

## The phenomenological turn in education The legacy of Piero Bertolini's theory

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### Abstract

At the end of the Fifties, an Italian scholar, Piero Bertolini, provided a phenomenology-based theoretical framework for rethinking education that largely anticipated the phenomenological turn that was to impact social sciences in the following decades. By founding his proposal on Husserl's phenomenology, Bertolini proposed a major theoretical shift in educational theory, research and practice: from "what reality (i.e. natural facts, other peoples' behaviour, traditions, established social order, everyday routines, early years etc.) does to people" to "what people make or can make of it". This anti-deterministic stance is probably the best known side of his work, yet Bertolini never claimed an omnipotent mind nor did he conceive the socialisation process as occurring in a social, cultural or material vacuum. On the contrary, he stressed the constitutive role of reality on whatever a mind can make of it. By outlining Bertolini's main theoretical claims and discussing his ground-breaking contribution to the 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship in education, this essay introduces this special issue dedicated to the contemporary relevance of his theory of education.

**Keywords:** education, Husserl, intentionality, life-world, natural attitude, phenomenology, phenomenological pedagogy, social constructionism, socio-materiality, theoretical attitude

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"Say what some poets will, Nature is not so much her own ever-sweet interpreter, as the mere supplier of that cunning alphabet, whereby selecting and combining as he pleases, each man reads his own peculiar lesson according to his own peculiar mind and mood."

Melville, H. (1852). *Pierre: or, The Ambiguities*, Book. XXV, ch. 4.

In 1958, eight years before the publication of *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, Piero Bertolini published *Fenomenologia e peda-*

*gogia [Phenomenology and Pedagogy]*, a book that laid the foundations for rethinking the way through which human beings learn to become competent members of the sociocultural group they belong to. With this groundbreaking book, Piero Bertolini founded the so-called Italian School of Phenomenological Pedagogy (see among others, Bertolini, 2001, 2004, 2006; Boselli, 1999; Dallari, 1990, 2000, 2005; Erbetta, 1998; 2001; Iori, 1988; 1996; Caronia, 1997; Madrussan, 2005; 2009; Mortari, 1994, 1997). He was incontestably the first scholar to found a general theory of education on Husserl's phenomenology (see Caronia, 2011; Iori, 2016).

The phenomenological notion of “intentionality” - i.e. the mind's orientation towards reality and its consequent unavoidable work of sense-making - was conceived as being at the core of the process of socialization. Intentionality accounted for the transmission of knowledge and ways to cope with an already known world (of meaning) and – at the same time – the re-construction and transformation of this same world of meanings and domains of knowledge. Both expert and novice were considered as active minds: far from being “passers” or recipients of culture, they were conceived as interpreters of culture, engaged in making sense of the surrounding reality as well as cultural traditions, everyday routines, cultural meaning systems and domains of knowledge. Even the reproduction of culture, social order and ways of thinking as well as the individual's alignment to social values were seen as accomplishments. As Derrida would have it decades later, there is no such a thing as “sameness” as even iteration is an active making of the identical (Derrida, 1988).

By introducing “intentionality” to the core of the socialization process, Bertolini (1958, 1965, 1988) highlighted the many layers where “*responsibility*” is at stake: novices and even experts are accountable for the sense-making process they are engaged in as their ways of “world making” contribute to making their social-world as it appears to them. From a phenomenological point of view there is no such thing as a deterministic impact of the socio-material context on the individual, no cause-effect relation between stimulus and response, between “the early years” and future development. This chain of determinants (if any) is interrupted by human intentionality, i.e. the unending re-crafting of the meanings any given reality might have (or is assumed to have). This conceptualization of education as an intentionality-led process couldn't but impact on the way the Italian scholar reformulated the basis of pedagogical theory, research and practice. The theoretical perspective orienting educational research and practice shifted slightly from “what reality (i.e. natural facts, other peoples' behavior, traditions, already established social order, everyday routines) does to people” to “what people make or can make of it.”

