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Published in:
Integrative psychological & behavioral science

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):
10.1007/s12124-018-9429-7

Publication date:
2018

Document Version
Version created as part of publication process; publisher's layout; not normally made publicly available

Link to publication from Aalborg University

Citation for published version (APA):
Tateo, L. (2018). Education as "Dilemmatic Field". *Integrative psychological & behavioral science*, *52*(3), 388-400. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9429-7

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Integr Psych Behav
https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9429-7

REGULAR ARTICLE

Education as "Dilemmatic Field"

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Abstract Psychology of education must discuss a number of relevant ethical, political and societal issues that cannot be simply overlooked as non pertinent to the discipline. For too long educational and developmental psychology have take divergent routes and have not enough dialogued with other fields such as pedagogy. I argue that it is first of all necessary to conceptualize the work of schooling, that is educational processes of teaching and learning in specific social contexts, as complex and dilemmatic fields. I discuss contributions from the past and current debate to support my claim that education is inherently ambivalent and dilemmatic, while educational psychology is too often normative and prescriptive. As many authors have discussed educational processes as battlefields between political and economic tendencies, we cannot avoid to discuss the relationship of such tendencies and the developmental processes of the person. The work of schooling is an action projected towards an imagined future, and educational psychology cannot avoid questioning the predictions emerging from the current socio-economic and political trends.

Keywords Cultural psychology of education · Dilemmatic field · Social inequalities · Value-laden development · Work of schooling

Introduction

Education is a nowadays a very sensitive public issue, characterized by fields of tension, socio-political and ethical issues and divergent visions of the future. Thiem (2009) shows how macro-scale educational policies, meso-scale organizational planning of city school systems and micro-scale curriculum choices intertwine to construct the future citizenships, "de- or re-valorize" local communities (Thiem 2009, p. 159) and, finally, to fight or preserve social inequalities (Lipman 2004). The "work of

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Published online: 02 May 2018

schooling" can thus be understood as several levels: the work of planning and organizing school system, the work of everyday schooling "labor", and finally the work of reviving the idea(l)s of education. Such a complex topic necessarily leads to a number of questions. There is the opposition between the individual and the collective (Birkeland and Ødemotland 2018; Li 2018), the dialectics between continuity and discontinuity in education (Birkeland and Ødemotland 2018; He 2018), the political and ethic implications of every educational policies (Li 2018; Szulevicz 2018). There is also the apparent opposition between education as the formation of an independent individual and the formation of a member of a society, that Simmel very nicely summarized in this metaphor: "Childrearing tends to be imperfect because with each of its particular acts it must serve two opposed tendencies: freeing and binding" (Simmel 1918/2010, p. 177). Finally, there is the very relevant contemporary issue: the educational context as a place of multicultural encounters rather than perpetuation of social distinction and even inequalities (Birkeland and Ødemotland 2018; He 2018; Lipman 2004; Szulevicz 2018).

In brief, my arguments will be the following:

- Educational systems are characterized by inherent ambivalence, that require a work of meaning-making and negotiation by the actors;
- There are some historical figures whose ideas can help us to understand how the system-person relationships work;
- If cultural psychology further develops these ideas can better help to illuminate the problems of education.

Thus, in the following pages, I will first try to stress the dilemmatic aspects that are connatural to the work of schooling and then I will discuss some lessons we can learn from outstanding thinkers, whose ideas can still be of great inspiration, both for understanding and trying to face the current problems.

Aporias and Dilemmas of Education

My first goal is to show how educational systems are characterized by inherent ambivalence. As human beings, we amuse ourselves with the idea that the institutions are characterized by some degree of consistency and unity of intents. We consider ambivalence and inconsistencies as temporary pathologies of social life. We expect some degree of such consistency even from the outsiders, and we like the idea of some kind of clear "bipolarism" in politics as well as in any other field. We can even accept the idea that things cannot be neither "black" nor "white" but some kind of negotiation in a "grey" area is a kind of workable compromise. What we have hard time in accepting is a form of logic in which things can be BOTH "black" AND "white". That is the idea that ambivalence and tension between opposing forces is a inherent characteristic of the system, rather than a temporary state of out-of-equilibrium. As I have argued elsewhere (Tateo 2015a, 2017), any social context is also a source of instability and ambivalence, to the extent that anytime we take a stance regarding a given issue, we immediately evoke the non-realized alternative. For instance, the examples of kindergarten in He (2018) show how time and space management are

limited resources, whereas making a choice immediately evokes also the non-realized option, although not present is clearly manifesting the "effects" of its absence.

