

# “Crossings and Dwellings”: Trajectories in Formative Education

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## Abstract

On March 27, 2024, Cristiano Casalini (Boston College) and Giancarla Sola (University of Genoa) organized the international Seminar “Formative Education: International Perspectives”. This resulting article delves into the concepts of “human self-formation”, “education” and “cultural instruction” within the context of General Pedagogy in Italy. It compares Italian and American pedagogical perspectives, noting Italy’s humanistic traditions *versus* America’s focus on “teaching” and “schooling”. Despite these differences, both perspectives emphasize the centrality of human beings, suggesting the potential of a *transcultural paradigm* strengthened by *transgeographical pluralisms*. This indicates that the problems lie more in terminological translation rather than in a real underlying incompatibility.

**Keywords:** human self-formation, education, cultural instruction, pedagogy, international perspectives.

## Resumen

El 27 de marzo de 2024, Cristiano Casalini (Boston College) y Giancarla Sola (Universidad de Génova) organizaron el seminario internacional “Educación Formativa: Perspectivas Internacionales”. El artículo resultante profundiza en los conceptos de “formación humana”, “educación” e “instrucción cultural” dentro del contexto de

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la Pedagogía General en Italia. Compara las perspectivas pedagógicas italianas y estadounidenses, señalando las tradiciones humanísticas de Italia frente al enfoque de Estados Unidos en la “enseñanza” y la “escolarización”. A pesar de estas diferencias, ambas perspectivas enfatizan la centralidad de los seres humanos, sugiriendo el potencial de un *paradigma transcultural* fortalecido por *pluralismos transgeográficos*. Esto indica que los problemas residen más en la traducción terminológica que en una incompatibilidad de fondo real.

*Palabras claves:* formación humana, educación, instrucción cultural, pedagogía, perspectivas internacionales.

### 1. *The concept of human self-formation*

On March 27th 2024, Boston College and the University of Genoa organized an international Seminar entitled *Formative Education: international perspectives*. The event took place at the Department of Scienze della Formazione of the University of Genoa, with the remote participation of scholars from the Department of Formative Education at Boston College. The Seminar – organized by Chairs of Professors Cristiano Casalini (Boston College) and Giancarla Sola (University of Genoa) – was held also in collaboration with the “Centro Studi Pedagogici Don Lorenzo Milani” of Genoa. Professors Casalini and Sola introduced the Seminar, presenting two different historical landscapes. Then followed a round table entitled “*Crossings and dwellings*”: *trajectories in formative education* with scholars Ilaria Barbieri, Holly Hoffmann, Paolo Levrero, Francesca Marcone, Harrison Mullen, Eric Roland and Antonio Taiga Guterres. The heuristic reason for the Seminar was to compare and contrast two distinct cultural and geographical realities of education and the translations of its terminology.

Italian distinguishes between three pedagogical terms: “formazione umana”, “educazione” and “istruzione culturale”, which can roughly be translated as “human formation”, “education” and “cultural instruction”. These three categories are the object of study in Pedagogy<sup>1</sup>. “Formazione umana” (human self-formation) concerns the human and humanistic development of the human being (viewed as a process of taking form) and their transformation. “Educazione” (education) refers to the educational relationship between two or more people. “Istruzione culturale” (cultural instruction) denotes the act or process of acquiring knowledge, the product of teaching and learning, including also the level or type of schooling. In English, these three different concepts are subsumed under the term “education”. Casalini suggested translating “formazione umana” as «formative education»<sup>2</sup>. Based on this, some terminological questions arise, which this article undertakes to disambiguate.

In Pedagogy, studying the Italian category of *formazione* (which Sola translates as «self-formation»<sup>3</sup>) involves examining the history of this concept, which draws on both the Sacred Scriptures and classical Greek thought. The Greek notions of “idea” in Plato and “form” in Aristotle play a significant role. According to Aristotle’s well-known definition, «form is substance», thus

<sup>1</sup> See M. Gennari, *Trattato di pedagogia generale*, Milano, Bompiani, 2006; M. Gennari, G. Sola, *Logica, linguaggio e metodo in pedagogia*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> C. Casalini, *Renaissance Humanism and Formative Education: A Philosophy of Education Deeply Rooted in History*, in «EDUCAZIONE. Giornale di pedagogia critica», X, 2 (2021), pp. 97-125.