Although this anti-deterministic stance is probably the most known side of his work, Bertolini never claimed an omnipotent mind nor did he conceive the socialization process as occurring in a social, cultural or material vacuum. On the con-

trary, he stressed the constitutive role of reality on whatever a mind can make of it (see Costa, 2015, and this issue). If the stress on intentionality underlined the “active side” of the individual’s meaning-making (“*genesi attiva*” [active genesis], Bertolini, 1988), the stress on another crucial phenomenological notion – the Life-world (i.e. the world-as-we-experience-it, a permanent source of meaning and evidence (Husserl 1970[1936], p. 126) – led Bertolini to also consider the passive side of our being-in-the-world-with-the-others. Building on Husserl’s notion of “passive synthesis” i.e. an intentional mind constantly working within the stream of the living present (Husserl, 2001, pp. 196-197), Bertolini underlined the co-constitutive role of reality as a given state of affairs in our ways of world making (“*genesi passiva*” [passive genesis], Bertolini, 1965; 1988). Overcoming the risk of both “idealism” and “realism”, Bertolini argued for a balanced view of the contribution of both the mind and the reality to the constitution of the Life-world.

At the end of the fifties, Bertolini provided a phenomenology-based theoretical framework to rethink education that largely anticipated the phenomenological turn that – from the work of Alfred Schutz (1962, 1966, 1972 [1932]; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) – would span social sciences (see Natanson, 1973).

### **Beyond a solipsistic cognitivism: The socio-historical roots of intentionality**

From the foundation of his theoretical proposal, Bertolini tried to situate the disembodied, a-historical transcendental subjectivity depicted by Husserl in his early works within the Life-World Husserl depicted in his later works. The Life-World is where transcendental subjectivity takes form and is experienced by a subject in flesh and blood. It is also the stratum where the encounter between the subject’s intentionality and the resistance of things takes place. Individuals are conceived as historical beings belonging to an already existing life-world. The life-world which constitutes the horizon of daily life (Husserl, (1970 [1936]) is a world-taken-for-granted, self-evident and given to our epistemic and practical activities (see Schutz, 1972). This background of taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and traditions provides established, normalized ways of understanding the world and sets the limits and opportunities for acting and thinking (Foucault, 1980). However, cultural knowledge background, social orders and even attributed identities do not determine people’s actions and behaviors.

How is it possible? How do these apparently contradictory statements constitute a coherent theoretical model? Intentionality is the answer.

For Bertolini, as for any phenomenologically oriented scholar, the object-directedness characteristic of the mind is precisely the means through which individuals become crucial agents of a creative process of culture making, remaking

and unmaking. Identities, knowledge, social and moral orders, are at the same time (already) given as preexisting state of affairs *and* re-constituted one interaction at a time (Garfinkel, 1967; 2002). Joining the position of social phenomenologists such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, Bertolini rejected any attempt to conceive identities, social orders, culture, traditions, systems of values as objective, overarching entities determining individuals' ways of thinking, acting and ultimately of being. Coherently with a phenomenological perspective, they are conceived as human products. Yet, as Berger and Luckman (1966) proposed some ten years later, these constructs eventually become objectivized, crystallized and act back upon human subjects.

It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a human-produced, constructed objectivity [...] The institutional world is objectivized human activity, and so in every single situation [...]. The relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one. That is, man (not, of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer. (Berger & Luckman, 1966/1991, p. 78).

This idea of “acting back” needs further specification. If it meant that the social world acts on individuals as an overarching force, this would not be consistent with the pillar of the phenomenological approach to social life: intentionality as the specific characteristic of the human mind. How then does the Life-world – i.e. a preexisting world of meaning, constituted and objectivized social and moral orders - act back on a conceived-as-active mind? What is the relationship between collective life-worlds and the individual's intentionality?

For a phenomenologically oriented scholar in education, the philosophically problematic link between the individual mind's intentionality and the collective shared world of meaning is – in some sense – a matter of evidence: the socialization process and, in particular, the symbolically mediated interactions it is made of, are precisely what connects the Life-world and the individual minds. We as individuals are not raised in a sociocultural vacuum, we grow up within a society and it is in and through the process of socialization that we “internalize” cultural scripts, taken-for-granted assumptions and the unquestioned certainties and unshakable convictions (Wittgenstein, 1969) on which we build our everyday lives. Socialization – in its ordinary and institutional forms – is the process through which individuals learn to act and think according to the so-called “natural attitude” (Husserl, 1982[1913]; 1970 [1954/1936]). In the terminology of phenomenology, “natural” does not refer to any biological, neuronal, genetic or otherwise innate disposition. It refers to the ordinary, routine, unreflective quality of people's everyday ontology where things are assumed to be as they appear to them right here, right now. De-

spite its name, the “natural attitude”, is the molding of culture on the mind (Duranti, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. Whatever the object-directedness of minds, its ways of making sense of reality and doing something with it, these ways are shaped by culture via the unavoidable path of socialization. In the mundane reasoning (Pollner, 1974; 1987) of people in flesh and blood, there is no such a thing as a pure cognitive mind or a culture-free intentionality. As Cole stated, culture is in the mind (Cole, 1996).

