
Verso un orientamento sensibile alle differenze di genere

Towards a Gender-Sensitive Orientation

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Esiste una credenza comunemente sostenuta, da alcuni decenni orsono, secondo la quale l'obiettivo di una reale eguaglianza di genere nel sistema scolastico italiano sia stato pienamente raggiunto. Questo articolo intende criticare questo assunto. Sono indagati alcuni aspetti problematici tra la scuola e la cultura di genere, focalizzando l'attenzione in particolare su di un fenomeno – la discriminazione educativa – che pone chiaramente in luce l'influenza persistente degli stereotipi di genere sulle scelte educative di ragazze e ragazzi. L'articolo punta anche a delineare alcune idee per un progetto di orientamento educativo che abbracci i principi di eguaglianza tra donne e uomini.

There is a commonly held belief, now some decades old, that the goal of real gender equality in the Italian school system has been fully achieved. This essay criticizes this assumption. It investigates some problematic aspects of the relationship between school and the culture of gender, focusing particular attention on one phenomenon – educational segregation – that clearly highlights the persistent influence of gender stereotypes on the educational choices of girls and boys. The essay also aims to outline some ideas for a project of educational orientation that embraces the principle of equality between women and men.

Parole chiave: Genere, orientamento, discriminazione educativa

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1. GIRLS AND EDUCATION: BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND EDUCATIONAL SEGREGATION

The Italian school system still has an extremely problematic relationship with gender equality, which to some extent is deceptive even today. Forty years have passed since Elena Gianini Belotti wrote, in her explosive essay *Dalla parte delle bambine* (*What Are Little Girls Made Of?: The Roots of Feminine Stereotypes*), «The procedure to undertake, which pertains to all of us but above all to women because they are entrusted with the education of children, is not to attempt to mold girls in the image and likeness of boys, but to ensure that every person who is born has the opportunity to develop in the way that is most suitable for that person, regardless of his or her gender⁴⁰⁶». This educational goal, which was outlined with a surprising degree of awareness at the beginning of the 1970s, still today has not been fully realized, although it is incontestable that some important progress has been made.

⁴⁰⁶ E. Gianini Belotti, *Dalla parte delle bambine. L'influenza dei condizionamenti sociali nella formazione del ruolo femminile nei primi anni di vita*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1973, p. 8.

This progress regards, firstly, the full achievement of education by girls. The «historical exclusion»⁴⁰⁷ of women from the official, dominant, male culture that had relegated female education to private spaces and domesticity for centuries⁴⁰⁸, was dismantled by several rapid changes that took place during the second half of the last century. With the exception of elementary schools, where universal education for both male and female students had already been implemented after the First World War, in Italy universal high school and university education – and the consequent large increase in the number of women and girls attending schools and universities – began to take shape in the 1950s and then to explode in the '60s and '70s. Following the school reform of 1962, girls entered junior high school and high school. In the 1970s, a major increase in their level of education was recorded⁴⁰⁹. An escalation began from that moment, and continued uninterrupted, so that by the '80s the "overtaking" of male students by female students in high school was recorded. In the '90s the same "overtaking" was even recorded at the university. It is important to highlight that female academic progress was not limited to mere quantitative progress. They also topped levels of scholastic and academic achievement. The performance of girls is on average superior to that of their male peers. This fact is demonstrated by several indicators. The repeat and dropout rates of girls are lower than those of boys at every level of schooling⁴¹⁰. Girls also graduate high school⁴¹¹ and university⁴¹² in less time and with higher average grades.

⁴⁰⁷ S. Ulivieri, *Educare al femminile*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 1995, p. 123.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. G. Seveso, *Come ombre leggere. Gesti, spazi, silenzi nella storia dell'educazione delle bambine*, Unicopli, Milan 2001; S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Le bambine nella storia dell'educazione*, Laterza, Rome 1999.

⁴⁰⁹ For an overview of female education in Italy over the course of the twentieth century: M. Dei, *Lo sviluppo della scolarità femminile in Italia*, in "Polis", n. 1, 1987; G. Franchi, B. Mapelli, G. Librando, *Donne a scuola. Scolarizzazione e processi di crescita di identità femminile negli anni '70 e '80*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1987; S. Ulivieri, "Donne a scuola. Per una storia dell'istruzione femminile in Italia", in E. Beseghi-V. Telmon (eds.) *Educazione femminile. Dalla parità alla differenza*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1992; S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Educazione e ruolo femminile. La condizione delle donne in Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1992.