> "Life in a culture is governed by a never-quite-resolvable tension between opposing, sometimes incompatible stances toward the world. These stances usually divide into those that are canonical, having to do with how things ordinarily are and should be, and those that are imaginatively possible, projecting how the world might be under altered circumstances. The dialectic between the two is endless, inherent in the demands of living communally, and reflects itself in law as elsewhere" (Amsterdam and Bruner 2000, p. 283–284).

I have called "dilemmatic field" (Tateo 2015a, p. 64) this kind of situations, in which the actualized path or choice is not "killing" the non-actualized counterparts. There are very rare moments in which we make decisions on the basis of very clear and distinct ideas. Fortunately, we do not live like in a tree-branch structure, rather in a field of forces in which "indeterminacy and ambivalence trigger the possibility of different courses of action" (Tateo 2015a, p. 64).

As Matusov (2009) nicely put it, we are still facing the dialectic between intrinsic *versus* instrumental education. The former focusing on learning as a goal *per se*, and the latter looking at learning as a mean for an end. This is another example of apparent contradiction, which is actually a dilemmatic field. Indeed, learning as instrumental AND teleogenetic process is not a contradiction, rather a field of tension in which at any time the actors make meaning of their educational choices. For instance, when Bruner (1960) coined the term "spiral curriculum" he probably did not have in mind an opposition, rather the idea that it should be organized: "around the great issues, principles and values that a society deems worthy of the continual concern of its members". (Bruner 1960, p. 52) I find this definition as a very nice way of describing the field of education. At the same time it is about great ethical questions and values, but it requires also an instrumental view to pragmatically address these problems. On the other hand, the concept of "spiral", includes both the aspects: teleogenetic (each step leads to a further maturation of the organism and the establishment of higher goals) and the teleological (education is value-laden and oriented towards some social objectives).

I am sure that if one asks to any educator what her teaching goal is, she will answer that she wants her students to BOTH develop as human beings and future professionals. No matter if she adopts a testing system or a dialogical teaching, she will be sincerely concerned with her students maturation. At the same time, one can observe the simultaneous presence of different ideological orientation in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. Education can be understood as a commodity following the market rules (Molesworth et al. 2010), or as a process of emancipation and a heritage of the communities (Higgins 2016). On the one hand, learning can be understood in extreme cases as an abstract model in which artificial intelligence works as a learning child and the learning child works as growing neuronal network (Thrun and Pratt 1998). On the other hand, learning can be understood as what si accountable as such (Almarode et al. 2018). But learning can also be understood as *Bildung* (Schneuwly and Vollmer 2018), the formation of human beings and citizens, yet still raising the question about what kind of citizen we are talking about (Roselius and Meyer 2018).

All these perspective are present and active in the educational systems and generate a certain degree of ambivalence and tension that can lead to numerous outcomes. So far, the contribution of cultural psychology has been relevant to unfold the role of societal values in the guidance of learning and education (see Branco and Lopes-de-Oliveira 2018 for a recent overview). Notwithstanding, I think that there is much more we can learn if we turn to times in which other fields of tension characterized the educational systems and if we widen a little bit our horizon up to include figures who are not usually considered in educational psychology. I will try to develop the idea of the work of schooling as a dilemmatic field drawing on the work of three twentieth century's philosophers, activists and pedagogists, who critically discussed, in different contexts, the issues I am raising with respect to current educational systems, and whose reflections are still illuminating. I also think that these pedagogists share with the approach of cultural psychology the idea that pedagogy is not just "technology of learning", as it is too often understood, but one of the cultural practices that support the development of the person as a full human being and as member of the community.