However – and as Bertolini (1988) stated – ordinary as well as institutional education, is also and at the same time the path through which the mold of culture is re-shaped everyday, one interaction at a time, *by* individuals’ intentionality. It is constantly built and rebuilt, enacted and (re)instantiated by people in and through their daily activities and mundane interactions. In short, the repertoire of cultural hinges, premises, frames, taken-for-granted certainties and habits of thought that shape individual’s intentionality is conceived as more resistant and operating than Husserl’s former transcendental phenomenology ever conceived it, but is still fragile, challengeable and modifiable like any other human crafted construction.

In underlining the mutual constitution of collective life-world and individual’s intentionality, Phenomenological Pedagogy anticipated the interactionist turn in social sciences and its deep insight into how we contribute to building that common world of shared meanings that – at the same time – shapes our daily life and makes it possible and accountable.

### **In-between culture and mind: Human interaction**

From symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1967[1934]; Goffman, 1969) to ethnomethodology and social studies of everyday life (Garfinkel, 1967; de Certeau, 1980), from conversation analysis (Schegloff, 1968; 1987) to the so-called “return to practice” (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001), scholars interested in the practical and communicative constitution of reality have contended and empirically shown the emergence of structure (e.g. roles, status, identities but also knowledge and cultural canons) from everyday practices, i.e. individuals’ activities. These bottom-up perspectives conceive people as involved in (re)constructing order, structure and identities, but also their epistemologies and ontologies in and through the design of their practical course of action, and on the micro-order of their everyday life (Cooren, 2010; Heritage, 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 2011). Although some contemporary emergency perspectives run the risk of radical situationalism (see the notion of *interactional reductionsim*, Levinson, 2005) and therefore minimize the life-world roots of our ways of world making, the interactionist turn basically underlined that knowledge and praxis, structure and action create each other (Giddens, 1984; 1991).

It is precisely because we act and interact according to the ontological and epistemological premises that make up our life-world and because we take them for granted and build on them that we ratify them and participate in constructing and solidifying what Max Scheler (1926) called our relative-natural world view. The Life-world is given as unquestionable, yet its unquestionability is also produced by the fact that social actors behave as if it were a natural, un-constructed world. The natural attitude of our mundane reasoning consists precisely in assuming a kind of coincidence between (our) epistemology and our ontology: first-order observations (Fuchs, 2001) are not examined as regards their validity (Schutz & Luckman, 1973, p. 8); rather they are taken as if they were facts. More radically, for our everyday natural attitude, first-order observations are such facts. As Garfinkel put it, some and often very strong cultural premises and self-evident certainties (e.g. children visiting parents at parents' home are "at home"; the price of a bus fare is non-negotiable; in absence of any particular markers, "how is she feeling" means how is she feeling, Garfinkel, 1967) orient and even allow people's everyday ordered interaction. But, and recursively, these premises are also ordinarily created, maintained and (re)instantiated for "another next first time" (Garfinkel & Wieder, 1992, p.186; 2002, p. 92) each time the individuals act accordingly and use them to make sense of their surrounding world. Harvey Sacks' seminal work on the analyzability of stories by children (Sacks, 1972) is perhaps one of the most convincing demonstrations of how these kinds of premises are – at the same time – constituted *and* presupposed, assumed as shared *and* ratified by the members of a community "to order their affair" (Sacks, 1984a, p. 24) and produce an accountable version of the world. By looking at the micro-order of everyday activities, scholars in the stream of phenomenology add a crucial dimension to the former transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 1982[1913]): they showed not only that individuals' intentionality (i.e. their ways of world-making), is at the same time culture-shaped and culture-shaping, but also *how* this happens in the course of mundane interactions.

Among the cultural dimensions that shape our ways of thinking (i.e. the subject's intentionality) and are shaped by them, two are of particular interest for a theory of education: the mundane reason's assumption regarding the objectivity of the world, and the widespread strong belief in the correspondence between knowledge and reality, between the map and the territory, between the way we represent the world and the world as it is. The first assumption affects education as a practice, the second affects pedagogy as scientific knowledge.

