

Scuola
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Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica

EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY

5-8 June 2019 Cagliari Italy

VOLUME II

Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology

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**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA
DEMOCRATICA"**

Via Francesco Satolli, 30 – 00165 - Rome, Italy

Edited by

The Organizing Committee the 1st International Conference of
the Journal Scuola Democratica

<https://www.rivisteweb.it/issn/1129-731X>

Published by

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

Via Francesco Satolli, 30

00165 – Rome

Italy



FILE IN OPEN ACCESS

How to cite a proceeding from this Volume. APA citation system:

Author, N., & Author, S., (2019). Title, in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica "Education and post-democracy"*, VOL. 2, *Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology*, pp-pp

This book is digitally available at:

<http://www.scuolademocratica-conference.net/>

ISBN 978-88-944888-1-4

Title **Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" - Education and Post-Democracy**
VOLUME II Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology

This volume contains papers presented in the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place at the University of Cagliari on 5-8 June 2019. The aim of the Conference was to bring together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate the concepts of "education" in a "post-democracy" era, the latter being a set of conditions under which scholars are called to face and counteract new forms of authoritarian democracy.

Populisms, racisms, discriminations and nationalisms have burst and spread on the international scene, translated and mobilized by sovereigntist political movements. Nourished by neo-liberalism and inflated by technocratic systems of governance these regressive forms of post-democracy are shaping historical challenges to the realms of education and culture: it is on this ground, and not only on the political and economic spheres, that decisive issues are at stake. These challenges are both tangible and intangible, and call into question the modern ideas of justice, equality and democracy, throughout four key dimensions of the educational function, all of which intersected by antinomies and uncertainties: ethical-political socialization, differences, inclusion, innovation.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and interdisciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners' mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 600 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on researches, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

ISBN 978-88-944888-1-4

Premise

Since 1973, with Chile's Dictatorship as a neoliberal 'laboratory', it's more than 45 years that the Global Education Reform Movement has transformed educational systems all around the world through a discourse rooted on epistemic and ideological hegemonies. A new 'truth' of the homo economicus as able to rationally and freely pursue its interest as self-entrepreneur is relentlessly spreading: the Human Capital paradigm then connects individualistic choices and personal skills to impose diverse educational tracks through a Life-Long-Learning investment. Thus, the restructuring of the Education State, thanks to policies of privatization, competition and high stakes accountability, has implied a new ethics challenging social justice ideals.

The massification of educational systems in Europe and worldwide, together with the increasing demand for their democratization, have profoundly challenged traditional teaching models: the lecture, the magister teacher and the specific spatial-temporal devices aimed at disciplining students according to the needs of a Fordist capitalist society and to the reproduction of class inequalities. Starting particularly from the Fifties in schools, and more recently in higher education, new teaching-learning configurations have been explored and developed: situated and participatory didactics aimed at involving students in a reflexive relationship with knowledge and social reality; new ways of hybridizing formal and informal learning; new pedagogies exploiting the possibilities inscribed in new medias and digital technologies. These practices, sometimes radically, reverse theory and practices in order to develop student-centred learning processes. The thematic sessions within this stream explore the challenges, tensions, ambivalences and potentialities of pedagogies and didactics innovations involving school and university teachers, students, as well as their surrounding environments: the physical, architectural, material and technological spaces that constitute a crucial component of situated learning processes.

The relation between education systems and policy making changed in the last decades, consequently to three innovations sharing the common paradigm of evaluation, namely: the establishment of national/international large-scale testing, the diffusion of systems assessing schools' and the raising interest for efficacy and cost-effectiveness of education interventions. These innovations have been highly debated from different and controversial perspectives. The aim of the conference stream is to collect papers focused on actual uses of different forms evaluation, in order to overcome previous ideological oppositions, contributing to move the debate into a more pragmatic and fruitful phase.

