

Education never stands still—it moves, adapts, and transform in response to new realities, while reshaping society in turn. This collection explores some forces defining learning today: digital tools, intercultural dialogue, artistic expression, and the call for ecological responsibility. At its core, education remains a space for negotiation and reinvention.

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PROCEEDINGS

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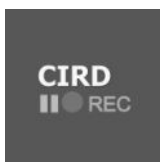
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Vol. 2

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Organizers and partners



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BEYOND INCLUSION. COEXISTENCE AND IDEOLOGY, BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL FIELDWORK AND PEDAGOGICAL SUPERVISION

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This paper addresses the issue of inclusion from a critical and intercultural pedagogy perspective, focusing on the problem of tokenism as a social and interdisciplinary issue. The concept of 'token' refers to a form of disguised exclusion, where seemingly emancipatory practices reinforce underlying subordination. The study begins by identifying latent forms of exclusion in educational practices through pedagogical figures' memos. A pedagogical supervision tool is then used to examine how these issues affect the professionals involved in critical-reflexive practices. The paper adopts a decolonial perspective in intercultural pedagogy, critiquing the 'token' concept by exploring the relationship between alterity and difference in pedagogical discourse. It also examines the role of ideology in education, clarifying the institutional functioning of tokenism and its effects on service cultures and educational settings. By analysing fields of experience marked by superficial agency and parity, the paper aims to uncover latent exclusion and propose alternatives that foster genuine cooperation and participation through a critical examination of education's material and symbolic conditions.

intercultural pedagogy; tokenism; inclusion; pedagogical supervision; educational relationship.

1. TOKENISM, SUBJECTIVITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

The contribution addresses the general framework of a broader research study on the relationship between social inclusion and educational planning (Bianchi, D'Antone, 2024). This is done through an analysis, guided by lines of critical pedagogy, of the concept of tokenism and its articulation with the themes of the *Third International Conference* of the journal *Scuola democratica*, which relate to the issue of social justice in education. In fact, the issue of tokenism, understood as a phenomenon and practice, and consequently of the token, as a subject emerging from the experiential domain defined by this practice, raises questions regarding subjectivity and the contradictory nature that characterizes it, insofar as it defines a field of experience whose correlations with the social fabric and its related cultural, scientific, and ideological forms are highly significant. Before proceeding with an

argument on this issue, however, it is worth introducing the concept of ‘token’ to assess its applicability within pedagogical discourse. According to Hirshfield (2016, 1), tokenism can be defined as follows:

Tokenism involves the inclusion (usually perfunctory or nominal) of numerical minorities within an institution or group. Examples of tokens include the solo black member of an all-white fraternity, a blind or disabled person in a group of able individuals, or a woman police cadet in a class of all men cadets. This type of inclusion generally takes place due to changes in policies or procedures, yet these changes do not necessarily mean that the organization itself has become less discriminatory and more inclusive.

At the same time, according to Niemann (2016, p. 1), the “token-subject” can be defined as follows:

Tokens are perceived as homogeneous. Their actions, decisions, values, and mannerisms are interpreted in a stereotype-consistent manner [...]. Stereotypic expectations may lead to the encapsulation and entrapment of tokens in particular roles, such as specialists in ethnic or gender matters and symbols of workplace diversity. They may trigger in the token feelings of inadequacy, stigma, inequity in the workplace, and stereotype threat, which refers to the fear of proving true the stereotypes about one’s group [...]. Stress is added when tokens’ imperfections and mistakes are perceived as reflective of their group, while their successes are deemed exceptions to the group stereotype.

In summary, it is possible to frame this practice and the subjectivation effect it produces in the following way.

On the level of the phenomenon and act, tokenism represents a form of instrumental inclusion (because it is entirely formal and aimed at portraying the institution that promotes it, whether consciously or not, as “inclusive”) and mystified, as it does not guarantee freedom and agency to the subject involved in this practice. Instead, it positions them as a representative of a minority, which, despite its minority status, has the right to presence. This framework is not dissimilar to the lines on subordinate integration (Catarci, 2015; Burgio, 2015).

On the level of the subjectivation effect, the ‘token’ is inevitably subject to ambivalent consideration: on one hand, they are unique, a paradigmatic representative of a minority who assumes the role of an expert in the issues concerning that minority; on the other hand, they are anonymous, a member of a homogeneous and undifferentiated group, whose representational function takes on the purely pragmatic contours of the role that such formal representation plays in the image of the institution and its participants. These lines, in some ways functionalist and framed within the dynamics of corporate work contexts, were the foundation of Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s pioneering work on the subject (2008).

