

Research Article

# The Unity-Idea According to Quentin Skinner: A Lesson in the Use of Educational Concepts in the United Kingdom and Italy

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## Abstract

This article reflects on the importance of Quentin Skinner's method for historical-educational research. This work explores some of its key concepts: ideas as “tools” used for persuasive argumentation, the heuristic inconsistency of the concept of influence, the unity-idea understood as an umbrella category that involves abstractions, the concept of context and the technique of intertextuality. Through a review of studies that have welcomed Skinner's methodology, the article also highlights how, both in the European and American contexts, there is a growing interest in educational research towards his investigative strategy. The analysis then focuses on two case studies on the concept of unity-idea: one on the idea of progressivism, widespread in the British tradition, and one on the idea of Christianity, developed in Italian personalist pedagogy. These two terms are similar “tools” in standardizing the complex educational reality, bringing different meanings and attitudes closer together. Skinner's analytical approach warns against this operation, because the use of general concepts, sometimes useful and necessary, can become an obstacle to the understanding of authentic meanings. Excessive trust in universal principles without a reflection that enters into historical complexity can lead to an ethical intellectualism for which a good theory is sufficient to change and improve practices. The valorization of historically solid meanings is a guarantee for an authentically transformative educational theory and practice.

## Keywords

Quentin Skinner, Context, Meaning, Unity-Idea, History of Education

## 1. Introduction

The work of Quentin Skinner (1940-) is central to the intellectual history between the 20th and 21st centuries. A prestigious exponent of the so-called Cambridge School, a group of scholars of political ideas, he was Regius Professor of Modern History at the university of the same name. Within that scientific community, he stood out not only for his fundamental historical studies, but also for his profuse commitment to methodological reflection. Both in the theory and in

the practice of research, he has based himself on the idea of reconstructing the authentic meanings of historical concepts through their contextualization.

In over forty years of intellectual activity, Skinner's rich production of historical-political research has been constantly accompanied by works of political philosophy and by theoretical contributions of language, in particular, on voluntary themes or interpretative actions, and numerous methodolog-

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ical studies on research on the history of ideas and on the interpretation of texts.

Among his commentators Marco Geuna, like Gordon J. Schochet, has organized the work of the British historian in the aforementioned categories [1].

This article develops a reflection on the importance of Skinner's method and in particular the concept of idea-unity for historical-educational research. The starting point is the analysis of the methodological thought of the British historian. The study is developed without claiming to be systematic. In particular, it does not delve into the complex debate on the idea of historical research, which started from the seventies of the twentieth century; it only mentions in general terms the research traditions criticized by Skinner; it does not systematically enter into Skinner's historical research; it does not evaluate the coherence between his historical works and his methodological ones; it does not take into consideration the theoretical study of linguistic acts; it does not investigate the sophisticated system of analysis that the English author has deepened on the specific rhetorical techniques, used by political philosophers of the modern age [2].

The following pages try to highlight in particular the instrumental nature concepts, the persuasive intentionality of the authors, the idea of context and linguistic convention and the concept of idea-unity also through two important cases in contemporary education, progressivism in the British context and Christianity in Italian personalist education.

## 2. Ideas-Tools for Persuasion

In his methodological essays, Skinner often states that much of his beliefs about intentionality are based on the studies of John L. Austin, the English philosopher and linguist, important for several works including the collection of lectures held at Harvard University in 1955, published posthumously in 1962 with the title *How to Do Things with Words*. In particular, Skinner takes from Austin the idea, in turn taken from Ludwig Wittgenstein, according to which words are «actions» [2]. This intuition implies that in communication there is the presence of an intentional force of the author, which Austin calls an illocutionary force.

To illustrate his reasoning, Skinner gave the example of the policeman who sees a child skating on a dangerous pond and tells him: «The ice is very thin». With this statement, beyond the meaning of the words, the policeman tries to do something, he tries to warn the young skater. The recognition of a warning intention, as in the previous statement about the police officer, is the result of a selection within the possibilities of meanings. This also happens in the communication of philosophers of the past. Their language wants to convince through their thesis, they are not just “words”. To understand this intention, the analysis must identify a single type of intention among the interpretative possibilities of past contexts of meaning. Skinner calls this intention primary intention [2].

The historical researcher, therefore, has a defined initial

task, which is to find the primary intention and also to explain it in the clearest and most complete way possible.

The question of how to identify this type of intention, especially in historical texts, remains open. Skinner's answer is that it is necessary to bring out the particular relationship between the meaning of the statement and its intellectual or ideological context, understood as a system of ideas, characterized by conventions, within which the author acts.