⁴¹⁰ A recent Muir report on school dropouts, states that «the phenomenon of school dropouts affects the population of male students differently than the female student population» and specifies that «for lower secondary school, if in the national media the percentage of students "at risk of dropping out" is 0.2%, the percentage of male students is 0.24% versus 0.16% of their female peers. In high schools the percentage of male students "at risk of dropping out" is 1.47% versus 1.1% of female students (with a combined average of 1.24%)». Cf. MIUR-Ufficio di Statistica, *Focus "La dispersione scolastica"*, June 2013, p. 18. Document available at the link: http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/9b568f0d-8823-40ff-9263-faab1ae4f5a3/Focus_dispersione_scolastica_5.pdf (accessed 20 January 2015).

⁴¹¹ The report of the MIUR-Ufficio di Statistica, *Focus. "Esiti dell'esame di Stato e degli scrutini nella scuola secondaria di I grado"* (September 2013) states that «The percent of lay-offs of women mainly corresponds to the segment with the highest grades. The girls who received "dieci" [100 percent] and "dieci e lode" [ten out of ten with honors] l'8.1% compared to 4.8 of their male peers. The

From this quick overview of the academic success of female students one could infer— hastily — that there are no longer any disadvantages for females and that women have fully achieved true gender equality within our educational system. In reality, a more in-depth analysis reveals that we are still far from achieving this goal because a series of problematic attitudes persist. Some of these attitudes are mostly hidden. They must be brought to light and, in this way, addressed.

One of the most evident and disputed issues regarding female students and education is "educational segregation". This is a sexist partitioning, inherent in our educational system, that leads male students to pursue fields that are considered masculine (technical-scientific subjects) and female students to pursue feminine fields (liberal arts). The phenomenon emerges in their choice of high school and becomes still more evident in university courses.

In the academic year 2014-2015 female enrollment for the first year of high school was distributed as follows: 49.8 % in high schools, 30.8 % in technical colleges, 19.4 % in vocational schools. The percentage of female students out of total enrollment is 48.6 %, but their enrollment is distributed unevenly based on the type of school: 68 % in high schools, 32.2 % in state technical colleges and 43.4 % in vocational schools. Educational segregation is so pervasive that it determines students' field of study within the various schools. Thus, for example, if the high school enrollment is mostly female, there are some subjects where the number of girls becomes overwhelming: 89.7% in social science high schools and 81.15% in language arts high schools. Conversely, although the technical col-

"nove" [nine out of ten] were 18.6% for the females and 11.8% for the boys. Conversely, the segment with a grade of "sei" [six out of ten] saw a greater concentration of lay-offs of males (36.1%) than females (23.3%)». (p. 9). Document available at the link:

http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/40b00e39-a316-4038-bbbd-4f04c4ec63e3/notiziario_Igrado_1213.pdf (accessed 20 January 2015).

The results achieved to the diploma of secondary school confirm this tendency. In the report from MIUR-Ufficio di Statistica, *Focus "Esiti degli scrutini e degli Esami di Stato del secondo ciclo di istruzione"* (December 2013) we find that «comparing by gender, the best grades in all types of schools are received by female students» (p. 5), This is demonstrated by the prevalence of women among the graduates receiving *100 e 100 e lode* (100 out of 100 with honors) (see diagram 3, p. 15). Document can be consulted at the link:

http://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2014/Notiziario_esami_scrutini_II_ciclo2012_2013_completo.pdf (accessed 20 July 2015).

⁴¹² In the most recent report by Almalurea on the outline of graduates states, in the section on grades, that among the factors that have the greatest influence on the probability of obtaining good results is belonging to the female gender (together with a higher level of education of parents, a high school *diploma secondario* (second level), a high score on the diploma, and strong cultural motivations in the chosen course). Belonging to the female gender also influences the regularity of studies. Cf. Almalurea, *Profilo dei laureati 2013*, May 2014. Document can be consulted at the link: <http://www.almalurea.it/universita/profilo/profilo2013/volume> (accessed 20 January 2015).

leges are attended in large part by boys (67.8 %), this figure hides a different internal distribution between the technological subjects, where the number of males is overwhelming at (83.9 %) and the economic sector where, conversely, the number of females is greater (56.2% of students are female and 43.8 % of students are male)⁴¹³.