<sup>3</sup> K. Biraimah, M. S. Bonhomme, M. Gregoire Gill, M. Beth Kenkel, G. Sola, *The concept of “education” in the USA. An interdisciplinary perspective*, in «Rassegna di Pedagogia», LXXIII, 1-2 (2015), pp.103-105.

analyzing the *form* that human beings take means analyzing their *essence*. Consequently, formation cannot be limited to “education”, as a person’s educational background does not alone define their essence. Similarly, formation cannot be reduced to mere “training”, because the essence of human beings cannot be defined solely by their skills, competencies and knowledge for any activity or job. Instead, formation refers to “human formation”, meaning the essence of human beings is constituted by their humanity and sense of the human.

Human formation is something like a personal development, but it specifically refers to the process of spiritual, intellectual, cultural and human self-formation that each person undertakes. In Pedagogy, the verb “to form” does not allow for transitive conjugation: the process of forming oneself is always self-forming, since only the subject is involved in the formative process, that is a self-cultivation. No one can form another human being. To form oneself means to actively form one’s own identity. “Formation” can refer to the foundation or basis for growth but it is also a lifelong process, from childhood to old age. The concept of self-formation also includes creation – intended as both the creation of knowledge and self-creation of a human being – and it signifies the complexity, uniqueness and unrepeatability of “taking shape” and *transformation*<sup>4</sup>. This term indicates the self-formative peculiarity of each human being. Self-formation concerns individual human beings in their intimate, inner and profound essence but it inevitably also concerns their existence and their external dimension. This process involves the “whole” person and every human potential. The word “formation” contains the semantic value of both “building” one’s own identity and “taking shape”

<sup>4</sup> See G. Sola, *Umbildung. La “trasformazione” nella formazione dell’uomo*, Milano, Bompiani, 2003.

according to the human species, as well as of the progressive “transformation” – both externally and internally – acknowledging also the influence of education and cultural instruction.

The word “formation” comes from a millenary tradition starting from the *paideia* of Greek classicism to the German concept of *Bildung* in the *Neuhumanismus* of the *Goethezeit*. In Italian Pedagogy, the term “human formation” alludes to the process of external and internal, physical and spiritual growth by which human beings take shape throughout the course of their lives. *Bildung* brings together the ideas of Greek *paideia*, Latin *humanitas*, Christian-medieval *perfectio* and Renaissance-humanism *dignitas hominis*<sup>5</sup>. *Paideia* does not only refer to the state of youth of the *pais* (i.e. the child) but emphasizes his/her particular “formative state”: the so-called Aristotelian being-in-possibility. It therefore accentuates their high level of *form*-ability and educability. This extends the temporal limits of the paideutic process, which is not unique to the child but is a “path” throughout the entire lifespan involving the bodily, spiritual and intellectual spheres. The Greek idea of *paideia* was then translated into Roman culture, preserving its original meaning. In addition to *paideia* (which was an example for the Latins to emulate), the concept of *humanitas* originates from Latin culture and aims to bring out the peculiarity of human nature and its sense of humanity. Difficult to wrap up in one word, *humanitas* is nourished by *virtus*: the set of moral qualities of human beings that make them excellent. *Libertas* is the necessary condition for virtue, since the latter can only be grasped through the study of *liberales artes*: like in Greek culture, education is a social privilege rather than a universal right. In the Middle

<sup>5</sup> See G. Sola, *La formazione originaria. Paideia, humanitas, perfectio, dignitas hominis, Bildung*, Milano, Bompiani, 2016.

Ages, the uniqueness of human formation unfolded through the concept of *perfectio*. Reflecting divine perfection, humans strived to reach God in the Kingdom of Heaven, by nobly shaping themselves during their earthly existence. *Perfectio* is charity, hope and faith, all substantiated by the love preached by Christ, who is considered the “pedagogue” of humanity.

In the German-speaking world, the concept of “human formation” could be translated with the word *Bildung*. Coined between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries by the mystic Meister Eckhart, “Bildung” originally referred to a spiritual edification inspired by the divine image that human beings carry within themselves, according to the Sacred Scriptures. Through the concept of *Bildung*, Eckhart recovered the philosophical thought of Plato and Augustine and fused it with the Aristotelian-Thomistic vision. According to Eckhart, the soul is the space where the *imago Dei* lives and, as such, it is a place of creation. Individual human beings, as reflections of the divine Being, are also creators of themselves. Perhaps this is the reason Eckhart did not use the Latin word *formatio* – which in the classical tradition outlines a “conformation” with something external – to emphasise the fact that for the human being everything is decided in the interiority, where the *image* (i.e. the idea) of God resides. Therefore, Eckhart combined the German word *Bild* (image) with the meaning of the Latin term *form* (form), using the German verb *bilden* in the double sense of “to form in the image and likeness” and “to form according to the species”<sup>6</sup>.