Intentionality highlights how concepts serve an author to support an argument, to convince on a thesis. In this regard he states:

As Wittgenstein said, concepts are tools. To understand a given concept or argument it is not enough to simply grasp the meaning of the terms used to express it, but also the set of things that can be done with it. Therefore, rather than a history of the idea, it proposes "a history centered on the thinkers who have used the idea, and on the different situations and intentions in which it has been used (pp. 52-53) [2].

## 3. Against the Unity-Idea and the Concept of Influence

Since his essay *Meaning and Understanding* (1969), Skinner has consistently criticized anti-philological ways of interpreting an idea. In particular, his accusation has been directed against two methodological orthodoxies that have been widespread since the 1960s [3].

The first criticism is against the dogma of the existence of metahistorical concepts, concepts that fill many studies of intellectual history. Because of this isolation, texts are distorted, influenced by concerns and paradigms that belong exclusively to the interpreter, and explanation occurs in stereotyped categories of thinkers (for example, Niccolò Machiavelli, “bad man”, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “totalitarian man”).

The orthodoxy of the autonomy of the text finds a significant development in the line of research that is based on unitary history, the true center of Skinner's criticism, which is seen in the American philosopher Arthur Lovejoy (1873-1962) one of the best interpreters. This direction attempts only to «examine the words that denote the idea», without worrying about the fact that they can be used «with different and completely incompatible intentions» (p. 31) [4].

Therefore, the researcher must consider «all the various situations, which may vary in complex ways, in which the given form of words can be used logically, all the functions words can perform, all the various things they can be done with» (p. 31). The central fact is that «there is no particular idea to which different writers have contributed, but only a variety of statements made in words by a variety of different agents with a variety of intentions» (p. 31) [4].

In the context of the polemic against the textual interpretative approach, which does not deal with a historical context, such as the studies of Arthur Lovejoy, Skinner delves into a

second criticism, that of the concept of influence, which can be admitted only through this analytical procedure: «It is known that (i) B studied the works of A; (ii) B could not have found the relevant doctrines in any other writer than A; (iii) B could not have arrived at the relevant doctrines independently» (p. 75) [4].

According to Skinner, the possibilities of analytically demonstrating the influence of one or more concepts of one author on another are few. However, this «does not mean denying that there are long continuities within Western political, social and moral thought, and that these continuities are reflected in the stable use of a certain number of key concepts and argumentative models» (p. 25) [2].

#### 4. Intertextuality and Context

For Skinner, the contextualization of concepts used by philosophers over time is achieved through intertextual analysis. For this reason, he studies the richest possible literature of a specific era, also analyzing many minor forgotten works. Intertextuality highlights the specific meaning of a concept within semantic conventions of the same era.

Skinner does not exclude considering social, political and economic realities for the formation of the concept of context, but states: «I am especially interested in linguistic contexts» (p. 323) [5].

The importance of linguistic contexts lies in the opportunity to frame the possible communicative conditions, in relation to which the researcher can define or locate the expressive intention specifically analyzed. The historian has intervened on this intuition frequently and with different contributions, as in the following statements:

Context is not a determining factor of the speech act, but rather the structure of its conditions of possibility. Therefore, context must act as a sort of court of appeal to assess the relative plausibility of the incompatibility of intentionality [4].

The members who belonged to the Cambridge school, while cultivating substantial differences in their proposals, were strongly in line with Skinner's contextualist idea [6]. In this sense, a phrase by John G. A. Pocock, one of the main exponents of the Cambridge school, is very consistent and eloquent with Skinner's method: «Only after we understand what tools are available to say something, can we understand what he meant» [7]. Having established «the whole range of communications that could conventionally have been made on a given occasion by the utterance of a given expression», Skinner knows that the understanding of the work is not finished (p. 87) [4]. «The next step should be to trace the relationships between the expressions and this wider linguistic context as a means of decoding the intentions» (pp. 86-87) [4]. Only after this step will it be possible to explain the specific use of the concept. Conventional reality is its binding precondition, which the author can follow, strengthen or challenge or subvert, opposing the linguistic conventions of an era. An author uses argumentative techniques through meanings

of concepts that are in context, like a toolbox.

#### 5. The Reception of Skinner's Method in Education

In recent years there have been signs that educational research is becoming increasingly interested in Skinner's methodology.