Further issue: How is digital technology changing education? Online schools and classes are becoming widely available; backpack of many high school and college students, instead of physical textbooks, are now carrying iPads and various forms of devices connected to online; teachers now have more ability to personalize lessons, instructions, and projects for each group or student; by using devices and programs to distribute classwork and assignments, they can even personalize lessons and focus on the work of each student; increased opportunities and constraints for students to collaborate together from a variety of places becomes possible; free online classes called "MOOC's" otherwise known as Massive Open Online Courses are becoming widely popular. Finally, a mounting set of variegated pressures to produce pedagogical innovation in teaching and learning is being addressed to teacher and school staffs. Even the governance of school system and school-daily life as a whole is undergoing a wide process of digitalization. But what does the increase in digital technology and approach mean for the current times? Although many advantages come with digitalized learning, there are also disadvantages that researchers, educators, academics and professionals are aware of, including and not limited to minimal to zero face-to-face interaction in the classroom and the lack of ability to work in person with study partners and teachers. Any conversation that does not include the potential dangers of the widespread use of technology would not be complete. Therefore, the stream focuses also on the interplay between learning theories and technologies. Both learning theories and tools are composed of multiple attributes, and they refer to many aspects and facets which render educational technology highly complex. Evolution in both theory and technology reflects no clear successive breaks or discrete developments, rather, waves of growth and accumulation. Evolutions in society and education have influenced the selection and use of learning theories and technologies; learning theories and technologies are situated in a somewhat vague conceptual field; learning theories and technologies are connected and intertwined by information processing and knowledge acquisition; educational technologies shifted learner support from program or instructor control toward more shared and learner control; and learning theories and findings represent a fuzzy mixture of principles and applications.

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Proximity and Shared Governance? Obstacles and Organisational Tensions in YG Program in Portugal

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Keywords: *Education, Youth Experts, Cooperation, Collective Responsibility, Governance*

Introduction

Following the last global economic crisis, one of the major structural problems Europe had to face was the substantial rise in unemployment rates. In particular, young people, on the one hand, and the contexts where the financial crisis was more intense and even led to external intervention, such as Portugal, Greece, Ireland and to a lesser extent, Italy and Spain, on the other, were considerably affected. Such rise in youth unemployment rate contributed significantly to a simultaneous increase in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), which have been monitored for some time as one of the major risks affecting contemporary young population. The idea that young people were increasingly disconnected from the major inclusion social structures, such as education and employment, motivated the building up of the EU largest policy and financial package in the field of employment, the Youth Guarantee Program (YG), launched in 2013 and implemented by each member state according to each country specificity. Expected to last until 2020, the program was aimed at ensuring all young people under the age of 25 years (in some cases, like the Portuguese one, the limit was raised to 29 years) receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Although rooted in the field of employment, the program underlines the importance of education, stressing the idea that young people could and should receive appropriate educational and training offers in order to enhance their present and future employability, especially for those whose trajectories are marked with school failure and dropout.

In Portugal, mobilizing the principle of shared responsibility and governance of the public interest – in this case young people's problems and needs – the program was operationalized by building up a network of partners aggregating institutions from public and the solidarity economy sector. Supposedly, local actors would be the most effective to identify, register, guide and integrate young people, out of the system – unemployed or inactive – into one of the YG offers. This solution awarded a leading role to the professionals that perform social and educational work with young people, outside of formal educational structures, called to be mediators between young people and the system, thus questioning the role and meanings of the concept of education, its actors and institutions.

In fact, education is an increasingly comprehensive concept that goes far beyond school space and compulsory schooling. It involves a broad

combination of learning modalities and platforms: lifelong learning, e-learning, educating cities, community education, etc.