During Humanism and Renaissance, the categories of *paideia*, *humanitas* and *perfectio* were complemented by the concept of *dignitas hominis* which highlights man’s capacity to become *faber* (maker) of himself: a

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<sup>6</sup> M. Gennari, *Dalla paideia classica alla Bildung divina*, Milano, Bompiani, 2017, p. 670.

self-determined being. Following the cultural rebirth, the category of *dignitas hominis* profiles the moral and civil ideals of courtly life. Through the latter, humans combine the need to know themselves and the world in which they live with the need to be *ex-rudis* (far from rudeness). Knowledge, formation and education become a *habitus* (a habitual way of being) which was supported by *mensura* (moderation) and *mediocritas* (balance). Therefore, *dignity* also encompasses demeanor, good manners and etiquette: it is what makes individual no longer just a *civis* (citizen) but also a *civilis* (civil). Humanistic ideals tacitly survive until the eighteenth century, when the German *Aufklärung*, with Classicism and Romanticism, give them new value. During the *Neuhumanismus* – that is the Neohumanism (the last great humanism of Western history) of the German-speaking territories between 1750 and 1850<sup>7</sup> – the concept of *Bildung* undergoes an epochal transformation: it is no longer considered as divine *Bildung* but rather as human *Bildung*<sup>8</sup>. The divine Icon loses its centrality in culture. In the neo-humanistic vision of the world, human being and humanity become at the same time axiologies and teleologies. Reason, feeling and spirit – all conceived as a harmonious *unicum* – are fundamental categories for the interpretation of the human being. *Bildung*, then, indicate both a person's formative history and their entire ontological being, in the union of exteriority and interiority<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Gennari, (ed.) *Neuhumanismus. Pedagogie e culture del Neoumanesimo tedesco tra Settecento e Ottocento*, 3 voll., Genova, Il Melangolo, 2018-20.

<sup>8</sup> See M. Gennari, *La Bildung neoumanistica. Germania e Europa nell'Età di Goethe*, Napoli, La Scuola di Pitagora, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> The literature on *Bildung* is abundant. For Italian studies on *Bildung* as the German equivalent of Italian “formazione”, see: M. Gennari,

So, the Italian pedagogical word “formazione” has several nuanced meanings, and it does not seem to have a direct one-word translation in English. Human formation is a growth path that leads individual human beings to decide *who* and *how* they want to be. This process in its complexity is influenced by genetic and biological, environmental and sociological, emotional and affective, ethical and aesthetic, religious and spiritual, civic and political, psychic and intellectual, physical and sexual, playful and professional aspects. Everything can be related to the formation of the human being and their humanity. Although it can also be seen as the result of genetic components, formation – which cannot be quantified or evaluated – is determined first and foremost by thought. Self-formation is also closely related to cultural enrichment and refinement, but it implies a holistic development that goes beyond mere academic knowledge, emphasizing character, ethics and aesthetic sensitivity. Therefore, human formation pertains to the totality, the unity and the harmony of the human being and it is his/her constitutive core. The term “formation” also conveys the idea of a continuous action by which humans shape themselves. This process «is slow, laborious, difficult, but it also brings joy, fulfillment and happiness»<sup>10</sup>. It involves «both the reassuring developmental phases

*Storia della Bildung. Formazione dell'uomo e storia della cultura in Germania e nella Mitteleuropa*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1995; id. *Filosofia della formazione dell'uomo*, Milano, Bompiani, 2001; id. *La nascita della Bildung*, in «Studi sulla Formazione», I (2014), pp.131-149; A. Kaiser, (ed.) *La Bildung ebraico-tedesca del Novecento*, Milano, Bompiani, 1999, 2006<sup>2</sup>; P. Levrero, (ed.) *Menschenbildung. L'idea di formazione dell'uomo in Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> M. Gennari, *Trattato di Pedagogia generale*, Milano, Bompiani, 2006, p. 41.

and the time of crisis. Self-formation is not a linear, continuously progressive path; rather, it involves discontinuous progress in subjective life, marked by setbacks, advances and counterbalances such as defeats or stagnation»<sup>11</sup>. We could say that human formation refers to our ontological being, yet at the same time it is the process by which we become ourselves, just as we are, and the process by which we (gave and) give ourselves form and undergo transformation.