In the following sections we will illustrate how Bertolini's Phenomenology of Education addresses both issues.



## Education as a practice: promoting “the philosopher’s attitude”

When rethinking education from a phenomenological point of view, “the objectivity of the world”, i.e. the idea that there is one real world available for everybody leads to some puzzled consequences and some paradoxes. If the world is the same for all how is it that it appears so different to different individuals? Should these differences be reduced *ad unum* (e.g. through practices of ortho-pedagogy, see Barone this issue) precisely because the real world is one, or should they be legitimized? In the latter case, does their legitimization imply bracketing the idea that there is one real world available to all?

Anchored on the phenomenological notion of intentionality, the pedagogical method outlined by Bertolini (see Palmieri and Barone, this issue; Lo Presti & Sabatano this issue) basically presupposes (and improves) the individual’s competence of sense-making which *implies* that the world-as-it-appears-to-me is (at least relatively, see Costa this issue) constructed by me. This sliding zone (Caronia, 2011) between reality as it is and what a socio-culturally framed individual mind makes of it, is the theoretical as well as the practical space for education. Acknowledging that reality can be thought otherwise, engaging in the “eidetic variation” (Husserl, 1982[1913]; 1989[1912-1928]; Bertolini, 1988; Iori, 2009) to see what goes unseen within the “natural attitude” (i.e. the relative dependency of knowledge from the subjective or cultural standpoint), are the overarching goals of a phenomenologically oriented educational practice.

It would be unfair to claim that Bertolini didn’t align with the original goal of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction and the method of eidetic variation: grasping the “essence” or going back to the “things themselves” (Husserl 2001: 168) having fictionally deconstructed all the properties of the object that appeared to be unessential, modifiable qualities. However, in his later works, Bertolini seems to suggest that the very educational gain of adopting phenomenological reduction and eidetic variation as methods, is not so much grasping the essence but rather highlighting the standpoint in the constitution of the reality “as it is”. Grasping the role of human intentionality in meaning-making, appreciating the “changeability” of our ideas and learning to see the world from another viewpoint, means stepping out from the natural attitude and attaining a theoretical attitude. Or, what Husserl called “the philosopher’s attitude”.

Suspending the typical mundane reason’s assumption - i.e. the belief in the existence of one objective world identically available to everyone – amounts to teaching and learning how to cope with alternative yet legitimate versions of the world. This path is far from being aligned to mainstream educational paths.

Traditionally the process of socialization (and mundane reason in general) provides ways to cope with “differences in world making” by preserving and even solidifying the idea of a commonly shared real world: some versions are discredit-

ed or delegitimized as a product of a dysfunctional, not mature, biased or otherwise blinded mind. This path recalls of course Foucault's and Goffman's studies on madness as a historical product, a social construction functional to preserving the very existence of a norm (Foucault, 1961; Goffman, 1961). Yet the process as such, i.e. the procedure through which individuals build and maintain one version of the world as if it was the unique and legitimate one against all the possible alternatives, is almost always at stake: by analyzing how a family produced and sustained a version of their five year old daughter as of normal intelligence and verbal competence against clinical diagnoses of profound retardation, Pollner and McDonald (1985) showed how we constantly assume that there is "one real world" that corresponds to our vision even when this is an "unusual" one. Yet besides these extreme cases, it is worth noting that this work of alignment of versions to a (supposed) real, unique and not constructed world is the basic pattern of socialization.

In the following excerpt I report an autobiographical story I was told by a woman in her eighties, recalling the times when the racial laws were in force in Italy. At that time she was 8 years old and attended primary school.

In the late '30s she lived in a town in Tuscany where she attended the public elementary school. Suddenly, her best friend Estherina stopped coming to school. Surprised, she asked her mother why Estherina wasn't coming to school anymore and her mother replied "in a natural way, as if it were obvious": "because she is Jewish". After telling me this story, the old woman dwelled upon some biographical details of her family that made her exclude any kind of ideological anti-Semitism on her parents' side: having moved to Rome, her father used the trunk of his car to help some Jews escape and hide in the countryside far from the city. Later on, the survivors' descendants proposed her father as a candidate for the "Righteous Among the Nations" award. What retrospectively astonished the old woman was precisely that "not attending the school anymore because she was Jewish" was something taken for granted and self-evident<sup>2</sup>.