Educational segregation becomes even more evident in the transition from high school to university. We note, firstly, that gender is one of the variables which most deeply influences students' choice of the course of university studies: 57% of women who graduate decide to enroll in a university degree course, as opposed to 47% of men⁴¹⁴.

Of those enrolled, the women make up the majority in almost all of the educational areas. There is a major concentration (95%) in teaching. Their numbers are always much higher in linguistics (83%), psychology (82%), political science (70%) and literature (69%). On the other hand, males predominate in engineering (77%) and science (67%)⁴¹⁵.

This data establishes that even though there are no formal barriers to women in several areas of study, female students continue to limit their interests to fields that have traditionally been considered feminine, such as education and healthcare. Girls are thus overrepresented in the humanities and underrepresented in the sciences and technology. Analogously, boys are, in turn, concentrated in a limited group of subjects and are mostly in the minority in others, in particular those disciplines that lead, more or less directly, to teaching.

The fact that educational segregation is considered to be a problem that pertains only to women can prove misleading, even if this misconception can, in part, be justified by the fact that at present the scientific and technological fields offer greater opportunity to rapidly join the work force and to enter the most prestigious occupations and carriers, in terms of both economic and social recognition. It follows that women are penalized more strongly because they are excluded from these specific fields. Clear confirmation of this is provided by the annual reports of *Almalaurea* on the employment of graduates which monitors their entry into the workforce during the five years after graduation. In the latest

⁴¹³ Cf. MIUR-Ufficio di Statistica, Focus "Le iscrizioni al primo anno delle scuole primarie, secondarie di primo e secondo grado del sistema educativo di istruzione e formazione", April 2014, p. 9. Document can be consulted at the link:

http://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2014/focus_iscrizioni_as_2014_2015.pdf (accessed 20 January 2015).

⁴¹⁴ Cf. MIUR-Ufficio di Statistica, Focus "Il passaggio dalla scuola secondaria di secondo grado all'Università", February 2012, p. 8. Document can be consulted at the link:

http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/1964531c-595a-4c29-906b-978f7b0120c0/servizio_statistico_immatricolazioni2011_2012.pdf (accessed 20 January 2015).

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

report⁴¹⁶ we read that three years after receiving a first level degree 64% of male graduates have stable employment⁴¹⁷ as opposed to only 55% of female graduates⁴¹⁸. Among first level degree graduates, one year after graduation, men earn 27% more than women⁴¹⁹. This gap decreases at three years (18%)⁴²⁰ and at five years (8%) after graduation⁴²¹, though the gap continues to be in the men's favor. This advantage persists even for graduates of a two-year degree course. The average income of men one year after graduation is 32% higher than their female colleagues (1,194 euro compared to 906 at today's value)⁴²². The income difference is also strictly correlated to the graduate's course of study. Higher income is associated with degrees in engineering, healthcare professions, science, economics and statistics (all with higher than average values, which range from 1,383 euro for the first group to 1,268 for the last). The income for graduates in physical education, literature, and teaching are significantly lower than the average, with salaries of less than 1,000 euro per month⁴²³. It is easily noted that the most "profitable" fields of study are those that are predominately pursued by boys.

We can therefore conclude that the brilliant academic successes that have been documented for girls are not adequately rewarded when women enter the workforce. The most obvious problems are a lack of career opportunities and consistently lower pay for women than for men. Furthermore, while men are spread out over a wide range of professions, women are employed in a very limited number of fields, with a strong concentration in the educational sector and the service industry⁴²⁴.

The disadvantages to women most certainly stem from a job market that is still not very welcoming to them, but they also stem directly from the choices of areas of study that girls make. As we have seen, these fields are less advantageous in terms of income.

⁴¹⁶ Almalaurea, *Condizione occupazionale dei laureati-XVI indagine (2013)*, March 2014. Document can be consulted at the link: <https://www.almalaurea.it/universita/occupazione>. (accessed 20 January 2015)

⁴¹⁷ In the report "stable employment" is defined as follows: «stable employment is characterized by job positions permanent employees and by those aptly named self-employed (entrepreneurs, freelance and self-employed). The decision to classify the autonomous jobs in the category of stable employment was based on verification that graduates do not consider this type of work to be an "fall-back", a temporary occupation in the face of a lack of better opportunities» (Ibid, p. 96).