## *2. Plural perspectives of education in the epistemic area of Pedagogy*

As part of the International Seminar dedicated to *Formative education: international perspectives*, some heuristic guidelines were proposed in relation to the pedagogical categories of *self-formation*, *education* and *cultural instruction*. Organized by Professors Cristiano Casalini (Boston College) and Giancarla Sola (University of Genoa), the meeting was first and foremost characterized by a plurality of value positions through which scientific research needs to be thought. The day dedicated to the seminar hosted not only Professors and Researchers, but also young PhD Students who built their study projects on the various pedagogical research fields. After the first two talks held by Casalini and Sola, entitled *Shifting to formative education: two historical landscapes* and *Formative education: meanings and translation issues* respectively, the agenda continued with a “round table” dedicated to “*Crossings and Dwellings*”: *Trajectories in formative education*. The title of this round table pointed towards the possibility of thinking about the intertwining

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

meanings that words and concepts take on due to the cultural context to which they belong. In particular, the short speech *Plural perspectives of education in the epistemic field of Pedagogy*, considered the significance that is ascribed to “education” within the Italian context in the epistemic area of Pedagogy: a science, a system of knowledge humanistically founded, that studies self-formation, education and cultural instruction of human beings.

It is known that Pedagogy establishes the centre of its studies around the human beings, considered «in its entirety, unity, totality, particularity, finiteness and unrepeatability»<sup>12</sup> regardless of «the gender, the ethnicity of belonging, the political or religious beliefs, his cultural identity and his sexual orientation»<sup>13</sup>. This science aims to explore the aspects of human beings related to *self-formation, education and instruction*<sup>14</sup>, now intertwining its speech with the practice of life, now establishing with other sciences (human or natural) an *inter-* and *trans-*disciplinary dialogue. The inner feeling of the human, the humanity, the humanistic ideal<sup>15</sup> are the fundamental principles on which the pedagogical knowledge is built. This, however, does not occur without an epistemological order and an epistemological disposition. Pedagogical epistemology indeed contributes to specifying a particular scientific *status*, but also looks at the plural methodologies with which this science interprets the existential circumstances involving human beings. The theoretical-epistemological framework of Pedagogy allows for

<sup>12</sup> M. Gennari, *Trattato di Pedagogia Generale*, Milano, Bompiani, 2006, p.70.

<sup>13</sup> M. Gennari, G. Sola, *Logica, linguaggio e metodo in Pedagogia*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2016, p.18.

<sup>14</sup> See *ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> See *ibidem*.

the development of research and meanings regarding the problems that concern human beings in the face of a «pedagogical reality»<sup>16</sup> configured through the plurivocality of cultures and life stories. The investigation around human beings therefore needs to be set up through a plural cognition that identifies, understands and addresses<sup>17</sup> pedagogical problems also considering the relationship that is established between theory and practice, from which an «epistemologically rigorous research path»<sup>18</sup> cannot be ignored.

Pedagogical issues are thus observed, thought and interpreted starting from the practice of life. They are then organized among the system relating to pedagogical knowledge. This also happens through a constant «critical control»<sup>19</sup> of the theories generated.

From an historical perspective, the identity of Pedagogy is strictly connected to the problem of *education*. The latter refers etymologically to the Latin verbs of *educāre* – that is, “to raise”, “to nourish”, “to grow”, “to take care of” –; of *educēre* – that is, “drawing out”, “extracting”, “bringing out”, “bringing to light” –; of *edocēre* – that is, “informing”, “showing”, “demonstrating”. Education is a path through which human beings can reach the full expression of themselves. It is a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout the next ages of life. An essential value is attributed to the relationship between two people, where someone educates and someone else is educated. Often the term “education” refers to hetero-education. In the relationship with the other person, we educate each other. Examples

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

of educational relationships are those established between parents and children, teachers and students, a pedagogue and a person, two friends or two people who love each other.

The one who educates has the responsibility to put someone else on a path aimed at (i) the self-formative growth – where by *self-formation* we mean the intimate and specific process that human beings carried on in their own interiority –; (ii) the ability to recognize, understand and interpret the fundamental values of everyone; (iii) the possibility to make life choices starting from a clear awareness about oneself and the world; (iv) leading human beings on a *pedagogical leaning* of life. The goal – that means the *telos* – of a relationship that can truly be acknowledged within an *educational principle* consists (a) in the *valorisation* of the humanity found in human beings, (b) in the *emancipation* of someone through the assumption of a critical conscience; (c) in the tension towards an harmonious and balanced dimension of life, (d) in the *identification* of the authentic value inherent in human being; (e) in educating about a continuous *problem-ization* of knowledge. But first of all, the purpose of education is the construction of a *relationship of trust* by relying on the one who accompanies, supports, listens, understands, and respects each subject's conception of world and life.