Although reported decades later, the interaction between the mother and her daughter illustrates the functioning of the (mother's) natural attitude in the socialization process and the crucial role commonsensical evidences have in framing our ways of making sense and interpreting the world. Like the hinges identified by Wittgenstein, these "evidences" – in the story, the fact that a Jewish child does not attend the school anymore *qua* Jew – open and close possibilities for understanding; they scaffold our thinking and decision-making but are rarely called into question. The story also illustrates how socialization is a process through which participants consolidate the "world-picture" quality (Wittgenstein, 1969, §95) of their representation of the world (e.g. how things are and why) as if there were no slid-



ing zone between a certain legitimized version of reality and reality as it is. In the story, the legitimized version of reality treated as correspondent to reality was the one created by the racial laws. When the racial laws were in force, Italian Jews were not allowed to attend public schools or universities and, therefore, many of them ceased to attend the school *because* they were Jewish. And although the daughter's question could have put this "evidence" into question, what we infer from the mother's reported answer is that she announced "the event's ordinari-ness, its usualness" (Sacks, 1984b, p. 414). Indubitably the mother's (reported) statement evoked and even corresponded to a reality out there, the one socially constructed by the racial laws. However it also *because* this reality was treated as an objective, unquestioned fact by the mother (i.e. a good-enough *explanans* to the daughters' question) that this same reality was consolidated and transmitted as a matter of fact. As her daughter remembered more than seventy years later, certainty was the epistemic stance taken by her mother in talking to her about her friend Estherina. For her mother and for her at that time, this was as obvious as the fact that "water wets". Had the little girl asked her mother why she shouldn't put her hands in the fireplace, her mother would probably have answered: "because fire burns", with the same tone of unquestioned normality with which that day she explained why her daughter's friend didn't attend school because she was Jewish. It is in and through these kind of interactions anchored to the natural attitude that children are socialized in the "relative-natural worldview" (Scheler, 1926) of their community. The daily micro-interactions and even the "small phenomena" (Sacks, 1984a, p.24) (e.g. the tone of voice) by which adults communicate their epistemic modalities and, therefore, assign a mode of existence to what they are talking about: hypothetical, questionable or, as in the case above, obvious.

Far from being oriented to gaining a "theoretical attitude" and informed by the principle of the subjective responsibility in the making of the versions of the world we live by, everyday socialization is informed by the "natural attitude". Ordinary socialization practices are framed by the web of unquestioned premises according to which individuals make sense of reality; yet, at one and the same time, socialization practices routinely ratify these premises precisely because participants use them to account for reality and because they do not question them. If they did, their daily life would become "very complicated" (Marconi, 2007). Perhaps it will. Yet – as the case of Estherina illustrates – living and acting according to the obviousness of what goes without saying doesn't seem to have less complicated consequences.

The fact that the everyday socialization *mainly* relies on (and develops in novices) the so-called natural attitude, does not mean *eo ipso* that the natural attitude is the only modality available within for "mundane reasoning" (as it seems to be for Husserl and – after him – the phenomenological approach to everyday life, see Schutz 1973, p. 8). As Michael Billig (1985; 1987) pointed out in discussing other

properties of everyday reasoning (e.g. the supposed unavoidability of generalization and stereotyping in everyday understanding), language can be used and actually is used to generalize or to singularize, to categorize and typify or to argue about idiosyncratic cases. In a similar vein, Bertolini (1988) suggests that education can be the means to (re)solidify certainties *within* the “natural attitude” (as in the example analyzed above) or to modify this attitude and direct thinking toward the premises or hinges that make us see the world as we see it. We are not necessarily led by our certainties even when we act as laypersons: we may or may not take for granted what is taken-for-granted, we may see and make sense of the world *within* our given cultural frames or analyze the frames within which we think; we may ask – as the philosopher outlined by Husserl does – what and moreover who makes us think what we think, or stay within the comfort zone of believing that knowledge corresponds to reality. This is a choice, and where there is choice there is responsibility.