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p. 125.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, p. 103.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, p. 130.

⁴²¹ Ibid, p. 131.

⁴²² Ibid, p. 169.

⁴²³ Ibid, p. 129.

⁴²⁴ Cf. F. Sartori, *Differenze e disuguaglianze di genere*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2009.

Thus, from an educational standpoint, it seems appropriate to examine the phenomenon of educational segregation. Why, when faced with unfettered access to the various fields of study and, consequently, to career choices, do girls "choose not to choose", diligently funneling into the fields that have always been assigned to women by tradition (education, healthcare). Could this decision be interpreted as a choice that young women make freely (a sort of self-segregation), or simply as the result of social and cultural conditioning that molds the girls "preferences" in such a pervasive and devious way as to make them appear authentic and natural? There are various reasons for embracing this second theory, which prompts the assertion that the educational choices of female students, like those of their male peers, are by no means spontaneous or deeply desired. On the contrary, they are conditioned by a sexist unconscious that dictates to females and males which paths are considered "appropriate" for their genders. This unconscious is continuously fed by messages from family, mass media, and even the school itself⁴²⁵.

In the school environment there are two parallel curricula that give conflicting messages. The first curriculum is explicit, visible, and identical for males and females, who have already achieved (at least officially) equal citizenship within the school's walls. A second hidden curriculum is imbued with implicit value messages, which often work against the educational goals that are explicitly pursued. The hidden curriculum includes «the self images of male and female students, the expectations of their families for the future of their children, often even the emotional and relational beliefs and behavior of the male and female teachers»⁴²⁶; this second curriculum «has weight even in the representations of professions and of the social positions that are appropriate for a man or a woman, those that are not very feminine, those that require the ability to make decisions and choices, those that require an investment in work hours that is not compatible with a woman's role in family life»⁴²⁷. In the work world a "symbolic gender order"⁴²⁸ has been created which offers a precise definition of male and female spheres. As Silvia Gherardi explains: «The order presupposes a system of consistent and stable expectations. The symbolic order of gender presupposes that a woman is feminine and a man is masculine, that the one is private, the

⁴²⁵ The observations of Elena Gianini Belotti on early influences on girls, in the family and at school, to convert to a feminine role, are still very current and illuminating (1973, *op. cit.*). Recently Loredana Lipperini revisited the issue (*Ancora dalla parte delle bambine*, Feltrinelli, Milan 2007) enlarging the sphere of influence to the world of the first degree high school.

⁴²⁶ B. Mapelli, G. Bozzi Tarizzo, D. De Marchi, *Orientamento e identità di genere. Crescere donne e uomini*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 2001, p. 250.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Cf. S. Gherardi, *Il genere e le organizzazioni. Il simbolismo del femminile e del maschile nella vita organizzativa*, Raffaello Cortina, Milan 1998.

other public, that the first is occupied with reproduction, the second with production and so on. And therefore the organizations for production, because they are public, are male; women "don't work" and in fact being a housewife meant (in the past) not being a worker, without being unemployed because in order to be unemployed one must be a worker»⁴²⁹.

Masculine and feminine social constructions⁴³⁰ are supported by a complex system of expectations that clearly distinguish, often in dichotomous terms (masculine/public sphere; feminine/private sphere), the jurisdictions reserved for men and for women. Within this system, there is a rigid division between professions and careers that are appropriate for one and for the other gender. This is referred to as a "horizontal division of the workforce": «Medicine, computer science and programming, electrical engineering and electronics are prevalently male careers. Nursing, primary and elementary school teaching, secretarial and clerical work, domestic help are female occupations. The female occupations reflect, therefore, at the same time the perception of the woman as a giver of care and support in the family and her choices in terms of educational trainings»⁴³¹.