Moreover, closely related to this conceptual change is the expansion of education and training professionals. In particular, those who perform an educational work with young people are in large number, thus forming a network of experts (Boltanski, Chiappello, 1999) that reflects the broadening of collective responsibility towards young people's rights and needs. This educational community is no longer composed only of teachers and school managers, but it also includes other mediation experts (psychologists, community development professionals, youth workers...). Inside or outside the school, they work with young people, especially with the vulnerable ones, in activities leading to comprehensive training, personal and social skills development and contributing to the definition of a personal project.

Drawing on data collected in one research-action project (and its follow up) aimed to enhance the efficiency of the Portuguese network of partners, we intend to discuss the governance challenges that the network faced departing from the fact that although significant investment in the network, it didn't produce the expected results. We propose to identify and briefly discuss the obstacles and limitations that the implementation of the YG program faced in Portugal, crossing the perspective of the involved mediation professionals with the results obtained through documentary and statistical analysis of the YG reports and database.

1. Public policy and Youth needs and expectations: Youth Guarantee in Portugal.

As already mentioned, the YG was based on the principle that each country, according to the characteristics of NEET young people, should define a national implementation strategy. In Portugal, it relied on a local partnership network. Coordinated by the Portuguese public employment service (IEFP-Institute for Employment and Vocational Training), the National Plan for the Implementation of a YG (PNI-GJ) is rooted in an interministerial network composed by a set of nuclear partners responsible by the multiple measures offered within the YG (education, training and employment). (Figure 1).

The YG strategy relies on the principle of responsibility and governance shared by various actors, articulated in a network. There are two types of partners: attendance partners (composed mainly by public institutions, e.g. employment and training services; Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education, etc.); and registration partners (existing nationwide organizations: NGOs, municipalities, youth associations, etc), benefiting from the proximity and know-how of the targeted youth population.

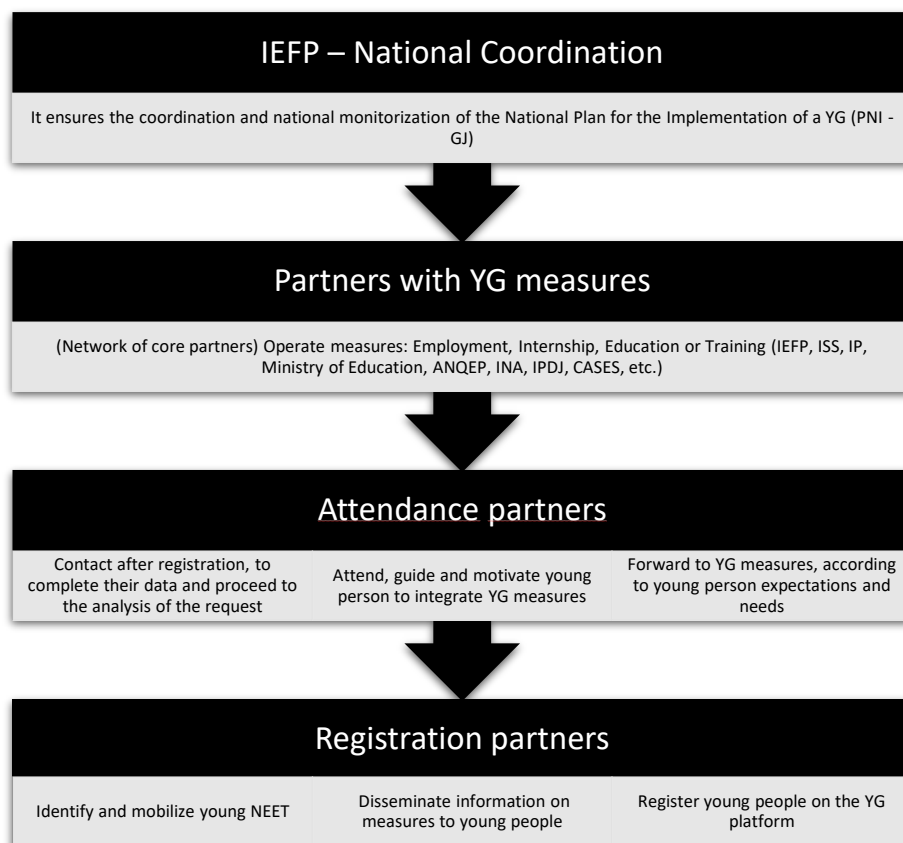
The strategy sought to engage the professionals that perform technical functions of social and (formal and non-formal) educational work with young people in the partner institutions, thus allowing a networked approach, acting in a logic of proximity (Breviglieri, 2005), to the various local actors (schools included).

