



## Critical Feminist Pedagogy for the Empowerment of Active Citizenship

**Francesca Marone**

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II (Italy)

[fmarone@unina.it](mailto:fmarone@unina.it)

### 1. Women, citizenship and social inclusion

The social and cultural differences within national contexts, the current difficulties for the affirmation of civil rights of women and recognition of their self-determination, the ways in which over the years the work has been organized and the income is distributed to internal households, show that there are still substantial differences in everyday life, and that the commitment to acquire a status in the family and society, which respects the equality and, at the same time, is the guarantor of the development peculiarities of the female, must be strongly renewed [14].

Over the past decades, the status of women in our country has changed radically in the family, the working environment and civil society. This changing role of women has been supported by important changes, but this growth is accompanied by a series of often contradictory and problematic aspects that still impede the achievement of substantive equality and equivalence of opportunity between men and women.

Current models of welfare are sometimes indifferent or adverse to promotion of leading role and independence, neglecting problems of citizenship, multiethnic cohabitation and human rights, and, least but not last, the right to knowledge and to definition of oneself diversity and uniqueness. It goes without saying that the top of this reflexion is just the category of education, since, with it, we intend to consider the bio-anthropological process through which the subject learns and re-elaborates his own belonging to mankind. This membership comes true after an intense dialogical exchange with social and cultural objectivity, and, consequently, after the process of socialization with symbolic orders concerning the imaginary, with its laws, its institutions, its objective courses [5].

The theoretical framework of the paper is that of the feminist critical pedagogy [9]. Thus we examined the theoretical and operational impacts of the thought of the scholars above on the actual Pedagogy of Difference, in the construction of alternative models applying the criteria of a different logic: a differential logic, opposed to a neutral universe, and able to save different subjects, especially feminine subject, in the name of otherness [2]. Differential-pedagogy that developed around the 80s of the twentieth century - one side has reconsidered the fundamental issues of women's subjectivity and, secondly, has inaugurated a series of reflections unpublished, created by analysis of the cultural, social and economic development of post-modernity [1].

Therefore, this article aims to inform strategies to address the complex and contradictory issue of gendered power relations in participatory planning processes for active citizenship: formation is required to work in direction to relationship, exchange, communication among subjects, as well as knowledge adjustment.

### 2. The action - research

Therefore, we have activated at the Faculty of Humanities - Department of Relational Sciences - University of Naples Federico II, with the approval of the Department for Rights and Equal Opportunities (in cooperation with the Ministry of University and Research and in collaboration with the School of Public Administration), a path in the promotion of culture and gender equality called "Women, Politics and institutions - training programs to help promote the culture and gender equality": a training of n. 90 hours for two consecutive editions (years 2008-2010) for students, university administrators and citizens, of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Equal opportunities and gender studies – two intertwined dimensions - have become over the last decade a cornerstone of the development of European citizenship. With this initiative we aimed to provide to a wide audience of trainees, a set of knowledge, partly theoretical and partly practical measures to promote the culture of gender and to promote the success and the participation of women in political and social life [10].

The experience of the scholars of the Department of Relational Sciences, in relation to gender studies is interdisciplinary and multigenerational, and has PhD in Gender Studies at the confluence of its pole and finds expression not only in research, courses and conferences in the individual teachers, but even in a magazine, "The Blue Room," published by the publishing house Filema.

On this basis the training has been proposed to examine, on a span of time ranging from the modern to this day, the causes of sex discrimination and, in parallel, to outline process of empowerment of women, through interdisciplinary analysis that realizes the complexity of the phenomenon, touching various aspects: psychological, pedagogical, philosophical, sociological, historical, legal, literary, audiovisual. The initiative has set as its goal the enhancement of specific skills and aptitudes of the individual/s, the spread and entrenchment of equality policies, with particular attention to training and knowledge dissemination [6].

The teachings were articulated around a number of disciplinary nodes in the specifications for:

- the social construction of "gender" and, in particular, the issue of women's subordination in the family, and the profound changes that now invest educational institutions and training systems, the world of work, organizations and public and private relational configurations;
- the access of women to forms of power and influence in various cultural and political spheres;



- cultural conditioning in the perception and representation of the female body and sexuality;
- the condition of women and the channels for access to training and labor market;
- good practices and policies of combining work and family life;
- the promotion of female participation in the creation of socio-economic activities;
- the improvement of social structures to support the work of women.

The action-research with students, university administrators and citizens introduced theories, models, experiences and practical skills having already built a new public space in the past, and/or currently may radically point to a social and political change, usable for both women and men. We know that narrative methodology is a valid instrument encouraging the reflexion and the self-knowledge of forming-subjects, and developing self-reflexive, meta-emotional and meta-cognitive faculties; that is why we will employ techniques as group and individual works, autobiography, narrations, simulations and study-case, allowing to help the establishment and the expression of identity, and the legitimization of sexed subjectivity through self-report [12].