There is clearly a close relationship between educational segregation and work segregation, which does not so much follow a logic of cause and effect as a circular logic. If it is true that the choice of certain degrees that are differentiated by gender automatically propel boys and girls towards different areas of the workforce, then it is equally true that the perception of occupational segregation (the fact that there are segments of the job market that are reserved for women and others for men) makes the educational choices of boys and girls more readily inclined towards fields that are considered to be socially appropriate for the gender to which they belong.

2. WHAT CAN THE SCHOOL DO?

What can the school do to dismantle these "gender cages" that limit boys' and girls' goals for the future? In a study⁴³² I posed these questions to a sample of high school teachers (men and women) and received essentially two types of responses. The first line of thought is embraced by those who maintain that the problem of discrimination against women in the workplace depends on factors outside of the school (family, the world of work, politics) and a persistent sexist

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p. 19.

⁴³⁰ Cf. S. Piccone Stella, C. Saraceno (eds.), *Genere. La costruzione sociale del femminile e del maschile*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1996.

⁴³¹ V. Burr (1998), *Psicologia delle differenze di genere*, Italian translation, Il Mulino, Bologna 2000, p. 86.

⁴³² The results of the investigation are collected in the volume: I. Biemmi, *Genere e processi formativi. Sguardi femminili e maschili sulla professione di insegnante*, ETS, Pisa 2009.

mentality that is present in Italian society. This group of teachers maintains that *the school can do little or nothing* to promote gender equality because it operates in a deprived context and does not have the ability to change the current sexist mentality. The impulse for change, according to these teachers, can not spring from within the school. It must come from the outside, in the larger social context, and only then will change occur in the school itself. This opinion is summarized well by the statement of a young teacher: «Change must take place first in society. I am firmly convinced that because the school is a significant place of culture, it would have no problem receiving – if there actually was a need – particular recommendations that come from outside. The school always follows, therefore... it is not in the school environment that, in my opinion, this question should be formulated, since the school does its job well, " churns out " good future workers, good male students and good female students»⁴³³.

This type of response is accompanied by the responses of those who maintain that *the school is already doing a lot: it does not discriminate*. This second line fully conforms to a deeply rooted idea that the school environment is a sort of oasis, a protected place, that is not contaminated by the sexism otherwise present in society. It is no coincidence that when one discusses our country's delay in achieving true equality for men and women and when policies for equal opportunity are planned, the school is rarely included in the political debate. The reason for this disregard can be traced back to precisely this commonly held belief: school is thought of as a "privileged place", with respect to the problem of sexual discrimination, where equality is by definition exercised. There is statistical evidence to support this thesis – though in reality it is easy to debunk – which consists of the high number of women in classrooms, as both students and teachers. For some decades it has been said, at times with a resigned tone, that the school is now «in the hands of the women»⁴³⁴. In reality, a less superficial examination reveals a much more complex and conflicting picture. If we investigate the question more deeply, rather than limiting ourselves to a superficial observation, we arrive at the opposite conclusion: the Italian school system – in its structure, in the knowledge that it transmits – is a reflection of a sexist society and, in its turn, is configured as an engine for perpetuating traditional and stereotypical views of masculine and feminine roles.

The main conduit through which sexist stereotypes enter the school consists of those same teachers who, often unknowingly, project expectations onto students that differ based on their genders. The results of some studies on teachers

⁴³³ Ibid, p. 335. This statement – it will not escape – brings to light a much wider problem, aside from the fact that the subject in question is gender equality. The problem is the conception of the school as simply a "reflection of society", rather than an engine of social change.

⁴³⁴ F. Pinto Minerva, *La scuola in mano alle donne o le donne in mano alla scuola?*, *Dibattito*, in "Nuova DWF", n. 2, 1977.

conducted in the Anglo-Saxon region beginning in the 1970s are illuminating in this sense. These studies expose the unequal treatment given to students of different genders, caused by differences in the teachers' expectations for them. According to elementary school teachers interviewed by Clarricoates⁴³⁵, male children, although they were more difficult to control than female children, are considered to be preferable and more satisfying students. Even when they do not perform as well as the girls in class they are generally perceived to be more intelligent and capable. In the opinion of these same teachers, the success of the girls is owed more to effort than to ability. According to a study by Walkerdine⁴³⁶ teachers tend to explain the success of girls in mathematics as the result of effort more than intelligence. They consider poor results of boys to be due not to a lack of intelligence but to other factors such as aggression. When girls struggle in "masculine" subjects such as mathematics, teachers tend to reassure them rather than encourage them to do better, thus intimating that exceptional ability in this area is not expected of them. It is easy to imagine what type of effect these stereotypes could have on girls' self esteem. Stanworth⁴³⁷ observed that female students who feel that their teachers consider them to be mediocre internalize this negative evaluation as their own self-perception. It is indeed known that the differences in teachers' expectations for their students, working according to the well known mechanism of the "self fulfilling prophecy", become in some way prescriptive and prophetic because they contribute to the formation of the students' self expectations⁴³⁸.

