducted with ten participants, aged between 5 and 20, through an eight-session pathway. The pedagogical design adopts a mixed-methods methodology, integrating quantitative tools, such as scales and grids, with qualitative tools, such as clinical diaries and interviews. The objectives lie in assessing the effectiveness of the sound mediator in enhancing executive functions and cooperative communication. Ultimately, the study proposes an integrated model that combines music therapy, pedagogy, and the psychology of learning, suitable for supporting the development of evidence-based protocols aimed at systematic inclusion.

In the contribution by Gianpiero Tiso, from the University of Milano-Bicocca, the expansion of generative artificial intelligence in school contexts raises crucial questions concerning educational justice, forms of marginalisation, and the quality of the practices of care that sustain everyday teaching. Drawing on an intersectional and decolonial perspective, the article analyses how in-service support teachers in Italy understand AI in relation to their professional stance, investigating the connections between technological self-efficacy, perceptions of inclusive potential, practices of digital care, intersectional sensitivity, and willingness to engage in specific training. The research adopts a cross-sectional quantitative design based on a structured questionnaire, validated through expert judgement and internal reliability analysis, administered to 550 Italian support teachers. The results show an overall favourable orientation towards the professional use of AI, alongside a marked training gap regarding the use of AI for inclusion and a clear awareness of the risks of standardisation and further marginalisation of the most vulnerable pupils. Regression analyses indicate that digital care practices are explained primarily by intersectional sensitivity rather than by technological self-efficacy alone, and that teachers’ propensity to use AI depends jointly on perceived competences, evaluation of its inclusive potential, and the ethical-

relational dimensions of teacher professionalism. These findings therefore have implications for rethinking the curricula of TFA-Sostegno programmes, as well as in-service training, from an integrated perspective that combines critical AI literacy, the ethics of care, and the decolonisation of didactics.

The article by Antonio Sacristano, from the University of Parma, investigates the need to rethink contemporary educational processes in light of the challenges posed by the decolonisation of didactics, intersectionality, and the ethics of care. Starting from a critique of the “coloniality of knowledge” and of the Eurocentric canon, the contribution explores how consolidated epistemic hierarchies operate as dispositifs of exclusion within educational institutions. Through a theoretical reflection that brings together critical pedagogy and postcolonial perspectives, the article proposes a shift from notional ontologies to relational ontologies capable of valuing interdependence and plurality. Specific attention is devoted to the deconstruction of the “hidden curriculum” and to the transformation of standardised assessment practices, often vehicles of epistemic violence, towards ecological and formative models. The ethics of care is understood here as a political stance and an “infrastructure of resistance”, essential for recognising vulnerability as a resource and for promoting cognitive and affective justice. In conclusion, the contribution outlines the teacher as a facilitator of processes of “unlearning”, envisioning the classroom as a laboratory of cognitive democracy aimed at social transformation.

The contribution by Sara Gemma, Maria Luisa Iavarone and Francesco Girardi, from Parthenope University of Naples, presents the preliminary project M.A.R.G.E. – *Madri in Rete per l'Empowerment alla Genitorialità* – as a practice of participatory action research, launched in contexts of educational complexity and marginality in the Second Municipality of Naples. The action involved networks of young local mothers and refugee women seeking asylum in pathways of mediation and education for care and motherhood, oriented towards competent parenting. Through creative practices, participatory workshops, emotional mapping, listening and embroidery circles, processes of self-narration and peer learning are activated, configuring themselves as open spaces of relationship with the local community. From a situated intersectional and decolonial perspective, the expected outcomes concern personal empowerment, the strengthening of the parent-child relationship, and the construction of forms of active participation, that promotes alternative narratives capable of valuing the margin as a generative space of care, transformation, and individual and collective self-awareness.