The following review of these contributions highlights an effort to question continuity and generalizations, which are widely accepted within the history of educational thought. These studies tend to include the thoughts of authors in specific ideological contexts and debates. It is clear, therefore, that Skinner has resumed the approach he applied to works of political theory, considering them in their essentially argumentative character, as a set of movements, which the author carries out in a competition or debate.

Among the studies that refer to Skinner's methodology is the essay by Kevin J. Brehony, professor at the University of Roehampton (London), *An "undeniable" and "disastrous" influence? Dewey and English education (1985-1939)* [8]. This essay delves into the reception of John Dewey's thought and educational practices in England between 1895 and 1939, showing how exaggerated the idea, promoted by historians of education, of the great influence of the American philosopher on the school and on English thought. In this sense Brehony explicitly takes up the three conditions indicated by Skinner to speak of the influence of an idea. In fact, much of what has been identified as Dewey's idea could belong to other thinkers. An important space within this critique is dedicated to the history of Joseph John Findlay, the first to introduce Dewey's thought in England. Without wanting to transmit Dewey's global thought, as is generally thought, Findlay promoted only some of Deweyan concepts (the value of the teacher's professionalism and the child's experience) to achieve his goals in the specific contemporary context [8].

The analytical approach developed in Sol Cohen's essay *Challenging Orthodoxies: Towards a New Cultural History of Education*, although not explicitly declared as Skinnerian, is similar to Skinner's in relation to the contextual scope of conventions. The essay delves into the discourses on child-centered political and educational progress, developed in the United States in the twentieth century [9]. Even more closely linked to Skinnerian methodology are John Howlett and Paul John McDonald, scholars at Homerton College, Cambridge University, who in their essay *Quentin Skinner, Intentionality and the History of Education* explain how the methodology of the British researcher can be operational for a rereading of the progressive educational tradition. This tradition is to be understood as that philosophy of education that emphasizes the freedom and centrality of the child in the educational process. Since the postwar period, many narratives have constructed a linearist history of progressivism, based on a textualist approach, often starting with Rousseau and Frie-

drich Fröbel and culminating in the more recent ideas of Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire. Through Skinner's lesson, Howlett and McDonald show examples of the limit of this type of historical approach, which does not deal with the dynamic relationship between a writer's thought and the contextual networks in which it operates.

This lack has generated one of the most evident deformations that have developed within the conceptualization of progressivism, that of superimposing progressive-scholastic thought and movement.

The second part of the essay also re-examines the relationship between two of the main progressive thinkers, Susan Isaacs and Alexander S. Neill, to highlight important differences related to the use of concepts that contradict the harmonic idea and the fusion of their thought within a unitary scheme [6].

Outside of British and American intellectual historiography of education, Skinnerian methodology finds important examples of application in the essays of Jon Igelmo Zaldívar, in collaboration with both Rosa Bruno-Jofré and Patricia Quiroga Uceda. With the first, Igelmo Zaldívar wrote *The Center for Intercultural Formation, Cuernavaca, Mexico, its Reports (1962-1967) and Illich's critical understanding of mission in Latin America* [10]; with the second scholar, he wrote *Las palabras son también hechos: Quentin Skinner, el giro contextual y la teoría de la educación, Teoría de la Educación* [11].

Both works show the argumentative-persuasive force behind Ivan Illich's works. In particular, the first essay analyzes *The Deschooling Society*, and the second analyzes *The Seamy of Charity and The Priest of Escape*, classic works by Illich. The authors criticize Illich's classification within the Spanish academic community, considered an extreme thinker of the educational radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, of which *The Deschooling Society* is the most representative work.

Bruno-Jofré and Igelmo Zaldívar show how this work, in reality, shares the linguistic conventions of its time, exploiting critical concepts of progress, highly developed by the American countercultural movement of the post-war period. Furthermore, *The Deschooling Society* adapts to the conventional educational context typical of popular education of the 1960s and 1970s, based on the reference work of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. Finally, when Illich's work promotes the use of technology in learning processes to reconfigure institutional and relational structures between teacher and student, he incorporates concepts present in the cultural context of North America in the 1950s, with thinkers such as Philip G. Johnson [10].