Another interesting line of research has brought to light gender differences in interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. Spender, in her celebrated study *Invisible Women*⁴³⁹, denounces a discriminatory attitude of teachers that consists in giving more attention to male students and in dedicating more time to interactions with them (the boys are encouraged more, than the girls, to ask questions and participate in class discussions). The only answer is that the girls tend to not ask questions, to participate little in group discussions and to become somehow invisible within the classroom, obscured by the boys attention seeking behavior that is perpetuated by those same teachers.

⁴³⁵ K. Clarricoates, "The Importance of Being Ernest... Tom... Jane: The Perception and Categorization of Gender Conformity and Gender Deviation in Primary Schools", R. Deem (ed.), *Schooling for Women's Work*, Routledge, London 1980.

⁴³⁶ V. Walkerdine, "Femininity as performance", L. Stone (ed.), *The Education Feminism Reader*, Routledge, London 1993.

⁴³⁷ M. Stanworth, *Gender and Schooling. A Study of Sexual Division in the Classroom*, Hutchinson, London 1983.

⁴³⁸ R. Rosenthal, L. Jacobson, *Pygmalion in the classroom*, Rinehart and Winston, New York 1968.

⁴³⁹ D. Spender, *Invisible Women. Schooling Scandal*, The Women's Press, London 1989.

When we speak of the discriminatory attitudes of teachers we are also referring to attitudes held by female teacher. The growing number of women in the teaching profession has not led to the hoped for changes in the elaboration of a new gender imagination. The hypothesis that a greater number of women would transform equality in the educational system has been disproven by many studies that already, beginning in the second half of the 1960s,⁴⁴⁰ exposed the complicity of female teachers in the uncritical perpetuation of a sexist and conservative culture, that – paradoxically – penalized their own gender⁴⁴¹.

3. PROPOSALS FOR A GENDER-SENSITIVE ORIENTATION

From what has been said thus far, the need for specific training for teachers – men and women – strongly emerges. This training should truly promote more equitable educational models and overcome the sexist stereotypes that continue to strongly influence the choices of boys and girls towards traditional goals. When it comes to preparing paths of gender training aimed at encouraging the diversification of the educational and professional choices of both genders, making them as much as possible authentic, based on real passions and interests, instead of on a socially imposed obligation.

A recent report by the European Commission⁴⁴² based on a study sponsored by the Eurydice network, reveals that the problem of gender inequality in the educational environment persists in all European countries – in forms that are more or less evident. The research reveals that most of the male and female students in high school and college – even with notable variations between various countries – continue to choose studies and careers that reflect traditional gender roles. The women are the majority of students and graduates in almost all of the countries and are particularly numerous in the areas of teaching, health, welfare and social sciences/liberal arts and the arts. The men are more numerous in engineering, manufacturing industry and construction. That comparative study reveals that all of the European countries, with a few exceptions, are mobilizing to put into action policies regarding gender equality in education. Italy is among the exceptions, those countries (Portugal, Greece, Romania, Estonia, Slovakia and

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. M. Barbagli, M. Dei, *Le vestali della classe media. Ricerca sociologica sugli insegnanti*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1969; Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Libreria editrice fiorentina, Florence 1967.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. S. Ulivieri (ed.), *Essere donne insegnanti. Storia, professionalità e cultura di genere*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Turin 1996.

⁴⁴² Eurydice, *Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes: Study on the Measures Taken and the Current Situation in Europe*, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, Brussels 2010. The report is available at the link:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/120EN.pdf.

the Czech Republic) that lack significant policies on gender equality in education. Studying the report specifically on our country,⁴⁴³ we find detailed data that justifies this critical statement, but we also find a series of ideas that are useful for drafting a project of gender training in our schools.