In their article, Francesca Salis, from the University of Macerata, together with Silvia Casilio, Anna Maria Riccioni and Veronica Punzo, argues that intersectionality has established itself as one of the most incisive and necessary

analytical categories for understanding power dynamics and inequalities in educational and social contexts. Through a qualitative study, the narrative approach makes it possible to highlight the extent to which educational language, constructs, and practices impact lives already marked by disability, and how school, training, and work experiences are nevertheless characterised by constructs and prejudices linked to ableism: a specific form of discrimination that pervasively intertwines with linguistic, cultural, and social structures. Within this framework, and following the presentation of the theoretical foundations, narrative research assumes a heuristic value that is not limited to data collection alone but can also recover women's voices, restoring them to a discursive space from which they have historically been marginalised or excluded. The study therefore presents an analysis of narrative interviews with women with disabilities who hold jobs and are actively engaged in the civic life of their communities. Through their accounts, the investigation reveals how self-narration becomes a privileged tool for dismantling stereotyped representations, offering new models of active citizenship and democratic participation.

The article by Valeria Ferrero from the University of Turin brings the critique of learnification into dialogue with the decolonial perspective, understanding the school as a place of knowledge production. Reducing education to learning orients it towards individual and performance-based logics, obscuring the aims of teaching and the criteria through which knowledge is legitimised. The decolonial approach radicalises this critique by revealing the regimes of validity that organise contents, languages, and forms of recognition. Decolonising teaching therefore means questioning how the school, as the Author argues, selects and authorises knowledge, transforming classroom practices, organisational arrangements, and educational policies to make epistemic hierarchies visible and open to critique.

The article by Antonio Balestra, from Link University in Rome, proposes a rereading of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a design grammar of plurality in post-digital educational contexts. It argues that inclusion becomes pedagogically grounded only when it is translated into curricular, assessment-related, and organisational choices that make the conditions of access, participation, and recognition public, intelligible, and open to discussion. From this perspective, UDL is brought into dialogue with epistemic justice, distinguishing between its testimonial and hermeneutic dimensions, with situated epistemologies, and with a conception of care understood as an institutional infrastructure of educational action. What emerges is the idea that designing for plurality entails not only differentiating access and forms of expression, but also critically questioning the criteria of recognition, curricular filters, and technological mediations that affect the distribution of credibility

and intelligibility. In its final section, the essay discusses some implications for didactic design and teacher education.

The contribution by Stefano Scarpa, from Giustino Fortunato University of Benevento, together with Elena Zambianchi e Francesca Toma, offers a theoretical reflection on the decolonisation of physical and sports sciences didactics, bringing the decolonial perspective and the intersectional approach into dialogue. Starting from a critique of the presumed neutrality of *bodily knowledge*, the body is interpreted as a situated reality, shaped by cultural and social dimensions and by power relations that affect students' educational experiences and participation. Attention is focused on assessment dispositifs and on the educational relationship, understood as contexts in which inclusion and exclusion are constructed and in which criteria of competence are often implicitly defined. From this perspective, assessment is not merely a tool for measurement, but a process that orients the recognition of learning and contributes to the construction of hierarchies among students. Finally, the reference to enactivism values the embodied and relational dimension of learning, highlighting the role of the body in the construction of meaning. This gives rise to the need to rethink didactic practices in a more inclusive key, valuing differences and diverse modes of learning and participation.

The contribution by Aldo Amoia, from the University of Bari, analyses the theoretical and practical conditions through which care, understood not as an individual gesture but as a relational and collective dispositif, can become an organising principle of educational contexts oriented towards social justice. Starting from a critical reading of the ethics of care (Noddings, Tronto, Mortari) and of its roots in the philosophical tradition (Aristotle, Heidegger) the contribution proposes an operational model centred on three axes: the recognition of vulnerability as a structural condition of learning; the construction of collective practices of interdependence; and the transformation of educational institutions through participatory dispositifs. The essay therefore considers concrete teaching methodologies, including Cooperative Learning, Restorative Practice, and Community-Based Learning, showing how they can embody a pedagogy of care capable of crossing differences, redistributing power, and generating belonging.