The educational relationship – of which (among others) pedagogists, educators and teachers are interpreters – is an act of kindness and care. Two people are two worlds, with an educational background resulting from life experiences. They are two worlds with different ways of thinking about reality and existence itself. *Styles of thought* and *styles of life* must be respected and welcomed by those who approach the “world of the otherness” that can be determined, for example, by a specific

cultural orientation. In the field of education various worlds are intertwined and compared. It sometimes happens that different worlds are characterized by discordant categories. That's why it's also good to educate ourselves on the *codes* – the systems of rules – through which other people set their lifestyle.

What meanings are attributed to the ideas of love, family, childhood, self-formation, education in light of several cultures? And what values does each one ascribe to the different categories we have mentioned? Starting from these questions, we can say that “education” refers to an *education which aims to understand the world of others*. Those who participated in the above-mentioned *International Seminar* educated themselves on the several meanings ascribed to the concept of education<sup>20</sup>. It is first and foremost a matter of approaching these different worlds, as the educator does within the educational relationship. This relationship develops without demanding or suggesting solutions to problems, but rather it is built by respecting the life of other people. Sometimes, different worlds clash vehemently. If we want to broaden the discussion within a macro-categorical dimension, we could give the example of a world society in crisis. This happens also because of the inability of human beings to welcome “the world of diversity”. On a micro-dimensional level, in the face of this clash – which is often perceived as the incompatibility of different points of view – the educator has the duty to educate himself in listening

<sup>20</sup> On this topic see C. Casalini, *Formazione tra frammentazione e sintesi*, Roma, Anicia, 2006; A. Granese, (ed.) *The concept of Education*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967 (tr.it. *Analisi logica dell'educazione*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1971); A. Kaiser, *Filosofia dell'educazione*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2013.

to that world which is so different that it seems indecipherable and incomprehensible.

Education means “to educate about the differences”. But it’s also “to educate about the identities”<sup>21</sup>. Identities means points of convergence, of confluence. One of these points is that there can be no education if not in the name of *freedom*: a fundamental category of the pedagogical speech. We can talk about *educational autonomy* and *educational dignity*, about *educational ideal* and *educational conscience*, about *educational value* and *educational code*. We can even refer to topics of *social education*, *friendly education*, *ecological education*, *critical education*, *aesthetic education*, *civic education*, *political education*, *technological education*, *scholastic education*, *family education*. But all these aspects need to be studied by Pedagogy in the sign of *freedom* because there are as many “*educational cultures*” as there are “*human cultures*”<sup>22</sup>. These lead human beings who lives in the contemporary world to reflect also on education about freedom, dialogue and listening. Educating in all of this means educating oneself in the categories of *humanity*.

Considering what has been said, there is a further semantic value which can be relate to education. The relation that each human being can set with themselves. Recalling what Hans-Georg Gadamer said during his conference entitled *Erziehung ist sich erziehen*, held in Heidelberg in 1999, we can say that “to educate” means first

<sup>21</sup> On this topic see M. Gennari, *Pedagogie Comparate*, in «Studi sulla Formazione», 2019, n.22, pp.187-200; K. Popper, *The myth of the framework. In defence of the science and rationality*, New York, Routledge, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> See M. Gennari, *Trattato di Pedagogia Generale*, Milano, Bompiani, 2006, p. 57.

and foremost “to educate oneself”<sup>23</sup>. The German philosopher underlines the tendency of human beings to educate themselves. That is to get the possibility to educate ourselves in culturalizing life experiences. Gadamer remembers to all of us that the interpretation of one's own and others' education allows to understand the differences, to grasp the identity traits and undertake a plural perspective.

Mario Gennari also defined education as a “sign”. In his text of 1984 dedicated to *Pedagogia e Semiotica* he said that educational relationship is a “sign that it stands in the place of something else”<sup>24</sup>. Recovering the words of Umberto Eco, we can therefore consider education as everyone's opportunity to recognise, interpret and attribute meaning to their existence. This is to better understand one's own and others' value positions towards humanity and the world around human beings.