The report on Italy begins very clearly: "In Italy gender inequality in education is not a question of concern. This doesn't mean that there is not a gender issue but that gender is not perceived as a problem by national authorities and policy makers, at least in the educational sector. Policies to avoid gender discrimination and to promote equality of opportunities between males and females are put in place in the labour sector. In the government there is a Board for Equality of Opportunities (Ministero delle Pari Opportunità) but generally speaking it doesn't deal directly with education"⁴⁴⁴. This assertion hits the core of the problem. In Italy the issue of gender inequality in the educational environment is not perceived to be a problem, even though it is. The first step to trigger a project of gender equality training is, therefore, to become aware that a problem exists and that it can only be tackled if the educational institutions focus on it and analyze it in all of its complexity⁴⁴⁵.

The report highlights another important fact that unites Italy with the great majority of the other countries: the gender training is generally aimed at girls, and not at boys. The problem of educational segregation is therefore perceived to pertain exclusively to women. Therefore, the educational initiatives that are promoted are aimed at encouraging girls to choose careers in the areas of technology and the natural sciences, however, national strategies aimed at overcoming the gender stereotypes that strongly condition even male educational decisions are absent. We must not, on the other hand, forget that, even though the girls are the most penalized by the rigidity of gender roles, the sexist stereotypes can also have an oppressive effect on male education, as this passage clearly points out: «the obligatory choices for males, the sciences and technology, the virtues considered to be male – authority, courage, drive towards success and career, abstract and operative abilities, control of emotions and feelings – have conditioned and still condition the opinions, behavior, fantasies and emotions of many young men, no less than the feminine virtues operate in a misleading or restrictive way on the imagination of young women condemned to sentimentality and irrationality, to live as though they were incapable of a set of jobs to which society, and the school, attribute more value»⁴⁴⁶. The same Evelyn Fox Keller⁴⁴⁷, de-

⁴⁴³ Eurydice, *Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes: Study on the Measures Taken and the Current Situation in Europe-Italy*, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, Brussels 2010.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 1.

⁴⁴⁵ C. Gamberi, M.A. Maio, G. Selmi (eds.), *Educare al genere. Riflessioni e strumenti per articolare la complessità*, Carocci, Rome 2010.

⁴⁴⁶ B. Mapelli, G. Bozzi Tarizzo, D. De Marchi, *Orientamento e identità di genere*, op. cit., p. 252.

scribing the process of formation of gender identity, maintains that in our society education has produced «men who don't know how to love» and «women who avoid science».

The social construction of gender roles therefore has a limiting effect on both men and women. Transferring the matter to the educational environment, one could hypothesize that just as girls have difficulty relating to scientific subjects in so far as they are perceived to be dry and impersonal, boys manifest more difficulty in learning abilities related to communication and social skills (for example learning foreign languages) precisely because of a more general inability to express and discuss thoughts and feelings⁴⁴⁸. It would therefore be useful to think of a gender training aimed at encouraging diversification of the educational and professional choices of both boys and girls⁴⁴⁹. The goal of supporting the development of strong female identities is not separable from the complementary and parallel objective of a renewed focus on the development of male identities⁴⁵⁰.

This point of view also recommends a rethinking of textbooks. On the subject of equality in textbooks, the report by Eurydice states that in Italy «there are not official guidelines or regulations on gender for authors of educational texts». The report also recalls the positive experience of project Polite: «From 1998-99 to 2000-01 Italy took part in a European project (POLITE: Equal Opportunities in Text-books) aimed to lead publishers to the adoption of a self-regulation code. The Italian Publishers Association (AIE) agreed to the self-regulation code and to a complementary vademecum promoting the production of text-books that

⁴⁴⁷ E. Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1985.

⁴⁴⁸ V. Burr (1998), *Psicologia delle differenze di genere*, op. cit., p. 64.

⁴⁴⁹ This is one of the central objectives announced in the recent *Resolution on eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU* (12 March 2013), where in paragraph 26 the European Parliament «Stresses that policies need to be drawn up which focus on deconstructing gender stereotypes from a very young age and on awareness training for teachers and students, and encourage and support career diversification for both young women and men». Document available at the link: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2013-0074&language=IT&ring=A7-2012-0401> (accessed 20 January 2015).