To fully understand the strength of *The Deschooling Society* and other ecclesiastical writings by Illich, Bruno-Jofré, Igelmo Zaldívar and Quiroga Uceda recall the thinker's career and difficult relationship with the Catholic Church. A priest and founder in 1961 of the CIC, in Cuernavaca, Mexico, for the training of missionaries, Illich had tense relations with the Vatican due to the continuous criticism of the methods of the

Latin Church, developed through the aforementioned *Seamy of Charity* and by the intellectuals who were part of the Center. The culmination of the struggle came in 1968 with Illich's declaration before the tribunal of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican. The dispute ended in 1969 with the publication in the *New York Times* of Illich's decision to stop writing theological texts and not to speak about the problems of the Catholic Church. However, he continued his battle against modern institutions by beginning to criticize school systems.

Therefore, a history of educational thought on Illich must take into account that the illocutionary force present in *The Deschooling Society* is linked «not so much to the criticism of the pedagogical action of schools [...] but to the need to give continuity to a line of theological thought that had been censored by the Vatican authorities» (p. 195) [11].

The essays *On the Rhetoric of 'What Works': Contextualizing Educational Research and the Picture of Performativity*, by Paul Smeyers and Marc Depaepe and *The Educational Theorists, The Teachers, and their History of Education*, by Rita Casale of the University of Wuppertal are further studies on education that refer to Skinner's methodology [12, 13].

Paul Smeyers and Marc Depaepe try to define a kind of *Zeitgeist*, which creates the favorable climate in which educational ideas can be developed and transmitted. They propose the Skinnerian concept of the normative force of dominant languages that can be respected or subverted [12].

Rita Casale's work fits into the controversial debate on the relationship between the history of ideas of education and social history to affirm that educational theory and practice are united. To support this thesis, she emphasizes the Skinnerian concept of intentional meaning, which cannot be separated from contingent linguistic and social conventions. The author also collects much of the content of Skinner's criticism that rejects the history of ideas incorporated into an intellectual void of Platonic beliefs, to reconsider them as agents that reproduce, institutionalize, or modify certain traditions and meanings [13].

Daniel Tröhler, a Swiss professor at the Institut für Bildungswissenschaft of the University of Vienna, is another researcher who has developed the Skinnerian methodology, in particular in the essay *The New Languages and Old Institutions: Problems of Implementing New School Governance* and, above all, in the monograph *Languages of education: Protestant legacies, national identities, and global aspirations* [14, 15].

In the first work, Skinner's conceptual tools are inserted into the study of the problems of contemporary school reforms. In this topic, the Viennese professor deepens the analysis of the language used by school reformers, based on the concept of Skinnerian convention and on its rhetorical capacity to show a framework of competitive discourses that compete with ideological hegemony [15].

In the book published in 2011, Tröhler analyses the languages present at an international level in the theories and

educational systems of the last centuries of modernization, connecting them with concepts and linguistic schemes developed in the historical-religious and political speeches and works of the Protestant area.

Tröhler uses the categories of the British historian (context, convention and intention), including within the terminology of the Genevan linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), in particular the terms *langue* and *parole*. Tröhler himself speaks of this correspondence: *langue* is what the British historian means by linguistic context, the defined system of expressive possibilities, characterized by conditioning or dominant conventions and beliefs; *parole* is the enunciation, the form of the text, always in relation to the contextual reality, even if it can oppose it or propose an alternative position, present in it in contemporary reality or taken from a remote place. Since a text can never completely free itself from its context, it cannot yet be a prisoner of it, thanks to the author's intention. Closing a circle around Skinner's methodological work, Tröhler's work concludes by explicitly recalling the British historian on contemporary issues, to affirm that the great educational problems of the current sense must be addressed through the construction of awareness in one's own point of view in order not to fall into readings completely absorbed by the dominant cultural paradigms [15].

## 6. C Testimonies of Unity-Ideas: British Progressivism and Italian Christianity

Progressivism in British educational theory is an educational movement that has its roots in the 19th century, developed in the 1920s and 1930s and especially after the Second World War. Progressivism developed as a reaction to the traditional and authoritarian teaching methods of the time to place the student at the center of the educational process, promote active learning methods and value direct experience. Each individual has unique needs, aptitudes and interests and teaching must conform to these differences, promoting the freedom of the learner. Students are encouraged to actively participate in their learning through activities, projects and real-life experiences. The main ways of progressive education are laboratories, school trips and other activities that allow students to learn by doing.

American scholars William H. Kilpatrick and John Dewey are considered historical reference authors of British progressivism, the first especially through the project Method, which promotes learning through practical and collaborative projects; the second author is important for the valorization of experience and active interaction with the environment, as well as for the resolution of contextualized problems motivated by practical needs and interests. Among the major interpreters of British progressivism are Bridget Horatia Plowden, Susan Isaacs and Alexander Sutherland Neill. The report *Children and their Primary Schools*, published in 1967 and commonly known as the *Plowden Report* is the document

that marks the full affirmation of progress in the history of English educational theory and practices.