Furthermore, a suitable study on education will consider the dimensions of rudeness, ineducation or miseducation, which are found in all social contexts today<sup>25</sup>. In the contemporary world these aspects are analysed within a *depedagogized context* – as Gennari remembers in *Logica, linguaggio e metodo in Pedagogia* written with Giancarla Sola in 2016.

Pedagogy directs its theories and practices toward an *educational care* in the broader issue of an *educational culture*, with the purpose of supporting each one to

<sup>23</sup> See H.G. Gadamer, *Erziehung ist sich erziehen*, Heidelberg, Kurpfälzischer Verlag, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> See M. Gennari, *Pedagogia e Semiotica*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1984.

<sup>25</sup> On this topic see G. Sola, *Trattato di Pedagogia Clinica*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2024; J. Hillman, M. Ventura, *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy - And the World's Getting Worse*, New York, HarperOne, 1992; W. H. Kilpatrick, *Education and the Social Crisis*, New York, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1932.

the *educational practice of himself* aimed at being able to *culturalize* life experiences and *understand* the value – or, better, the plural values – placed in every human being.

### 3. *The pedagogical meanings of cultural instruction. A humanistic perspective*

This contribution aims to explore the pedagogical implications of the concept of cultural instruction according to a humanistic perspective which places the human being at the center of research and culture produced throughout history. The term Humanism is usually used to refer to the Italian cultural context of the XV century, when a vision of world and life emerged that gave birth to a new idea of human being, whose dignity resided in his being and whose value was expressed in the sense of humanity that made him fraternally human among his fellows. In the sixteenth century, this concept spread throughout Europe during the Renaissance, bringing about changes in the political and civil, social and economic spheres. These changes in the arts and languages, knowledge and science established a different relationship between man and the world. A new order of knowledge emerged, which was to be free and human. It corresponded to an encyclopedia of knowledge whose epistemic and epistemological relations were established according to an organic and democratic articulation. However, the desire to translate *humanitas* (i.e. the sense that humans have of their authentic humanity) into reality crossed European culture throughout history in specific epochs that we can call *humanism* (from Greek-Roman classicism to the modern era)<sup>26</sup> and suggests that humanism – including

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. G. Sola, *La formazione originaria. Paideia, humanitas, perfectio, dignitas hominis, Bildung*, Milano, Bompiani, 2016.

pedagogy – can be conceived of as a code by virtue of which everyone is enabled to take on a “free and human”<sup>27</sup> form throughout history. This perspective is in line with an idea of humanistic pedagogy, according to which individual self-formation and education are based on freedom and subjective humanity.

Based on this, cultural instruction is understood as one of the objects of study in which pedagogical research unfolds together with self-formation – self-formation meaning the process whereby humans form themselves by virtue of their own dispositions and vital forces – and education, the latter arising from the relationship between and across humans<sup>28</sup>. This vital relationship promotes self-development while recognizing and respecting others' differences. Pedagogy can therefore be seen as a human science aimed at the study of self-formation, education and cultural instruction. If considered in relation to self-formation and education, cultural instruction cannot be reduced to the acquisition of knowledge and regulatory or prescriptive norms but is «a way of putting ourselves in relation with humanity and its deed in history»<sup>29</sup>. It «has an unavoidable function of liberation»<sup>30</sup> from «institutions, machines, techniques, organized groups, Churches and States»<sup>31</sup>. This happens when cultural instruction is capable of «illuminating our conscience, of leading us to understand everything with a

<sup>27</sup> E. Garin, *L'educazione in Europa. 1400/1600*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1957: XII.

<sup>28</sup> In order to examine this topic, the following studies can be considered: M. Gennari, *Trattato di Pedagogia generale*, Bompiani, Milano, 2006; M. Gennari – G. Sola, *Logica, linguaggio e metodo in pedagogia*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

critical and tolerant eye, of awakening the concrete sense of a humanity that proceeds by building its tools and always surpassing them, among the finished and perishable deeds of a work of non-perishable value»<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, according to a humanistic vision of pedagogy, self-formation, education and cultural instruction are not only processes supporting the becoming of man throughout his life, but they are constitutive dimensions, namely particularities which distinguish his personal ontological identity and guarantee the dignity of subjective differences. Self-formation, education and cultural instruction thus declare what the human being is.