Interestingly enough, this is more than wishful thinking or a new appeal to the risks implied in “the comforting gift of renewed absolutes” (Berger & Zijderveld, 2009, p. 46). As it was pointed out forty years later Bertolini’s proposal by Duranti, “what we have been socialized to think, feel, and do has become part of what Husserl called “the natural attitude” (Duranti, 2009 p. 220) and therefore it may be extremely difficult to bracket it and engage in “eidetic variation”. However, closer analysis of everyday life interactions also shows that instances of “phenomenological modifications are quite common in child-adult verbal interactions” (p. 206). In these cases at least, the natural attitude is transformed into a theoretical or reflective attitude. At least from the phenomenology of education point of view, pursuing the adoption of a theoretical stance is the main goal of any phenomenological oriented educational practice. The only legitimized “ought to be” as anything else would amount to “running” the risk of ideologization [...] “a risk that education and pedagogy run in a very perspicuous way” (Bertolini, 1988, p. 120).

The next section discusses the relationship between pedagogy and education outlined by Bertolini on the basis of Husserl’s claims concerning the life-world origin of science.

### **If the map is never the territory: applied sciences and the *insecuritas* of scientific knowledge**

As mentioned above, a second major idea pertaining to the Life-world is of particular interest for a theory of education: the strong belief that if produced with due caution, under certain circumstances, out of some identified processes and methods our knowledge of reality can correspond to it. This belief is at the core of provinces of meanings as crucial as justice, medicine, scientific research, everyday

interaction, as well as the contemporary pressure for and the implementation of evidence-based policies and practices.

It is indeed commonly assumed that the best policies and practices are those that rely on information and knowledge of the phenomenon the policies are all about. The more information and knowledge are accurate, complete and reliable the more the decisions supposedly fit with the features of the phenomenon and will be relevant. The implied link between knowledge *of* reality and action *for* reality is a logical one: practice (i.e. policies, practical guidelines) is accounted for as a logical consequence of a premise (i.e. scientific data and statements). We call this procedure “evidence-based decision-making” or “evidence-based practice” (Nevo & Slonim-Nevo, 2011; for a renewed claim for evidence-based policy and practices see among others Chambless & Ollendick, 2001; Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002). The trust in scientific discourse as providing evidences on how things are or will be under certain controlled circumstances is based on a major unstated assumption: the ontological rupture between the Life-World (i.e. what science is about) and the Science-World, between everyday discourse, social representations and practices and scientific discourse, representations, and practices. These two realms are supposed/assumed/believed to be organized according to different and independent logics, methods and vocabularies. It is precisely this ontological difference/independence that supposedly guarantees the objectivity of scientific discourse: once constructed according to the methods and rhetoric governing the world of science, scientific discourse can represent the world as it is or as it will be under certain controlled circumstances. Parallel to this enduring cultural belief, another quite opposite view of science was developed throughout the XX century, thanks to Husserl’s groundbreaking thoughts. In 1936, in the lectures that gave rise to *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl (1970[1936]) introduced the idea of the Life-world origin of science: the scientific knowledge of the world we experience as our world is rooted in, depends on and ultimately is shaped by the motives, interests, passions, intentionality and everyday knowledge that characterize the – totally cultural and historical – world science is expected to represent (see Schutz, 1962; Garfinkel and Liberman, 2007). Since then and the work of Kuhn (1962; 1970), a challenging perspective in the sociology and philosophy of science shook the long-standing canonical conception of scientific knowledge based on Hume’s distinction between facts and values and a ‘Baconian notion of objectivity’ (Carrier 2012, p. 2549). According to this perspective, science is no longer conceived as a way to mirror reality as it is (or will be under certain controlled circumstances), but rather as a reality-constituting, value-laden social practice (see among others Longino, 1990; 1996; Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Pickering, 1992, 1995).

The idea that science is a social practice that constitutes reality like any other social practice is now very well established in literature and far from new (see Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Gross, 1990; Latour & Woolgar, 1979). Michel Foucault

(1994; 1969) and Pierre Bourdieu (1988; 1990a; 1990b) set the main theoretical frameworks for social studies of science (see Brummans, 2015). Since then, many scholars have theoretically or empirically investigated some specific aspects of scientific research. Analyzing the design of the research as a socio-cultural practice *per se*, the genetic epistemologist Alberto Munari (1993) challenged researchers in human sciences to take into account the inevitable cultural, if not even ideological nature of our scientific undertakings. As he pointed out, whenever researchers decide which uncertainties are pertinent to define a particular phenomenon (for example, what they consider an independent variable hypothetically affecting a given dependent variable), they do it based on historically rooted knowledge. More recently, de Muijnck (2011) analyzed the attachment theory in developmental psychology, showing how and to what extent it nourishes and – at the same time – is nourished by our commonsensical idea of what is right and what is wrong for children in their early years. Researchers constantly make epistemic decisions about what counts (and does not count) as *explanans* (statements that explain) and *explanandum* (statements that need to be explained). These decisions refer to a background made up of cultural beliefs. These cultural beliefs and discursive formations set the possibilities as well as the constraints of scientific knowledge (Foucault, 1980). In other words, scientific research is not produced in a social and cultural vacuum: it pays ample tribute to a particular world vision. What today may appear a truism (but see the renewed empiricism implied in any request for evidence based practices) was a rupture in the pedagogical thought of the '60ies.