Some Possible Points of Departure

My second point of discussion will concern three historical figures, whose ideas can help us to illuminate the system-person relationships work in education. I have chosen these persons for several reasons. First, because they represent different areas of the world (Europe, United States and Latin America) in different historical moments. However, they were living in times of relevant social change and ferment of ideas. Second, they are innovators and to some extent, revolutionaries who combined the theoretical and practical work in the field of education. Finally, they did not have any academic conceit and showed a deep interest and empathy with their fellow human beings. Despite they came from different political and religious backgrounds, they considered the personal story of each person and the unique social context as both relevant aspects to build a theory and practice of education. For these reasons, I think they partially share the approach of cultural psychology and I will try to show that it is worth studying them more in depth.

Leonard Covello: Resisting Assimilation

The first person I want to mention, in chronological order, is an Italian-American pedagogist, Leonard Covello (1887–1982). His original name was actually Leonardo Coviello and he was the son of a poor Italian migrant handworker in New York. He had his name Americanized by his school teachers as first act of "assimilation" (Covello 1958). This experience led him to study the process of schooling of young Italian immigrant students in the school system of New York between World War I and World War II (Covello 1967). In his work, Covello showed how the assimilationist ideology was embedded in the educational system, leading to everyday schooling practices that were triggering "a generational conflict between Italian-born parents and American-born children regarding the meaning of Italianness and Americanization" (Cinotto 2004, p. 500). Covello (1967) studied how school tended to stigmatize the young immigrants' aboriginal culture "not only as irrational and impractical but also as clearly

anti-American" (Cinotto 2004, p. 503). This was enacted by acting upon some of the most basic habits, such as completely replacing English language with native dialect and blaming the Italian food habits (the core of the "home" and "family" feeling) in favor of more "civilized" American ones. Very well-known is for instance the reaction in front of the American habit of having "healthy" breakfast with corn flakes. For Italian immigrants, corn was farm animals' food, thus forcing them to eat it equaled to treat them as beasts rather than human beings. According to Covello (1967), immigrant students had to elaborate a complex negotiation, that often led to a collective feeling of inferiority and a rejection their own Italian identity in conflict with their parents' generation. When Covello became principal of the Benjamin Franklin High school in East Harlem, New York, he struggled to develop an idea of schooling that carries both the "obligation" and the "opportunity" of:

> "dealing with a heterogeneous population, new to American soil, transplanted here in haste, and only now beginning to take root. This new immigration is still struggling with a bilingual problem, is still facing all types of difficulties in trying to adapt itself to the varying, quickly shifting, and confusing standards of social behavior. It is still living under emotional stress because it has been unable to adjust itself adequately to the speed and complexity of our industrial and commercial life. It is still incapable of adjusting itself to the tempo of American life. This condition is further aggravated by the fact that these communities are often isolated from the more wholesome forces in our American life" (Covello 1936, p. 332).

In Covello's understanding, school failed to deal with diversity and with the promotion of the community as a "heterogeneous" system of persons and groups. In my understanding, he claimed that the idea of schooling as a process of socialization can be understood in two polarities which are both value-laden. Does this sound a familiar debate? On the one hand, there is the idea of assimilating diversities into a mainstream culture to facilitate the maintenance of social order: the student ENTERS the existing culture THROUGH schooling. This is for instance what is happening with the human movements of people granted with the status of refugees: it is believed that schooling would be a mean for a faster integration. However, a closer look will reveal that the actual process is intended to assimilate the refuges and give them what they lack rather than considering them legitimized epistemic subjects and trying to establish a fair exchange of knowledge (Ryu and Tuvilla 2018). On the other hand, there is the idea of assuming and respecting the heterogeneity of society and thus schooling becomes a way of relating the different educational agencies that concur to the development of the person:

> "outside the school, vital, powerful, and compelling forces that are constantly educating the boys and girls of the community in spite of, or contrary to, the school ideal. The surging life of the community as a whole, its motion picture houses, its dance halls, its streets, its gangs, its churches, its community houses, its community codes of behavior and morals- these will either promote or destroy the work of the school" (Covello 1936, p. 336-337).