The hypothesis of this contribution arises from these considerations, interpreting them through the relationship, in some respects untimely yet highly generative, between education and ideology. Such an articulation presents at least two significant characteristics. The first concerns the possibility of more closely connecting

institutions and society, reading power dynamics, subjection/subjectivation, and social reproduction between the lines (Papi, 1978). The second allows, by virtue of the implicit and automatic nature of ideological discourse, for the conceptual pair ‘tokenism-token’ to be understood not in an open or rationalist manner, but rather in terms of its impersonal and latent aspects. Following this hypothesis, the phenomenon of tokenism cannot have an interpersonal nature, if by this we refer to the relationship between singular individuals entering into exchanges and communication. Instead, it will have different characteristics that call into question the very concept of ‘subject’. Specifically, by employing the concept of ideology, understood here in the sense it holds within the Marxian and Marxist tradition, it may be worth recalling the *Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach* (Marx, 2000, 172). Marx, as is well known, addresses the issue of human essence in this way: the Sixth Thesis critiques Feuerbach’s idea that religious essence can be reduced to human essence. Marx argues that human essence is not something abstract or inherent within an individual. Instead, human essence is shaped by the totality of social relations. In other words, what defines humans is not an intrinsic quality, but the network of social interactions and conditions in which individuals exist.

The issue raised by the Sixth Thesis, shifting the concept of human essence outside of an “interior space” (Morfino, 2022, 25), allows for an important move. Following the insights of Cesare Luporini, it is possible to argue that “human individuals are not only situated within the social relations generated by their associated activity: they also internalize these relations, to which they are conditioned” (1978, p. 379). This relationship between production and reproduction points to the conflictual and ritualized nature of social relations themselves, as Louis Althusser (2014) had clearly understood by identifying specific apparatuses as the social and symbolic contexts for this ritualization. It thus becomes evident that even when a singular individual (a teacher, educator, mid-level manager, coordinator, etc.) expresses a particular instance of exclusion, this instance should not be immediately interpreted as purely individual, rational, and intentional. While this does not deny the possible characteristics of freedom and intentionality in individual and collective educational activity, both already have an inherently social nature. It is possible to trace the imprints of this in regulations and pedagogical projects, in the various service cultures and the norms derived from them, as well as in the different representations of the professional profile of pedagogical figures on both the explicit and latent levels. Now, Althusser defined “interpellation” as the process by which ideological discourse “grips” the individual, aimed at reproducing certain behaviours functional to the social order. Althusser writes (2014, 191) that, while the ideological discourse expresses an instance of mystified subjectivation, it also has margins for failure. Thus, this process of social reproduction and non-coercive persuasion contains a level of precariousness that allows for a space where, precisely through the materiality of behaviours and the interpretation of norms and their violation, there emerges the possibility of political and pedagogical maneuvering. We refer here to the possibility, identified within the range of counter-identificatory moves, of “dis-interpellation”, as formulated by Tyson E. Lewis (2017, 314):

Education is not simply an educational interpellation or counterinterpellation because it does not concern itself with mirror recognition [...] but rather with the possibility of dis-interpellation that makes the subject unfamiliar to itself and thus open to its own dissolution through the encounter with an outside. [...] the role of the aleatory teacher is to open a space for an encounter by setting up the possibilities for a clash and then to bear witness to the marks of subjective dissolution. Instead of repressing such moments of disorientation, an aleatory teacher holds onto them.

The move described by Lewis, which closely engages with the critical-reflective capacities (D'Antone, 2023) of educational figures broadly understood, envisions the possibility of breaking the very status of individual identity along a dual vector. On one hand, the educational act is understood here in terms of encounter and conjunction, thus as a process that is neither predetermined nor teleologically oriented; otherwise, it risks falling into the traps of ideological discourse. This aspect expresses the need for supervision and consultation, understood as second-level practices for and with the professionals involved in educational projects. The goal is to define the structure of the ongoing educational event and to identify any potential ideological encrustations and the possibilities for modification, connected both to the educational style of the professional and to the multiplicity of times and needs expressed by the educational situation itself (*ibidem*). On the other hand, considering education itself as a possibility for resistance takes on not a *value-driven*, but a *structural* connotation. In the educational experience, the encounter with alterity (both personal and impersonal – Massa, 1986; Dozza, 2000) becomes a *chance* of loss and disorientation with respect to the subjectivation coordinates that tokenism, on the contrary, would implicitly expect. And, since this act and effect of subjectivation must be understood not in a Eurocentric sense but within a logic that is also imperialist, efficiency-oriented, and adultist (De Giorgi, 2020), these margins for dis-interpellation represent a form of disorientation from the colonial logics that still constrain not only practices and policies, but also the more or less explicit discourses on education.