The contribution by Alessandro De Nicola, from the University of Milano-Bicocca, proposes an approach to education grounded in the intertwining of situated educational infrastructures, commons, embodied languages, and practices of care. In dialogue with perspectives on situated epistemologies and the decolonisation of didactics, the contribution thus defines learning as a relational and multimodal process, rooted in contexts and practices. Through an action-research trajectory consolidated over the last decade, the city and cultural heritage are interpreted here as an educational infrastructure capable of activating

forms of participation, co-construction, and shared responsibility. From this perspective, embodied languages, such as gesture, image, sound, and movement, operate as cognitive dispositifs. At the same time, care is configured as an epistemic practice that orients non-extractive relationships among subjects, knowledge, and environments. Within this framework, education emerges as a situated configuration of practices, relationships, and conditions for learning.

Four additional contributions are included in the *Alia* section.

The essay by Renata Viganò, from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, develops the thesis of educational research methodology as a strategy for connecting scientific disciplines, theoretical frameworks, research practices, and applied contexts. The complexity of the educational object, therefore, calls for a critical examination of interdisciplinarity, distinguishing the different domains in which it is situated and drawing attention to scientific interdisciplinarity as a pragmatic project oriented towards shared research goals. The conditions that make genuine interdisciplinary integration possible are then discussed, leading to the argument that research methodology can serve as a logical architecture capable of connecting research questions, theoretical frameworks, methodological choices, analyses, and interpretations. With reference to the principles proposed by the Committee on Scientific Principles of Education Research, the text explores the criteria of so-called “good research” in education and highlights its role in ensuring epistemological solidity, argumentative transparency, and the logical extension of results. The conclusion is that epistemological, methodological, and critical openness constitutes the indispensable habitus for educational research that is both scientifically grounded and socially relevant.

The essay by Maria Brembilla, Marco Giganti, Federica Baroni and Marco Lazzari, from the University of Bergamo, explores children’s and preadolescents’ imaginaries of robots within PNR coding and educational robotics pathways. It draws on 753 textual and graphic productions collected in response to the open question: “What is a robot for you?”, which are analysed through a reflexive thematic analysis approach integrated with descriptive and inferential analyses. The results highlight a non-random distribution of representations across the school pathway, with a trajectory ranging from iconic and not yet stabilised forms in the early grades, to representations mediated by cultural repertoires in the transition to lower secondary school, and finally to more ontological and functional definitions at the end of the latter. The most frequent category concerned the nature of the robot, whereas relational and ethical dimensions appeared less developed. The study therefore suggests considering imaginaries as situated epistemic resources and calls for the design of educational robotics pathways that integrate technical, critical, and value-oriented dimensions.

In the article by Elisabetta Nicchia, from the University of Genoa, generative artificial intelligence tools are shown to be significantly transforming teaching and learning processes, offering new opportunities to rethink didactic design. Initial teacher education, therefore, represents a privileged context in which to critically discuss and experiment with the use of GenAI in this field. The contribution presents an experience conducted with 46 fourth-year students enrolled in the Primary Education Sciences degree programme at the University of Genoa. The teaching proposal involved training, experimentation, and reflection activities on the use of GenAI in didactic design. Participants developed and compared three types of lesson plan: one produced by the students themselves, one co-produced with GenAI tools, and one generated entirely by GenAI. The analysis of the differences among these modalities enabled participants to recognise relevant pedagogical and didactic implications, offering interesting insights for a conscious integration of GenAI into teachers' professional practice.

The essay by Delio De Martino, Fabio Filosofi, Luca Bianchin and Anna Dipace, from Pegaso Telematic University, and Maria Meletiou Mavrotheris, from the University of Cyprus, addresses the rapid spread of AI, which is transforming higher education and raising new questions concerning the competences required by students and educators to interact effectively with AI systems. The study therefore presents a review aimed at identifying and synthesising the competence dimensions in the AI literature related to higher education, through an exploratory search conducted across different databases. The results reached by the Authors show that the AI literature converges around four main competence axes: technical-operational, critical-cognitive, ethical-regulatory, and human-relational. The study also highlights how these axes can inform future development frameworks and assessment practices.

And now, enjoy the reading!

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