This resonates with the current debate about school, family and community relationship (Epstein 2018). The problem of (re)building productive relationships between

educational agencies signals the fact that such relationship can be problematic or that a separation has been in place. Multicultural societies have simply made once again visible what Coviello was already studying decades ago: the educational system is an open system, in constant exchange with its environment. As part of a larger whole, it cannot ignore the fate of the other sub-components. As I will try to argue, this is not an either/or choice. It is rather another example of dilemmatic field, in which schooling is somehow promoting AND inhibiting both tendencies in a process of "inclusive separation" (Valsiner 1997). School is producing all the time ambivalent messages that lead both to a tendency to assimilation and continuity and to the promotion of diversity and discontinuity (Tateo 2015b).

Danilo Dolci: Ethics and Aesthetics of Schooling

The second reference is Danilo Dolci (1924–1997): an Italian intellectual, social activist, sociologist, popular educator and poet, who spent the most part of his life in the rural areas of Sicily, trying to develop a progressive view of education as part of the population development and liberation from poverty and organized crime. Dolci, who called himself an educator poet, had a vision of school "that will educate the young to know and respect their cultural and natural origins and become less competitive, more responsible, productive and creative citizens in and of the earth" (Vitiello and Polidoro 1980, p. 201). I think that he addressed exactly the kind of issues raised for instance by He (2018) and Li (2018): how the work of schooling can deal with the dilemmatic field of fostering young creativity, imagination, responsibility and rules of citizenship, how it can overcome the dualism between study and play, between schooling and real life? Can education actually support the full development of the person's potential, including her role as active democratic citizen, starting from the ethical and aesthetical nature of experience?

There are three pillars of Dolci's idea of education. The first pillar is that there is no substantial difference between the competences that a person should develop to be a citizen of her local community and citizen of the world. The dilemmatic field discussed by Szulevicz (2018) and Thiem (2009), that is the idea that a globalized education means that everyone shall know the same things, as implied by Bologna process and OECD policies, must not be in opposition to the recognition and appreciation of local knowledge(s). The dilemmatic field between productive and reproductive work of schooling is overcome by Dolci as a "dialectical relationship between discovery and original, creative rediscovery, and the acquisition of the cultural heritage developing outside" (Dolci 1973, p. 138). It must be noted, that for Dolci, this process of learning and identity construction was strictly related to the person life context. In the case of rural Aicily, for instance, the empowerment of the person and the community began from the acknowledgment of the richness of the history, of the environment, of the rural life. Becoming citizen of the world, for Dolci, means that when we acknowledge our heritage, we learn to recognize the others' richness. The opposite attitude, that of the oppressor and colonizer, would be simply to say that ones' own heritage is better than any other in the world. For Dolci, what I am originates in my roots and makes me equal to the other people in the world. The second pillar is the refusal of any knowledge hierarchy: praxis, intuition, imagination and science they all concur to the full development of human potential. Thus - to answer the question raised by He (2018) in

Chinese kindergarten's experience - play, study and work are complementary aspects of "the participants' individual interests and the study of the environment constituting the basis both of the methods used and of the programme content" (Dolci 1973, p. 138) and the rigid academic distinction between these types of activities have only an administrative reason rather than a pedagogical one. Finally, the third pillar of Dolci's philosophy of education is the *maieutic* method: "a process of collective exploration, both theoretical and practical, and which takes as its starting point the experience and the intuition of the individual" (Dolci 1973, p. 140). Developing the Socratic idea of maieutic questioning, Dolci claimed that the common aspect of both being an active and responsible citizen and developing new knowledge and learning is the capability to raise questions starting from the personal curiosity, intuition and desire. Questioning means to not accept the received opinion, to explore, to actively seek and create ideas. But questioning also means to share and to come collectively to the democratic elaboration of solutions. In more theoretical terms, Dolci explains is method as follows:

> "As the children develop we shall try to strike a balance between thought and action, and to encourage physical and mental activity in accordance with the following progression: observation, concentration; maieutic elaboration of the initial statement of the problem and of the hypothesis; establishment of a plan of experiments (individual and group) to test the hypothesis; thinking through of the problem (individually and in groups); tentative formulation or verification of the theory; verification of suggested hypothesis; adjustment of the theory" (Dolci 1973, p. 139).