2. TOKENISM AND DECOLONIALIZATION

As previously mentioned, the research explores the multiple implications, latent yet active, or evidently expressed, that tokenism has in the educational relationship, particularly in the intercultural context. It does so through a qualitative methodology that draws from Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) and “Clinica della Formazione” (Massa, 1992), and also refers to micropedagogy (Demetrio, 2020) and autoethnography. Data were collected through the writing of theoretical and autoethnographic memos (Charmaz, 2014; Bianchi 2019) and through supervision meetings (D'Antone, 2023).

We start from the premise that “education cannot be neutral” (Catarci, 2016, 71) nor can it avoid being “itself a political act” (*ibidem*) nor, again, can it be anything other than “engaged pedagogy, more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy” (hooks, 1994). If the first part of the work traced a complex path

linking tokenism to the construct of subordinate integration (a construct deeply anchored in the relationship between education and ideology), this section proposes a reconstruction, in an engaged and archaeological sense, that relates tokenism to the coloniality inherent in educational practices and more broadly referable discursive practices to the intercultural universe.

To attempt, in a first approximation, a restitution of the sensitizing concepts that the research group is considering in data analysis, the theme of decolonialization in education is chosen as an integrating background.

Intercultural pedagogy is inherently deconstructive (Fiorucci, 2020), critical, uncomfortable, aware of the need to dynamize learning and produce “imbalances”, to support dialectical confrontations (Santerini, 2004), manage cultural shocks (Cohen-Emerique, 2015), work in the continuum that evolves from ethnocentrism to ethno-relativism.

Shifting the center of the world (Thion’g o, 1993) and decolonizing, first and foremost, the mind (Thion’g o, 1986), become determining processes to be able to act on an engaged pedagogical perspective oriented towards social justice, capable of supporting processes of conscientization and real decolonization, that is, vigilant and capable of recognizing and addressing the drift of tokenism. What indeed seems appropriate is to propose a first distinction between the terms ‘decolonization’ and ‘decolonialization,’ bearing in mind that, from a critical pedagogical perspective, it is more urgent than ever to decolonialize, that is, to exit coloniality, because decolonizing has not been and is not enough (Borghi, 2020, 29).

Anti-racism, like anti-colonialism, has hidden—and still risks hiding—a Eurocentric posture. And this becomes even more dangerous when it exempts from keeping an eye on the oppressor within each of us: “fighting side by side each from their own position within the hierarchies of race, to break the yoke of an oppression of diversified tone, but of common matrix” (Palmi, 2020, 12). The unawareness of the necessary deconstruction of the implicit undermines the notion of dialogue at its root, making it evident that it is necessary to overcome both a “miserabilist” vision and a “utilitarian” vision of migration: that is, two reductionist visions that oscillate between paternalism and economic functionalism and tend to reduce migrants within categories predefined by host societies (Fiorucci, 2020).

Thus, what is passed off as inclusion is, with good approximation, a form, among the many possible, of tokenism. Talking about inclusion and acting on it, addressing the issues of racism and sexism, requires the awareness of embracing decoloniality in educational practices, starting from classrooms. bell hooks (2010) notes that discussing challenging, real-life topics in class can sometimes lead to emotional reactions, such as students crying. This is particularly observed in classes taught by black professors, where the crying student is often white. A black feminist colleague referred to this phenomenon as the “crying white woman syndrome”.

When discussing racial dynamics between whites and blacks, tears often manifest in class because they represent shame and guilt; when talking about race, it is not possible to maintain the emotional distance that persists with other less heavy

topics.

As a research group, we constantly asked ourselves: how can we concretely go beyond tokenism in the materiality of educational settings? As mentioned, these and other questions cannot be immediately decided and want to configure themselves as sensitizing concepts, capable of supporting an argument as rooted and adherent to the data as possible.

Deconstruction practices and resistance practices become a categorical imperative for practitioners who, first and foremost, have the responsibility to emancipate themselves from internalized coloniality: hence, to quote Palmi: “the need for the convergence of autonomous processes, which with specific modalities and temporalities work together to unveil and disarticulate the mimetic functioning of the racial device” (Palmi, 2020, 13). The proposal of engaged pedagogy involves the enhancement of a teaching for the decentralization of viewpoints that can address topics such as: the Western knowledge model; Colonial and Decolonial Pedagogy; Power; Identities; Intersectionality; Race and Ethnicity issues; Disability and Ableism; gender and sexual orientations; the Anthropocene and its overcoming; cultural sensitivities, social justice; Equity; and, above all, provide a framework for practice or an action plan.

Educators must recognize that any effort to transform institutions (to reflect a multicultural perspective) must consider the fear of teachers, which manifests when they are asked to change their paradigms. Therefore, training centers must be established where teachers can express their concerns, and at the same time learn to create new ways of addressing multicultural courses and programs (hooks, 1994).

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