

Call for papers

Schools and Religious Identities: Challenges and Dilemmas of the New Millennium

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Over recent years, the question of the role of religion in public life has dramatically re-emerged not only in Europe but worldwide, due to the increasingly multicultural and multi-religious character of contemporary societies, which coexists with different forms of secularization. As a mirror of society, school is closely involved in this issue, particularly when minority groups such as Muslims in Europe are concerned. This issue can appear to be marginal, if considered alongside the major challenges of equity and efficiency that state education systems are confronting nowadays, especially in a climate of drastic budgetary restrictions. The issue, however, takes on a new meaning when seen in a larger perspective. Schools have the task of educating future citizens, in societies that are more and more heterogeneous and fragmented because of globalization, yet they are neither harmoniously integrated nor genuinely pluralistic and inclusive. In addition, religion continues to be a significant source for intra- and infra-group identification processes, individual and collective behaviour and knowledge transmission. Moreover, it cannot be denied that religion is occupying a prominent yet ambiguous place in the public sphere, at the turn of the 21st Century, regardless of predictions of religious decline. More specifically, religion in contemporary societies often risks being essentialized as a cultural “fact”, and even used to support long-lasting social and political conflicts.

The rise in religious diversity and religion-based demands is posing challenges and dilemmas to current educational systems worldwide. In Europe, some of these dilemmas date back to the end of the twentieth century, but we are witnessing a new phase of resurgence nowadays, in conjuncture with the intensification of ethnic conflicts. Indeed, tensions between educational curricula and religious identities affect a variety of topics, including: compatibility between school norms and religious rules concerning, for example, nutrition schemes, dress codes (the well-known problem of the Muslim headscarf in France and Britain), calendars and festivities and so on; the spatial accommodation of religious pluralism in school classrooms (the display of the crucifix on classroom walls in Italy) and buildings (the presence of prayer rooms); tension between pluralism and mono-religious or secular concepts and styles of life at school (e.g. gender equality) and, finally, contents and methods in teaching religion and the distortional effects that stem from teaching subjects such as literature, history, social sciences and even natural sciences without

taking into consideration the variety of religious traditions and canons. Controversies have focused on the need for, and limits on, religious freedom, especially in situations where devotional and ritual practices risk impinging upon the freedom of others.

Local responses to such issues are often affected by the relationship between religion and the general template of multiculturalism that the state aims at implementing within society. Due to the changing nature of social pluralism, democracy and “laicity”, and in the frame of *multiple secularization*, public institutions also have to continuously redefine the boundaries of religious freedom in educational policies. Moreover, these boundaries continue to be contested, debated and reviewed at local, national and global levels, and vary among primary, secondary and tertiary education and according to the rationale of each educational sector.

Furthermore, on closer inspection, the issues mentioned are in danger of receiving only superficial treatment if they are not related to a broader, still more controversial theme, which is increasingly alerting public opinion, i.e. the performance of religion in youth cultures. The literature offers an articulated interpretation of young and second-generation immigrants’ religiosity: from the assimilation of secularization, to a ‘reactive religiosity’ (e.g. the so called re-islamisation of new generations), or even to religious radicalization and extremism; in between, creative approaches re-wording traditions, and an increase in personal interpretation and spirituality. These different options are also linked to different paths in social integration (or exclusion) and to different results in terms of socialization, and values and political orientations (e.g. liberal democratic – or anti-liberal and democratic – views, or even old and new western forms of anomy). A deep analysis of such tendencies is more necessary than ever, in order to imagine a school that is able to dialogue with both secular and religious worldviews and values using the lexicon of ethics, justice, active citizenship and democracy.

In recent years, scientific research on the issue of religious, cultural and ethnic diversity has shown a growing interest in this field of study. However, in many countries, theoretical and empirical analyses are still immature. Gerd Baumann describes the truly ambiguous triangulation of religious, national and ethnic claims in our contemporary societies as a “multicultural enigma”. Only a deep analysis of the interdependence between these different forms of belonging will allow us to definitively dissolve the multicultural riddle. It is true that religious diversity requires good governance of education systems. This effort, however, goes beyond a strictly organizational intervention. If we want to understand how school (and society as a whole) is rethinking its role in the current scenario, a real questioning of educational models cannot be postponed.

Submitted papers may deal with either case studies on specific geographical regions or comparative studies on topical themes related to different local, national or international contexts. Multi and interdisciplinary contributions from various disciplines such as sociology, history, anthropology, politics, psychology, pedagogy, childhood studies, ethics, and philosophy are welcomed.

Possible themes for papers include (but are not limited to):

- Religious education.
- Gender and sexual discrimination in religious groups at school.

- Religious exemptions.
- Anti-multiculturalism and islamophobia.
- Anti-laicism and secular phobia.
- Limits of religious freedom.
- Religious education in relation to structural, systemic forms of racism.
- Religious diversity and its impact on functioning and fulfilment of educational goals.
- Comparative assessment of experiences pertinent to religious education institutions and religious education in secular schools of all levels.
- The effects of education on religious tolerance and conflicts across societies and cultures.
- The role of secularization and religion in youth cultures and identities, in link with problems affecting social integration of second-generation immigrants.
- Social and cultural representations of religion and religious diversity between teachers and students and among textbooks, curricula and the extra-curricular programs.
- Policies targeted at including religious communities in the local governance process.
- Local practices (programs, projects and experiments) involving schools and their transferability.
- Religion, religious diversity, symbolic conflicts and connections or deviations with respect to citizenship, social integration and multiculturalism.
- Training, skills and sensibilities of teachers related to religious education subjects.
- School prevention of fascination towards religious radicalism.

Deadlines:

15th February 2017: Abstract (max 300 words) submission deadline.

1st March 2017: Notification deadline.

30th April 2017: Paper submission deadline. Papers, in English or Italian, should not exceed 6000 words, inclusive of abstract and bibliographical references. A double blind refereeing process will follow.

15th June 2017: Notification of referees 'comments deadline

30th August 2017: Final paper submission deadline

Abstracts, papers and information requests may be sent to:

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