Dolci was of course operating in a larger context of what I would call the learning revolution between the 1950s and the 1970's, when the ideas of Bruner, Malaguzzi, the humanistic approach to education, the discovery of Vygotsky in English (just to mention few examples), in combination with a huge social and cultural change worldwide, were altogether producing a climate of reflection, experimentation and radical criticism about formal education and developmental psychology (Bruner 2008).

Dolci devoted much attention also to educate the educators. I think that some of the issues raised by the experience of Birkeland and Ødemotland (2018) could be illuminated by Dolci's reflections about the difficulties of training the educators (which is the term that he used instead of "teacher"). He detailed the problems that educators could meet as they come from traditional schools:

- "To be able to see the world through the children's eyes.
- To participate in the group life of children, and yet to remain detached in order to develop our powers of observation.
- To document progress in a really scientific way, and not merely to keep descriptive diaries. (Even the person driving the bus takes notes on the reactions of families and their children during the journey.)
- To overcome difficulties of communication and reach a state where reasonable criticisms can be made candidly.
- To balance our own creativity with that of the children.
- To achieve the necessary self-control (giving individual attention to each child naturally becomes tiring; smoking is forbidden in the educational center).

- To know how to integrate within the group of educators basic attitudes and competences.
- To overcome the exhaustion of much of the work. Besides work at the center from 8 am to 4 pm, there is a great deal of preparation of material, personal reflection, documentation, finding out about experiments elsewhere, attending meetings, and visiting families.
- To work in such a way that hypotheses, theory and practice mutually interact with one another. We want to employ methods that are scientific, while retaining a freshness of imagination for each encounter - above all for those with the children" (Dolci 1976, pp. 4–5).

As one can read in the radical, humanistic and utopian vision of work of schooling, Dolci combines human, pedagogical, scientific and psychological competences that the educators should develop. It would be untimely to go further in this direction for sake of space and time, yet I would like to orientate the reader attention towards the aspects stressed by Dolci in the excerpt above and the kind of problems described by Birkeland and Ødemotland (2018). For instance, the distressed claims of the students that participated in the Chinese experience: "this is not normal" is very meaningful of the role played by what Birkeland and Ødemotland (2018) call "disturbances" in the work of schooling. It is indicative of another of the dilemmatic fields in education: that of the tension between "normal" and "abnormal" development or between endogenous forms of development and the exogenous direction of development promoted by the educational systems (how the person is ought to develop), that are often grounded in an ethnocentric view of values (Tateo 2015b). Dolci would have probably smiled and said: disturbance is the origin of learning.

Paulo Freire: Education as Liberation

The power of dialogical approach as epistemological relationship (Freire and Macedo 1995), of problem-posing and critical thinking in education was stressed also by the third author I will refer to: the Brazilian philosopher and pedagogist Paulo Freire (1921–1997). Freire's contribution to the development of a philosophy of education as a tool to freedom and empowering of human beings is enormous. His main achievement was to be a forefather of educational systems decolonization. He discussed education with respect to the oppressor-oppressed relationships in society (Freire 2000). Education can be BOTH a tool for the construction and maintenance of the system of oppression - by silencing, dehumanizing and de-empowering the oppressed, and by naturalizing dominance relations – and a tool for liberation – by helping the oppressed to regain a sense of humanity and agency, and by triggering a process of awareness in the oppressors (Mayo 1999).

> "There is no such thing as a *neutral* education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. The development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process will

> inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society. But it could also contribute to the formation of a new man and mark the beginning of a new era in Western history." (Shaull 2000, p. 34, original italic)

Some concepts point directly to the topics of the target papers. One of the principal epistemic virtues, according to Freire, in order to develop knowledge is the capability to involve in dialogue for the sake of true epistemic curiosity:

> "when students lack both the necessary epistemological curiosity and a certain conviviality with the object of knowledge under study, it is difficult to create conditions that increase their epistemological curiosity in order to develop the necessary intellectual tools that will enable him or her to apprehend and comprehend the object of knowledge. If students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing" (Macedo 2000, p. 17).