Drawing on the so-called 2<sup>nd</sup> Husserl, Bertolini anticipated the constructivist turn in social science. Working in the middle of the “war of paradigms” (see Caron this issue) he never fell to the sirens’ calls of pedagogical positivism that spread in the first half of the XX century and all the subsequent avatars until the contemporary quest for evidence based education. He rather theorized the constitutive role of the subject (i.e. the analyst, the social science researcher, the “*pedagogista*”) in the making of any second-order construct concerning education (see also Bertoldi, 1988; Massa & Bertolini, 1999; Mariani, 2000; 2003; 2008). Even when identifying the essential distinctive traits of education (what he called the “original intentional directions” of education, Bertolini, 1988, p. 161), Bertolini tried to highlight (and save) the difference between a theoretical construct (i.e. the formal structure of the education) and its (supposed) occurrences, between a constituted second-order type and its historical tokens, between a scientific representation of reality (e.g. education) and what this representation aims to stand for. Anticipating the deconstructive epistemology turn in social science, from his early works Bertolini (1958, 1988) maintained a skeptical stance toward any scientific approach to scientific knowledge, i.e. any attempt to delete the marks of the knowing-subject from the known-object, to ignore the socio-historical roots of (scientific) knowledge as well as its unavoidable value-ladenness (see also Semerari, 1982; Steier, 1991). Although

in his early works he seems to postulate the possibility of an isomorphism between methodological (i.e. the categories we use to investigate the world) and ontological structuralism (the structural organization of the world as such), in his later works he appears more cautious as to this possibility. In 1990 he went one step further by acknowledging “the crucial necessity for any branch of knowledge to question itself, its modes of production, its possible meanings as well as the possible links it has with other epistemic domains” (Bertolini, 1990, p. 371). The reference to the modes of production clearly points to the Life-world origin of science (Garfinkel & Liberman, 2007), the epistemological implications this rootedness has on how scientific results are conceived, and the consequent issue of the impact of scientific results on everyday practice and decision-making.

According to Bertolini, taking a reflexive stance in producing (educational) research is the epistemological antidote that prevents or at least reduces two risks: shifting slightly from the unavoidable value-ladenness of science to science as propaganda, and transforming education as an evidence-based form of indoctrination. It is only by adopting epistemological vigilance on the irreducible gap between a (scientific) representation of reality and reality and by cultivating the awareness of the dependency of science on its modes of production, that “I think it possible to contrast any ideological use of science (of any science) as well as the ideological construction of it” (Bertolini, 1988, p. 120).

### **Phenomenology and education today: conclusive remarks**

It is hard if not impossible to summarize the multifaceted and sometimes contradictory legacy of phenomenology in the first half of the XX century to the scholarships of the second half of the century. But if we had to single out one main idea it would probably be a radical trust in the human beings’ agency, i.e. their competence to make a difference whatever the structures, pressures, constraints or preexisting world-visions they were thrown into.

This profound humanism nourished the social sciences and it is in some sense the inspiring stance of the constructivist paradigm (see among others, Steier, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Although adopting opposite analytical standpoints, both the top-down cognitive perspectives and the bottom-up interactionist approaches that developed from the 50ies agreed in conceiving human beings as creative social actors engaged in constructing the meaning, sense and social organization of their world. This process is seen as radically embedded in and possible because of the cultural frames and material resources available in the world people live in. From a top-down perspective, cognitive approaches (see D’Andrade, 1984; Holland & Quinn, 1987; D’Andrade & Strauss, 1992) conceived human activities as led by constructed cultural models: prototypical, language-based scripts of events