Acting as mediators between young people and the system, the design of the network awarded these professionals the power to 'rescue' young people in the NEET situation (either by identifying/registering them on the YG online platform, or just by guiding them).

Despite being considered innovative, since it is structured by inter-ministerial and interinstitutional cooperation (EC, 2016), the Portuguese YG plan has faced several difficulties in its implementation and this formal cooperative work has not produced the expected results. Five years after YG implementation,

Portugal continues to face challenges in promoting early intervention and out-reach of non-registered NEETs in public employment services and the number of young people registered in the YG since its implementation in 2014 is considerably low. A complex set of reasons contribute to understand the YG program poor results. In this paper, we will focus on the organizational difficulties that emerged from the dynamics of such a wide network⁶.

FIGURE. 1. *Youth Guarantee main actors*



source: TESE

2. Methodology

This paper is drawn on data collected within the scope of the research-action project *Make the Future... Today!*⁷ (January 2017-June 2018) as well as on the follow up research (April 2019-October 2019), still in progress. Several techniques were employed during the activities of diagnosis, evaluation and monitoring of the YG Plan: analysis of the YG database; documentary analysis of YG reports; participant observation records from nine workshops with Local YG Network Partners. More recently, a follow up survey was applied to the Local Network partners (341 valid responses), in order to collect data that allowed a deeper understanding of the network constraints and potentialities.

⁶ Other mismatches in the YG implementation, namely between the design and development of YG public policy and the young people and expectations (Vieira et al., 2018) and in other dimensions concerning the partners integration in the local network (Vieira, et al., in press) - operational and relational issues – have already been previously discussed.

⁷ Project 'Make the Future...Today! Accelerate Youth Guarantee implementation in Portugal, increasing the number of young NEET registered in the system and the partnership's efficiency'. Funding: EaSI-European Commission (VS/2016/0373)

3. A network that doesn't work? Organizational constraints

While trying to understand the modest results of the YG implementation plan, analysis of the discussions held during the workshops with partners as well as the analysis of the network results in terms of registration and guidance of young people uncovered a set of constraints that contributed to understand the resistance in participating more actively in the YG program, explaining, in part, the low levels of participation in the network dynamics, which would allow fulfilling its goal of identifying and guiding young people in NEET condition.

The first constraint refers to the size of the network and the number of participants that compose it.

Often, public policies adopt a logic of resource maximization, assuming that its efficiency depends directly on the number of actors involved (Provan, Kenis, 2007). In the case of this network, however, despite the significant mobilization of institutions from the public sector and solidarity economy that work with young people (1497 local partners in April 2019), some key actors, like the formal schooling system, are almost missing from the daily life operational network.

Moreover, data showed that only $\frac{1}{3}$ of the partners involved in YG were active, that is, they had already registered in the YG at least one young individual in NEET condition during the first three years of program implementation (2014-2016). From that third, many had made a small number of registrations and/or did not register frequently. Despite the recovery in the latest database update - about half of the local network partners - the proportion of active partners remains modest given the objectives of the YG implementation strategy. Additionally, only 16% of the partners have logged in to the YG platform in the last 12 months.

A second organizational constraint revealed by the analysis is related to the contrasting legal and statutory differences of the partner institutions, (Hall, Metcalfe, & Irving, 2015). This fact raises questions regarding the configuration, resources and governance conditions in which each one operates (Araújo & Rodrigues, 2016), but also to the fact that, according to their genesis (public or private), the problems, limitations and constraints may be different (Thomann et al., 2016; Tosun et al., 2016).