Progressivism is usually represented as a homogeneous and above all linear movement oriented towards its full affirmation. In reality, as Howlett and McDonald have shown, there are important differences between its interpreters. One of these concerns the idea of intelligence, which Isaacs and Neill act in very different ways [6].

Isaacs, who wrote mainly in the 1930s, understood intelligence according to the meanings consistent with the context of his time, that is, a static and non-multi-level phenomenon. Intelligence is an innate ability and rather impermeable to the effects due to interaction with the environment. This vision was shared by authors of the time. Isaacs was also consistent with the "organicist" ideas of the time, developed for example by George Campion, according to which there is a close and rigid relationship between intelligence and age, with no attention to the social context in which an individual lives. If we analyze the term intelligence in relation to the British context of the 1960s in which Neill wrote and worked, we can realize, instead, how much he explicitly tried to subvert the linguistic conventions of his time. In the 1960s, the idea that intelligence was a measurable intellectual reality was universally accepted. Furthermore it was thought that this process of quantification could be achieved through formal tests and examinations, which both medicine, psychology and school could develop.

Intelligence was also a faculty that allowed us to recognize the value of the teacher's authority and social hierarchies, as expressed by Richard S. Peters, Arthur Jensen and Richard Lynn among the authors [6].

These ideas about intelligence were supported by the general belief that only experimental and quantitative science could be able to define the concept.

Neill, who was the headmaster of Summerhill School, opposed the idea of shared intelligence in the dominant context of his time supported by previous authors.

In fact, his conception of intelligence is completely separate from the scientific discursive framework in which most of the normative contextual literature operates. For Neill, intelligence cannot be defined or developed through scientifically proven pedagogical techniques. To develop intelligence, the child's freedom must first be guaranteed. Neither teachers nor tests are authorities that can be trusted with the growth of intelligence in a clear-cut and absolute way. Neill's entire conception of intelligence also conflicts with the belief of the time that the faculties of intelligence are necessarily consistent with the advancement of an individual's social position [6].

Another testimony of idea-unity is the christian concept, used in Italian pedagogy from the twentieth century to the present, developed within the Catholic context. Italian Catholic scholars, especially since the second half of the twentieth century, systematically use the word christian to define their discipline, and christianity to name the culture to which they belong, as is evident in Scholé's publications. Founded in 1954, the institution was born after years of efforts to coor-

dinate catholic forces between scholars and operators in the field of education, such as teachers and professors of the UCIIM (Italian Catholic Teachers Union) [16].

From the point of view of discursive relations, the use of the words christian and christianity establishes a relationship of affinity with both philosophy and personalist politics. With the first, there are convergences at international and national level, developed in the 1930s and 1940s, in particular with the Centro Studi Filosofici di Gallarate, created in 1944, a key institution in Italy for twentieth-century philosophy. In the political sphere, the same terms were used by the Christian Democracy, which was always the first party to govern the Italian Republic, from its constitution in 1948 until 1994 [17].

From a semantic-persuasive point of view, the use of christianity and christian by Schol s pedagogues is an example of unity-ideas, that is, tools oriented by a rhetorical intention to legitimize/delegitimize an identity. The ideas of unity are universalized notions that level the complexity, relationships, differences, discrepancies and evolution of a historical phenomenon. Christianity and christian, in the context in which they were used, implicitly allow the Italian thinkers of Schol  to self-evaluate; to present themselves as bearers of an "ecumenical" thought, given the variety and lack of historical unity of Christian confessions. It is thought of as a message considered valid for all believers in Jesus; a discourse of truth that must be spread among non-believers. Significantly, the terms catholicism and catholic are used much less frequently, and always as synonyms of the whole of christianity. We must not forget that in the world, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there is a great variety of christian confessions in addition to the best known ones, such as catholic and protestant, zwinglian, lutheran, calvinist and anglican. Christianity as knowledge valid for everyone and at all times implies considering its reference as necessary and irreplaceable in the definition and education of the person as obvious. However, the historical analysis projects the dynamics of the mimicry of the catholic point of view of the construct, that of being the traditional religion in Italy.

