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Review of a Book by Giuseppe Bertagna:

Giuseppe Bertagna, *La scuola al tempo del Covid. Tra spazio di esperienza ed orizzonte d'attesa [School at the time of Covid. Between space of experience and horizon of expectation]*, Edizioni Studium, Roma 2020, s. 304. ISBN 978-88-382-5003-3.

Recenzja książki Giuseppe Bertagna:

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Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities of single countries have been actively responding not only to the problems related to the treatment of patients, but also to the sharp increase of educational poverty of schoolchildren living in the most delicate social contexts (LUMSA 2025).

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With great satisfaction I present to the Polish reader the thoughts of an Italian professor-educator regarding the problems of school and education in Italy during COVID-19. These thoughts are important because they concern a country that has been largely affected by the coronavirus epidemic, which also had repercussions in the field of education. Recent studies in the Italian context among school children aged 14–18 conducted by IPSOS (a world leader in research on understanding society, markets, people) showed that the respondents have a very critical attitude towards the activities undertaken by authorized educational institutions. In these studies, adolescents primarily emphasize the risk of early school leaving by teenagers (drop out), which may increase the phenomenon of easy exploitation of unskilled minors (IPSOS 2025). Over 28% of respondents say that at least one or two students in their class have dropped out of school since the lockdown and the start of online schooling. Students complain about the quality of on-line learning (35% of respondents) and point to the repercussions on the social level resulting from the lack of contact with peers and the functioning in the world of only virtual meetings. For 46% of teenagers, the past year was a “wasted year” (lack of contact with peers, frustration with inadequate treatment during the lockdown – for example, minors were forbidden to go outside in the fresh air while other people were tolerated to go outside for a walk with their dog) (see also Stańkowski 2021/22, 89–107).

On the basis of such a situation among teenagers during the pandemic, prof. Giuseppe Bertagna (distinguished educator, expert in education, research worker at the University of Bergamo – Italy), in the reviewed monograph addresses the problem of the school and its future prospects for functioning after the coronavirus pandemic. In the introductory part, over 100 pages long, the author briefly reconstructs the history of the epidemic from the 1950s up to the present day. In this part of the work, we find considerations situated between philosophical pedagogical reflection and personal memories of school policy. The text of the reviewed monograph shows a clear position of G. Bertagna on “what to do” in the time of a pandemic. The author looks critically at the operational indications of representatives of medical sciences, which, in his opinion, are inadequate during the epidemiological catastrophe (p. 44). What may interfere with reading this part of the book is excessive encyclopedism, quoting various original texts from Cicero to Seneca and the use of a wide phantasmagoric range of authors supporting his theses (quoting Kierkegard,

St. Paul of Tars, Habermas, Leibnitz, Rousseau or even Shakespeare and Pope Francis).

Overall, the book is divided into two parts. Part I is more retrospective in nature. In this part, G. Bertagna somehow reconstructs what has happened in Italy in recent months in the context of school (the activities of the ruling class, administration). It is certainly a sharp, critical analysis of how the author describes the “ineptitude” of the ruling class to face the tragic situation of the Italian school in the time of a pandemic. Without theoretical considerations in the retrospective part of this book, G. Bertagna prefers a clearly polemical approach to school policy and reforms that are not fully implemented. In the era of dealing with COVID-19, the author talks about the “funny”, absurd ministerial regulations of 2020 and a deep distrust, even disobedience of schools towards the centralism of management. In the author’s opinion, the pandemic and the necessary measures to protect the health of children and adolescents showed the weakness and caused a crisis of the school based on Taylor’s concept (p. 54). He regrets that his proposals to promote the school during the summer holidays as an “experimental laboratory” with the free participation of students in order to restore interpersonal relations and keep students’ interests alive, were not properly received by the authorities. The hypothesis of the so-called *The Summer Scholé*, in which new anthropological paradigms and new school experiences could be applied in the personalistic key, was left unnoticed by educational authorities. According to the author, not much has been done in terms of infrastructure, digitization and teacher training. Such situations are described by G. Bertagna as a fair of missed opportunities. Hence the perspective, which can be called *pars construens*, to reconsider the school as a whole, in order to change the content proposed by the school, overcome the chaos of digital reality and rethink the function of the teacher who should accompany the student in learning (p. 88). It is certainly positive that the author connects the school with the broadly understood society and economic and cultural changes as well as the vision of school classes in which full-time lessons do not exclude the use of digital technology (pp. 147–153).