Indeed, results from the survey applied to local partners made possible to identify that one of the major difficulties professionals experience in the YG operationalization is related to networking and interaction with other partner institutions – namely, the national public employment services and YG nuclear partners - making clear that the network did not result in significant horizontal cooperative relations. Furthermore, there are sparse interactions with the leading institutions of the network.

Some of these difficulties are related to internal communication either between the several local partners or between public services, highlighting the constraints related with the network dimension and its characteristics as it is composed by several institutions which are different in its genesis (public and private), organizational structure, purposes and goals.

Due to these different characteristics, partners also show different levels of involvement, commitment and institutional obligations to the YG coordinator, as some of the institutions belonging to the network are actually departments of the national public employment service.

Therefore, these set of factors result in different power relations established (either horizontally or vertically) between partners, which create entropy to the daily work of the professionals that put into practice the goals of the policy

program. In fact, when asked about the program's contributions to the institution where they work and to their daily professional practice, most of the professionals that responded to the online survey revealed that they don't consider the YG program and platform as an added value for their professional practice, stressing as critical issues the isolated work by institutions and the inexistence of networking. Even among professionals who value the integration of the program in the institution where they work and in their daily professional practice, they assess more positively the possible benefits for young people, namely in the offer of measures in the area of employment and education/training, than the benefits for the institution itself or for networking.

Finally, despite the existence of public institutions in the network, the local strategy of the YG implementation is largely dependent on the set of partners from the solidarity economy, thus from private or cooperative matrix, whose operation depends on sources of financing, some limited and temporary, which limits the scope and effectiveness of their intervention.

The dependence on external funding, often restricted to a limited period of time and associated with a project, causes a high turnover of human resources in these institutions. It is known that social work, especially in the period of crisis, has been a sector particularly penalized by precariousness, uncertainty and professional vulnerability, based on the use of contractual short-term relationships (Standing, 2011).

Analysis showed that many professionals were working at the institution for less than 5 years and that the proportion of workers without a formal working relationship (contract) with the institution is also significant, working as individual outsourcing. This means, for example, that a large number of those professionals participating in the observed workshops did not even have access to the credentials that allowed them to register young people in the YG platform, as they were still associated with the professional who preceded them in the function.

Along with the other organizational constraints, the transience and precariousness of the professionals responsible for the local implementation of the YG thus appears to be critical factors conditioning the effectiveness and continuity of the identifying and guidance procedures of the young people in NEET condition and, by this way, constitute an obstacle to the implementation of the policy.

Conclusions

This paper reflects upon the Youth Guarantee program in Portugal, as an attempt to put in place a shared governance.

The design of the implementation of a YG in Portugal, engaging a logic of proximity and integrating a multi-sectoral and multi-level reticular approach, made of a nationwide network of partners, seemed to be a success factor. Moreover, it presented an innovative conception of education as an important part of the local network of partners dealing with young NEETs includes professionals whose skills (other than teaching skills) are considered as important contributions to guide young people 'out of the system' and help them to define their own personal projects.

However, our research identified some obstacles and organisational tensions in YG program implementation that undermine the desired shared governance. Three critical factors were explored: one has to do with the size of the network and the number and the efficiency of participants that compose it; the second organizational constraint revealed by the analysis is related to the contrasting legal and statutory differences of the partner institutions; the third one

derives from the transience and precariousness of the professionals responsible for the local implementation of the YG.

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ISBN 978-88-944888-1-4

Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica
EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY
VOLUME II
Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology

Edited by: The Organizing Committee the 1st International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica.
<https://www.rivisteweb.it/issn/1129-731X>

Published by: ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA" - Via F. Satolli, 30 – 00165 – Rome (IT)
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