The case of the Norwergian students visiting to Chinese schools, described in Birkeland and Ødemotland (2018), is an example of the risks for educators to overlook the relevance of epistemic curiosity. "Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire 2000, p. 72). If we combine the lessons of Covello, Dolci and Freire, so far discussed, we see how one of the key aspects of the work of schooling is the capability of a true and honest openness to the dialogue with the other, and the reflective capability to put in brackets our inevitable value-laden ethnocentrism. This also implies the recognition of imagination as important mean to access intersubjectivity and understanding the perspective of the other, as Min claims in her paper and I have also suggested elsewhere (Tateo 2015a).

Freire (2000) developed also a very critical metaphor of schooling, that he called the "banking concept of education" in which "the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system" (Freire 2000, p. 72). If we consider Szulevicz's remarks (2018), we can see how this metaphor goes far beyond the criticism to the transmissive model of teaching that mirrors a social model of oppression. The metaphor of "banking" is also pointing at a process of commodification of schooling (Molesworth et al. 2010). A banking model of schooling evokes a whole set of actions that can be performed with knowledge as a commodity. Teaching and learning thus become means of production of some goods, and the student can be filled with it. Knowledge as money can be saved, used, invested, produce returns, outcomes. The use of knowledge as money thus logically calls for assessing and accounting. As Thiem (2009) claims, the political role of education can be oriented towards "using content and classroom practices to explore the production of citizen-subjects in restructuring political economies" (p. 161). We can here observe another dimensions of the dilemmatic field, in which the emphasis on the instrumental value of schooling and its understanding as a process of production and consumption of

knowledge runs in parallel with the concept of the person being responsible for one's own learning. A principle of personal emancipation and development can turn into a way of promoting a "customer" view of the student and building in this way the perfect neoliberal and globalized workforce of the future (Szulevicz 2018; Thiem 2009). "Education is a key site of cultural political struggle" in which "attempts to renegotiate schooling's political and economic outcomes risk upsetting fragile compromises around values, identity, and representation […] Perhaps more so than other social policy sectors, education presents particular problems for contemporary programs of rationalization, privatization, and commercialization." (Thiem 2009, p. 166).

Conclusion: Integrating Theory

After discussing some of the aspects of Covello's, Dolci's and Freire's theoretical approaches to education, I will maintain that cultural psychology has the potentiality to develop these ideas in order to better illuminate the current problems of education and will make some suggestions.

The first point of contact between cultural psychology and the lessons of Covello, Dolci and Freire, is that that the person is responsible and active agent of knowing, but it is also true that this process never happens in a solipsistic way, and, above all, it does not happens only for egoistic purposes. As Li (2018) argues, there is a constant dialectic between individual and collective in the work of schooling. According to the different systems of values in the society, the work of schooling will find different workable compromises that meet one of the preferred horns of the dilemma. Yet any kind of dominant (mono)(ideo)logic informing the work of schooling means to accept a wider monological mainstream social system of values. Such a monological view - or banking concept of education - always fails:

> "to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality. But, sooner or later, these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality" (Freire 2000, p. 75).

The educational institutions have the specific delegated purpose of instantiating a specific system of values in a given community (Tateo 2015b). The work of schooling sets the range of acceptable forms of personal development, including a certain degree of variability. For instance, the different educational practices discussed by Li (2018) and Birkeland and Ødemotland (2018) are promoting or inhibiting specific forms of learning, according to different systems of values with respect to the dilemmatic field individual/collective. Yet in both cases, individual AND collective are both present as elements of a dilemmatic field rather than clear-cut alternatives. This happens because the appreciation of individualism, immediately evokes the field of what is not-individualistic. On the other hand, the emphasis on the collective is immediately evoking the role of the individual. Within a dilemmatic field, one element is co-defined WITH and THROUGH the other elements. Here resides my hypothesis of a difference between dialectic and dilemmatic forms of development. In my theoretical view, the dialectic movement is oriented towards the overcoming of the opposition in view of a new synthesis, that will generate a new dialectic couple and so on. The dilemmatic view, is instead based on the idea of a tensional field, in which tensions are not completely