It is then worth asking what cultural instruction is. This category primarily refers to a process through which humans acquire and build a body of knowledge that constitutes their culture. Looking at the etymological meanings of the word “instruction”, this originates from the Latin verb “instruere”, which means “to make”, “to compose”, “to put together elements, one on top of the other”, “next to the other”, or in “relation with each other”, thus try to find and follow a precise order. In a pedagogical sense, instruction leads humans to bring order to the articulated system of sciences and knowledge that comes from the cultural reality to which they belong. It is both a path that humans can thread singly (they instruct themselves) and under the guidance of others (they are instructed). It is not merely process of transmitting information, or knowledge. Nor can it be identified with teaching, indoctrination, training. It is a free and critical relationship that each of us establishes with knowledge and culture in order to elaborate our own personal cultural structure. This means that cultural instruction is closely inherent to Pedagogy and Didactics, but it cannot be understood only as a teaching and learning process.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

Given these assumptions, what is culture then? The term culture refers to the complex set of knowledge, ideas, and cognitions that everyone acquires and builds on in their relationship to the world. In an anthropological sense, culture is the expression of the (spiritual and real-world) life of groups, ethnic groups, communities, and peoples. Culture refers to meanings expressing the identities and differences of individuals and of defined social realities. As Romano Guardini wrote, culture «is everything that human beings create and they are, in their living relationship with the world around them»<sup>33</sup>. This means that culture –both when it is understood as a subjective expression and when it refers to a social group – arises from the dialogical and dialectical relationship of humans with the world. This relationship involves feeling, mind, thought – all that is internal to humans. But it also involves the senses and the organic materiality of the corporeity. And it is always the result of a critical elaboration of experience. This prefigures the connection between self-formation and cultural instruction while recognizing their distinction. When commenting the thought of Wilhelm von Humboldt on the German word *Bildung* – which in the historical and cultural context of *Neuhumanismus* (1750-1850)<sup>34</sup> carries the meaning of the interior, deep and harmonious self-formation of the human being, the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer remind us

<sup>33</sup> R. Guardini, *Grundlegung der Bildungslehre*, in “Die Schildgenossen”, n.8, 1928, S.314-339; *Grundlegung der Bildungslehre. Versuch einer Bestimmung des Pädagogisch-Eigentlichen*, Werkbund, Würzburg, 1953 (tr.it. *Fondazione della teoria pedagogica*, in *Persona e libertà. Saggi di fondazione della teoria pedagogica*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1968, pp.49-92).

<sup>34</sup> In order to examine this topic, the following studies can be considered: M. Gennari, *Neuhumanismus. Pädagogie e culture del Neumanesimo tedesco tra Settecento e Ottocento*, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2018-20, 3 voll.

that «when in our language we speak of *Bildung*, we mean by this term something higher and at the same time more intimate, that is, that peculiar spiritual disposition that knowledge and feeling, understood as an act of the whole spirit and of all morality, produce by reflecting on personality and character»<sup>35</sup>. This distinguishes *Bildung* (“self-formation”) from *Kultur* (“culture”), namely «the education of faculties»<sup>36</sup>, the intellectual and physical, moral and aesthetic, political and civil potentialities that characterize the human being. This is the purpose of sciences and knowledge across the different cultural traditions. Although knowledge is autonomous and distinct as it arises from different perspectives aimed at exploring and knowing reality, it is the interrelationship between knowledge domains – which is made possible by the critical conscience of humans – that makes humans aware of the problems that concern reality and themselves. This is a process that can only come from the individual and requires autonomy and freedom but produces beauty, emancipation and dignity which accompany creation, discovery, growth.

Culture grows out of the relationship aimed at understanding oneself, others and the world, through a process attributing meaning. It develops through constant interpretation. Culture is generated by humans’ openness to reality. This reality, in turn, unfolds in the interpretation that the subject will be able to give to it. Knowledge emerges from interpretation, which consists in a critical act through which subjective thought is able to distinguish, discern, discriminate the reality of things, be able to understand things for what they are, personal conscience, subjective history, and the languages that pertain