⁴⁵⁰ Beginning in the 1970s, with a real boom in the '90s, an area of study opened on a national level – *men's studies* – which proposes a new reading of the masculine, no longer considering it as a universal and total category but as a partial category that is complementary to the female gender. For further information see: P. Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*, Seuil, Paris 1998; R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1995; W. Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1993; G. L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, Oxford University Press, New York 1996; V. J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language and Sexuality*, Routledge, London 1989. In recent years interesting studies have also been conducted on this point of view in Italy, among which we can mention: S. Bellassai, *La mascolinità contemporanea*, Carocci, Rome 2004; S. Ciccone, *Essere maschi. Tra potere e libertà*, Rosenber & Sellier, Turin 2009; S. Deiana, M. M. Greco (eds.), *Trasformare il maschile nella cura, nell'educazione, nelle relazioni*, Cittadella Editore, Assisi 2012.

represent fairly women and men and help students to construct their identity». Unfortunately, subsequent studies demonstrate that Italian scholastic editors have avoided accepting and developing the guidelines for editors that were elaborated by Polite. Textbooks continue to convey a completely rigid, sexist, and also anachronistic imagination of gender⁴⁵¹. Therefore, investing in a textbook update that recounts the radical changes that have taken place in the feminine world, but also in the male world, in recent decades seems to be a necessity.

The last piece needed to initiate a gender training project is to support an updated training of teachers in gender culture and equal opportunity. Still reading from the Eurydice report, we certify that: «Gender is not included as a topic in guidelines or curricula for teachers initial education and there are not specific gender guidelines relating to teachers' day-to-day practice in the schools»⁴⁵². This lack of elaboration of subjects relating to gender by the teaching staff, and in particular by the female teachers who make up the majority, reiterates the ideal of a "neutral" school, where differences – of gender, of age – related to the body, seem to dissolve.

But, Barbara Mapelli asserts, «gender then passes secretly through the wide net of this fictitious neutrality and passes through all of the more common stereotypes, the limits, the mentalities, the symbologies, invisible to those who practice them and uncritically accepted or validated, because it is abandoned to the not spoken, to the negated, therefore to the obvious»⁴⁵³.

It is therefore necessary to introduce a view of gender in the school that will be revealed to be a precious resource – for the teachers just as it is for the students – for investigating their own personal identities, which are closely tied to their professional identities. The gender point of view effectively dictates a critical examination one's own professionalism, that in the educational and pedagogical relationship places in crisis even one's own personal identity⁴⁵⁴. It is a perspective that stimulates one to think of oneself as a gendered person who converses and transmits knowledge to other gendered people, of a different generation, in a relationship that is lopsided due to a number of factors⁴⁵⁵.

Today, female and male teachers, together, have the opportunity to begin a journey of gender awareness that could be rooted in three fundamental objectives: *awareness of one's own gendered identity* and of the influence that being a woman

⁴⁵¹ I. Biemmi, *Educazione sessista. Stereotipi di genere nei libri delle elementari*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Turin 2010.

⁴⁵² Eurydice, *Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁵³ B. Mapelli, "Educare nel tempo. Generi e generazioni", in AA.VV., *Con voce diversa. Pedagogia e differenza sessuale e di genere*, Guerini, Milan 2001, p. 73.

⁴⁵⁴ B. Mapelli, *Identità professionale nella scuola e formazione di genere*, in "Cisem Informazioni", nn. 13-14, 1997.

⁴⁵⁵ V. Caroni, V. Iori, *Asimmetria nel rapporto educativo*, Armando, Rome 1989.

or a man can have on the educational process and in relationships with students; *awareness of the different needs of male and female students* (the students are not neuter. They are males and females with traits and idiosyncrasies that should be recognized and valued); *awareness of the sexism inherent in knowledge*, imparted in school in the various disciplines.

This path is preparatory for a project of educational orienting aimed at giving girls and boys the critical tools that they need to make informed, autonomous, and critical choices⁴⁵⁶, beginning with awareness of belonging to a gender identity, that must not impose limits and prohibitions but, at the opposite, should augment their freedoms.

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⁴⁵⁶ F. Lo Presti, *Educare alle scelte. L'orientamento formativo per la costruzione di identità critiche*, Carocci, Rome 2009.

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