overcome in a dialectic synthesis. A dilemma has no single solution and its element will continue to exist even once a choice is made. For instance, the work of schooling is producing all the time ambivalent messages that the person has to personally elaborate. Ambivalence is not a by-product of the system, it is a constitutive dimension. In the case of the young Italian immigrants described by Covello (1958, 1967), the personal trajectories of the students develop within a dilemmatic field in which the choice to become a "proper" American citizen does not erase the alternatives, rather the choice implies an everlasting tension: for the rest of their lives, the young will also be those who choose "to not be Italians". In the case of the kindergarten activities discussed by He (2018), we can find a similar dilemmatic field with respect to the issue of being a student of the "city" instead of a Immigrant student. Besides, we can see how the definition of what is a proper "study" activity can be only defined in relation to what is "play": the time used to study will immediately evoke the absence of play.

The second element that I find very relevant is the issue of situated power dynamics. Cultural psychology is aware of power at the theoretical and discursive level. Covello, Dolci and Freire contribute to identify a practical and affective presence of oppressor-oppressed relationships in educational systems. Also in this case, the presence of the dilemmatic field is revealed by the observation that the oppressed can never be liberated by the defective mark of its conditions. For instance, in the case of migrants, educational achievements are evaluated "under the condition" of being in the state of refugee (Ryu and Tuvilla 2018). Educational success of a refugee, a member of a minority group, a vulnerable person will be assessed against this condition, so the dilemmatic field will be reproduced by saying: she made it *despite* her handicap, implying also what she could have not been achieving.

A third point in which cultural psychology converges with the authors I have discussed is the analysis of how the work of schooling is both an instantiation of the existing system of values (continuity) and an elaboration of the future kind of society we want to be: "the intercontextual connection between school and the other life context" (Marsico and Iannaccone 2012, p. 864). The school is in fact a complex institution - a "place in between", to use the "balcony" metaphor of Marsico and Iannaccone (2012). In both cases, the work of schooling is part of an action toward an imagined future. As dilemmatic field, the work of schooling is made of structural tensions, that we tend to reify into "bad" and "good" values, to naturalize into what "is normal" and what "is not normal". I personally find that the most important lesson to be learnt from Covello, Dolci and Freire is that we should be very careful about which kind of education we wish, because our wishes could be fulfilled. Most important, we should be aware that we are not the only wishing persons and that our wishes are important as the others.

To sum up, I started by the assumption that any educational system is characterized by inherent ambivalence. This ambivalence is not a pathology, rather a feature that require a work of meaning-making and negotiation of power by the actors. These are issues that periodically come back to the arena of scientific debate, but do not keep memory of the previous historical discussions. This is the reason for mentioning three historical figures whose ideas are still extremely productive from the theoretical point of view. Finally, I have tried to show how these ideas can converge to enrich cultural psychology and better understand the problems of current work of schooling. The main theoretical advancement I have proposed in this paper is the concept of *dilemmatic*

field: a kind of situations, common in the work of schooling, in which the actualized path or choice is not "killing" the non-actualized counterparts. The work of schooling is not just about solving problems, making choices or overcoming developmental tasks. It presents in forms of dilemmatic situations for all the actors involved (e.g. students, parents, teachers). Dilemmas cannot be solved, but lived by. A general preference towards one of the horns of the dilemma depends on the system of value and power dynamics. However, opting for one option is not eliminating the alternatives. For instance, schooling can be BOTH a tool of oppression, assimilation, normalization and reproduction of inequalities AND a tool of emancipation, empowerment and liberation. This is because, as any student knows by personal experience, when the educational values stress obedience, immediately deviance becomes a choice. Even better, banning a classic book makes it more appealing to students who would never otherwise read it. It is not by coincidence that among the most frequently banned classics in the country of liberty there are books like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (Doyle 2010): Dolci, Covello or Freire would not find it surprising. Dilemmas are what makes us humans, are the space of freedom in which normalization and normativity do not have full power, as they do not admit the full defeat of the opposite.

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