The organization, the men and the ideas expressed at the first Schol  congress, significantly entitled *Christian Education* (1954) and considered fundamental for Italian educational personalism, are highly emblematic [18]. The congress, in fact, was financed by the catholic publishing house La Scuola and was preceded by a mass, celebrated with the Roman rite by the only religious authority present, the bishop of Brescia Giacinto Tredici. All the foreign researchers invited came from catholic universities: Raymond Buyse and Albert Kriekemans from the University of Leuven (Belgium), Adolfo Mu oz Alonso from the University of Murcia (Spain), Emile Planchard from the University of Coimbra (Portugal) and Raymond Savioz from the University of Zurich (Switzerland).

The professors based the work of the Center on official documents of the Roman Church without historically clarifying the concept of christianity. In the introduction to the congress, Aldo Agazzi indicated the institution's objective as:

«to outline the concept of Christian education and to specify how Christianity affects education». Subsequently, Agazzi highlighted that the authorities come only from the Roman Church of modern history (Juan Bosco, Andr s Manj n and Jacques Maritain), representatives of the «pantheon of "eternal" Christianity [which] must be the reference [...] in the world of education today» (p. 13) [19].

Mario Casotti, one of the main education researchers in Italy at the time, also used Agazzi's universalist communication scheme. He defined Schol  and his work as «Christian», and said that it «includes the entire movement of philosophical-pedagogical thought that is based on the teachings of the Gospel and those writers and thinkers inspired by the Gospel» (pp. 23-24) [20]. Luigi Stefanini, at the same congress, also used the word christianity in a universal way. In fact, he stated that «Christianity has been a driving force of the long and not always linear path of the history of humanity, stimulating man to actualize the values that are inherent to his nature» (p. 40) [21]. If we go through the history of Italian pedagogy and arrive at the beginning of the new millennium, we find the same unitary use of the concept of Christianity. A significant testimony is given by Giuseppe Bertagna, who had an important role in Schol  through the presentation of interventions in important conferences, such as in 2004, with the report entitled christian education and teaching of religion, where the universalist concept returns [22]. Similarly, in the book *Dietro una riforma*, he defends the «Christian tradition» which, more than the classical roots, has contributed to «teaching Europe and the world the concept and practice of the 'human individual' who recognizes himself as such to the extent that he is infinitely open to the other through the *logos*» (p. 348) [23].

## 7. Conclusions

Skinner's method of analysis is particularly effective for understanding historical meanings in education. Through a systematic and rigorous approach, it allows us to reconstruct the context in which educational theories are developed or received. In this way, the authentic meaning of the concepts expressed by authors and educators emerges, as they are placed in the historical dynamics that generated them, allowing us to grasp the intentions, the purpose, the desire for conformity or the transformative charge. The general concepts, such as progressivism or christianity used in the theory, are better articulated and defined internally through the construct of Skinner's idea-unity, which in this way presents itself as a tool for making more nuanced and profound educational evaluations.

Precisely thanks to those evaluations, the researcher can also develop comparisons of ideas and pedagogical intentions between authors, movements and eras, at a much more refined level of knowledge.

From Skinner's methodology it also emerges that the dynamics of development of educational theories are not a sim-

ple exposition of ideas, which can travel undisturbed beyond contexts and eras. Historical roots and cultural contexts necessarily intertwine with ideas, practice and theory are always intimately connected.

Furthermore, by highlighting the internal logic and connections between the various concepts, the thought of an author, studied through context analysis, clearly shows the argumentative framework that his educational theory develops. This not only facilitates the understanding of the theories themselves, but also allows us to evaluate their validity and relationship with the meanings of current events. Thanks to this method, it is possible to recognize the strengths and any critical points of the different educational theories, providing a solid basis for further developments and research.

Skinner's analytical approach allows us to build an education theory that is not abstract, but deeply rooted in historical and social reality, offering concrete tools for the practical application of educational ideas. The absolute nature of an education theory, which bases its concepts only on abstraction, risks being generic, misunderstood and exploited. Excessive trust in universal principles without a reflection that enters into historical complexity can lead to an ethical intellectualism for which a good theory is sufficient to change and improve practices. In reality, concepts, when they cross contexts, always interact with the meanings of those environments. The school context and educational realities in general are no exception to this complexity. The implicit, rooted and conventional meanings must be made explicit by the same tools of educational theory if we want it to be a force of conscious and purpose-oriented intervention that can confirm, modify or subvert reality itself.

## Abbreviations

CIC	Cultural Research Center
UCIIM	Unione Cattolica Italiana Insegnanti Medi
VV.AA.	Various Authors

## Author Contributions

Daniel Boccacci is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Biography



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