The second part of the book is more proactive in which scenarios for a school eligible for radical renewal are outlined. This part of the work ends with the hope that the Recovery Fund projects will not be lost by Italian decision makers. In this spirit, the author proposes to take steps to restore the Italian

school system. According to the author, the school is a place that is not coded once and for all, but an environment in which there are constant processes of building and co-constructing solutions taking into account various ideological trends. In my opinion, G. Bertagna rightly emphasizes that a school that does not pay attention to the student in a personalized way but only treats the student as a person who has to adapt to the school system, such a school is doomed to failure. The author promotes the vision of a school that is not separated from the environment by walls, a school that remains open to the world, to an experiment between what is formal and informal. In his opinion, the school should have new didactic spaces, new forms of learning and socialization. It is in this paradigm that teachers can discover a renewed role for the school. Regarding teachers, G. Bertagna calls for rethinking the initial formation of future teachers (new study plan path) and the career path of their internship-based career right up to their entry in the professional register. The epilogue ending the entire publication defends teachers who, in the author's opinion, should undergo special recruitment, the process of formation and preparation for continuous work during the years of their professional career, which cannot be seen in the key to the current legal and administrative solutions. When it comes to the teacher, G. Bertagna's indication of the mutual dependence between upbringing and instructions is valuable (p. 261).

The general conclusion expressed by the author at the end of the work is quite pessimistic – even the pandemic, with its tragic consequences in terms of the organization of the school and the education of students, has not managed to change in a positive sense the Italian school, which has been stuck in fossilized structures and routine activities for 150 years. Prof. G. Bertagna regrets that, once again, the opportunity to change the model of education has been missed and the problems of the Italian school system seem to be still unsolvable. The author concludes quite sarcastically that only banners hanging from balconies with the words “Everything will be fine” inspire optimism.

What is characteristic of the author is often the acute issue of telling the truth, pointing the finger at the problems of the education system, which requires radical reforms. The publication under review is not a kind of diary of events related to the school and COVID-19. It is rather an attempt to convince the reader that school management and solving educational problems is not a matter of correcting the pattern that has been in force for years, but more a matter of getting rid of the selective amnesia of the ruling class, political

prejudices and mutual hostility, which may, in turn, lead to a new look at the challenges of the school of the XXIst century. As for the organization of the school, the author does not agree with the solution that reality should be adapted to the pattern imposed by decision-makers (e.g. ending lessons at the same time during a pandemic for all students). What also lies at the heart of the author is the primacy of personal teacher-student relations. Many times, G. Bertagna notices that the deprivation of the fundamental rights of children leads to the impoverishment of relational experiences, which are an essential part of the developmental age of a young person.

Certainly, when reading three hundred pages of the reviewed publication, which, incidentally, is written by G. Bertagna in a fairly lively and fluent manner, the reader, together with the Author, notices the necessity to change the school policy, change the paradigm regarding the relationship between politics and pedagogy, and finally change the organization of the school and the perception of the educator in changing multicultural society. Certainly, the arguments presented by the author in the critical part are realistic, while those in the proposal part contain, I would say, visionary elements. The merit of G. Bertagna as a pedagogue is also the fact that he is able to propose the opening of a new discussion, giving the pedagogical discourse a central place in the formation of the educational path of the school of the future.

It is also valuable in the publication that, on the basis of European guidelines, the author suggests the proper use of access to loans, which are focused on digitization, reorganization of the roles of employees and teachers themselves, along with new career prospects and specialization. The author's remarks are not an expression of negativity and his resignation from further struggle for school, but on the contrary, they are the result of many years of experience and current efforts to create a new shape of Italian education, based also on financial opportunities guaranteed by the EU.

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