that work as frames of reference for inference-making and as guides for appropriate, understandable and accountable actions. From this standpoint, mind and knowledge precede and inform practice. Adopting a radical bottom-up perspective, interactionist approaches conceived the structures and meanings of social action as produced by everyday actions and discourses. Research in this stream (e.g. ethnomethodology and conversation analysis) claimed that and empirically showed how cultural models that organize everyday life in intersubjectively shared ways are constructed moment-by-moment by the ways people participate in social events (Garfinkel, 1967). From this standpoint, praxis is the very method for the construction of meaning, knowledge and social order. However and besides radical differences in the way they conceived “the knowledge vs. praxis” primacy, top-down and bottom-up constructivist approaches to social life shared a humanistic-centered perspective. By humanistic-centered perspective I mean a relative underestimation of the different and multiple ontologies that make up the social world (Latour, 1996; Caronia & Cooren, 2014; Caronia & Mortari, 2015).

The social world where the work of everyday culture construction outlined by constructionism is performed, is not constituted only by people who interact reciprocally. In the last decades, renewed attention to the material aspects of social life has been addressing<sup>3</sup> more and more the artifactual dimension of daily life (see among others De Certeau, 1980; Appadurai, 1986; Semprini, 1999; Latour, 1996). Studies in this stream have showed how it is a crucial component that affects and is affected by interactions, social organization and cultural frames of reference. The material features of everyday life contexts are not an inert background for people’s everyday lives nor an ineffective stage where people enact their intentionality that occurs as a pure, uncontaminated cognitive act. Insofar as people establish meaningful interactions with objects, artefacts and spaces, they make them exist in their social world, making sense of and involving them in a mutual co-construction process. Once created, things make us “do things”, and become agents in a strict sense of the term (Latour, 1996; Brummas, 2007; Cooren, 2004)

Even the so-called “material turn in social sciences” (which balanced a too-humanistic phenomenological view of social Life) was in some sense anticipated by phenomenological pedagogy. Perhaps because of its proximity to everyday life and the everyday business of “making people”, Phenomenological Pedagogy never underestimated the constraints of the Life-World as it never presumed an omnipotent linguistic, pre-cultural social actor. Rather, it conceived the process of culture creation as radically embedded in and dependent on the material resources and cultural frames available in the world people live in. Theoretically speaking, Bertolini focused on the historical, intersubjective and *material* constraints of the world we live in it (see Barone, this issue), as well as the intersubjective and cultural origins of the ways human beings act out and perform their intentionality. Educa-



tional practices occur in socio-material context (whether “natural” or institutional), this context (or setting) makes a difference on educational outcomes.

Briefly, within the phenomenological pedagogy paradigm, the phenomenological trust in human intentionality is always balanced by a socio-historic-materialistic perspective. And this is perhaps the core idea of Bertolini’s legacy: according to a phenomenological approach to education and everyday life, participants (parents and children, experts and novices, teachers and pupils) are viewed as constantly engaged in constructing the meaningful dimensions of the world they live in, *through their situated and object-mediated actions* within the limits and possibilities of their cultural and material world. According to this approach, education may be conceived as a never-ending cultural work through which, building on the social and material resources available to them, individuals constantly (re)produce the cultural and moral orders, meanings, structures and social organization of the world they live and will live in.

Sixty years after the publication of *Fenomenologia e Pedagogia*, and thirty years after *L’Esistere pedagogico. Ragioni e limiti di una pedagogia come scienza fenomenologicamente fondata*, the essays collected in this special issue are a posthumous homage to the founder of the Phenomenological Pedagogy. While Costa theoretically considers the unsolvable problem of a constituting-constituted reality and the impact this Janus-faced conception of reality has on the very definition (and implementation) of education, Caron reflects on the impact the epistemological paradigm has on how research findings are crafted, expected to be, assessed as relevant and even used in developmental applied sciences. Vaccari presents the theoretical perspectives that have a “family resemblance” with the phenomenological turn in education, particularly those that claim for the force of language in the subjective and collective constitution of reality. While Barone’s article focuses on the socio-material constraints and resources that animate the Life-world, and therefore educational processes, Palmieri as well as LoPresti and Sabatano address the practical implications of phenomenology in the “doing of education”.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> To mark the unnatural origin of “natural attitude”, Duranti (2015) proposes the label “cultural attitude” (p. 21).

<sup>2</sup> This extract was also analyzed in Caronia, 2014. The present discussion largely draws on that previous analysis.

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