<sup>35</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1960 (tr.it. *Verità e metodo*, Milano, Bompiani, 1983, p. 33).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

and are peculiar to each human being are arranged in a living relationship with the world. The meanings that each human attributes to reality as the work of his thought and conscience produce knowledge and culture. They also enable individual transformation. This is achieved – as Wilhelm von Humboldt writes – when «the education of the soul, which is more universally and immediately useful, is not neglected, beyond the higher scientific education of the intellect»<sup>37</sup>. This happens because «simple form, pure thought, needs a matter in which it can, by imprinting itself, endure, so too human being needs a world outside himself. It is from here that his aspiration to broaden the sphere of his own knowledge springs»<sup>38</sup>. Knowledge and culture are generated by man's thought, which represents «an attempt to become comprehensible to himself, his action, an attempt of his will to become free and independent in himself»<sup>39</sup>. But «thinking and acting of the human being are possible only thanks to a third element, only thanks to the representation and the elaboration of something, whose distinctive sign is in fact not being a man, that is, the world, he tries to make as much of the world his own as he can and to bind it to himself as indissolubly as possible»<sup>40</sup>. As Gadamer writes, still recalling the words of von Humboldt, «language (...) has existence only just because as the world is represented in it»<sup>41</sup>. Therefore, a human's thoughts, his *Weltanschauungen*, but also his culture are

<sup>37</sup> W. von Humboldt, *Theorie der Bildung des Menschen*, 1793, in *Werke I. Schriften zur Anthropologie und Geschichte*, WBG, Darmstadt, 1960, S.234-240 (tr.it. *Teoria sulla formazione culturale dell'umanità*, in *Università e umanità*, a cura di F. Tessoro, Guida, Napoli, 1970, p. 50).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>41</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, op. cit., p. 507.

centered in the multiplicity of languages thanks to a process of cultural instruction which restores the dialogical and dialectical sense of culture. Cultural instruction enables humans to organize their knowledge but also their human structure by means of knowledge itself. This is what human culture is. Knowledge and culture are to be understood as a critical and problematic elaboration of reality which is dialogically and dialectically open to a plurality of ideas and visions of the world, in the awareness that knowledge is relative. Here lies «the supreme aim of our existence: to give the richest possible meaning to the concept of humanity inherent in our person»<sup>42</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusions

The pages written by Marcone, Barbieri Wurtz and Levrero profile the three objects of study of General Pedagogy in the Italian context. Interpreted starting from the studies carried out by Mario Gennari and the «Genoa School»<sup>43</sup>, this system of knowledge is defined here in terms of a plural declination of scientific research that can enhance a *pedagogical culture* developed also through the *transcultural paradigm*. What has been discussed in this paper about *self-formation*, *education*, and *cultural instruction*, considered as human ontological dispositions, comes from a humanistic perspective that intends to place human beings, in the concreteness of their human condition, at the center of scientific research in pedagogy. These three concepts thus become logical-

<sup>42</sup> W. von Humboldt, *Theorie der Bildung des Menschen*, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> F. Cambi, *Appunti sulla storia della Bildung*, in Cambi F., Bugliani A., Mariani A., *Ortega Y Gasset e la Bildung*, Milano, Unicopli, 2011, p. 150.

conceptual categories through which it is possible to critically and problematically understand the meaning that *humanity* assumes in every epoch, up to the present day. This is in order to imbue life with human meaning, through histories and geographies, ethics and aesthetics, languages and religiosity, sociality and politics, in every time and space.

The article highlights the semantic incongruities and points of convergence between the Italian and American perspectives on *education*. While the Italian approach is deeply rooted in the *humanistic traditions of history*, the American perspective peculiarly revolves around concepts such as *teaching* and *schooling*. Despite these differences, both perspectives intertwine and converge, centering on *human beings* and their life. This convergence underscores the potential of a transcultural paradigm strengthened by *transgeographical pluralisms*, suggesting that the problems lie more in terminological translation rather than in a real underlying incompatibility.

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# Indice

## *Editoriale*

Il Curriculum e la Bibbia

*(cc fm bv)*

1

“Crossings and Dwellings”:

Trajectories in Formative Education

*Francesca Marcone, Ilaria Barbieri Wurtz,*

*Paolo Levrero*

7

Tre studi su Pestalozzi

III - Gli esiti conservatori della pedagogia popolare

*Adolfo Scotto di Luzio*

31

Les enseignants pré-universitaires et la construction  
de l'État régional italien de la Renaissance.

Les États Gonzague et Estense

Partie I

*David Salomoni*

61

Un'analisi critica dell'educazione e della figura  
dell'educatore nel pensiero di Henry Giroux

*Teresa Savoia*

79

Dalla vita “mortificata” al progetto di vita indipen-  
dente. Deprivazione giovanile e politiche educative

Parte I

*Francesco Paolo Romeo*

99

Disabilità e partecipazione sociale fra sfide  
e opportunità

*Chiara Patuano*

121

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