Participative research methodology, wishes to overcome the still existing gap between the subjective experience and symbolic structures representing and meaning it [3]. Moreover, in "the virtual space" – or rather, the website above – we expect moments of distance education and comparison, in a sort of "telematic agorà". Encouraging the necessity of new information, aimed at the diffusion of consciousness of one's own rights, for the satisfaction of emergent needs in social, cultural, professional and educational fields. The web can be considered a bearing-wall: the use of technologies is an element of mediation in identity-making dimensions and outside reality [8].

Promoting the study and research on gender relations, the role of imagination in the construction of cultural models, the relationship between identity and otherness, the value of differences and encouraging the need for new information, aimed at spreading awareness of their rights for the satisfaction of needs emerging in the social, cultural, professional, educational, creating a public space in which to experiment original forms of sociability, as well as ethical and political options [11].

Methods of choice of research and intervention were the gender training methodologies that helped to develop self-reflection and knowledge of the trainees. Therefore, were used in the work of classroom techniques such as group work with a focus on internal relations, narrative tools, approaches and experiential adopting languages that facilitate the emergence of female subjectivity [7]. Operational methodology will consist in "Starting with Oneself", which is a topical qualitative methodology in pedagogy of difference [13]. This model of search has changed the same conception of the presence and the participated action, moving her/it from plain formal and juridical-institutional to plans personal and political / cultural.

The education for active citizenship was proposed as education for growth: or as acknowledgement of one's own gender identity, one's own relation experiences, one's own being in the world and in a particular historical and cultural context [4].

In the first phase of the research we aimed to rethink to the concept of citizenship from women's point of view, from old to new forms of its achievement.

In the second the research also examined the unexplored potentialities concerning feminine citizenship: subjectivity, women's presence and mediation at work and in institutions, as well as spaces for initiative and subsidiary power of single gatherings of active citizenship.

### 3. Conclusions

Such participatory research practices have proved effective in identifying, in the enhancement and development of attitudes, skills and capacities of the trainees and the hidden curriculum. The project has allowed the construction of a sense of belonging, of citizenship through analysis and evaluation of their educational history and / or work. It is also noted the importance of the relational between training participants; attention to the resources of each individual, the enhancement of affect women. Thanks to a range of support services, training activities, such as tutoring and online spaces for reflection, it was intended to customize the way to identify specific training needs in relation to specific social needs and skills of analysis and design of educational activities, actions taken as empowerment of individuals and communities.

Furthermore, both the first and the second edition have been joined by numerous events in synergy with each other, now proposed by the teachers, now by the learners themselves, now by the local authorities, helping to create a real network on the issues which were widely discussed and explored in the course of the two editions.

Take account of sexual difference means looking to the activity of thought, word, action for women and men, who are always different, as their mutual influence and interweave [15]. One way not to exclude women, and gender relations, is making history through the telling of relational contexts. Our project was born and was brought to fruition within a community, in which the components that share by the same interests and a common purpose, were related, that is, formed a context. A framework, in addition to relations between men and women, representing the temporal, geographical, social and anthropological environment. This is a fresco of a historical period in which women act in person with their relationships, their exchanges with men, relationships, trade, feeding everyday instances, spiritual, cultural and political moment.



## References

- [1] Braidotti R. (1994, 2011), *Nomadic Subjects*, Columbia University Press;
- [2] Code L. (1991), *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, Cornell University Press, New York-London 1991;
- [3] Florence, N. (1998) *Bell Hooks' Engaged Pedagogy: A Transgressive Education for Critical Consciousness*, Greenwood Press, New York;
- [4] Hall J. A., Braunwald K.G., Mroz B. J. (1982), *Gender, Affect and Influence in A Teaching Situation*, in "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", Vol 43(2), Aug 1982, pp. 270-280.
- [5] Held V. (1993), *Etica femminista. Trasformazioni della coscienza e famiglia post-patriarcale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1997.
- [6] hooks b. (1994), *Teaching to transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, New York;
- [7] hooks b. (2003) *Teaching Community. A pedagogy of hope*, Routledge, New York;
- [8] hooks b. (2006) *Outlaw Culture*. Routledge, London;
- [9] Luke, C., Gore, J. (1992) (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy*. Routledge, London;
- [10] Marone F. (2010), *Cittadinanza di genere: le donne tra esclusione e partecipazione*. In: M. Striano. *Pratiche educative per l'inclusione sociale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano;
- [11] McWilliam E. (1994), In *Broken Images. Feminist tales for a different teacher education*, Teachers College Press, New York;
- [12] Olesen V. L. (2000), *Feminisms and qualitative research at and into the millennium*. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 215-255). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- [13] Piuksi A. M., Bianchi L. (1995) (a cura di), *Sapere di sapere*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino;
- [14] Tinker I. (1990) (Eds.), *Persistent Inequalities*, Oxford, University Press, New York;
- [15] Ulivieri S. (2007), *Educazione al femminile. Una storia da scoprire*, Guerini, Milano.