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# Towards a Thinking and Practice of Sexual Difference: Putting the Practice of Relationship at the Centre

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## Abstract

This article seeks to open up a discussion of issues relating to the significance of sexual difference, the thinking and politics emerging from it and how it might affect educational philosophy. It briefly examines the initial work of Luce Irigaray, which has become quite influential in parts of the English speaking world, particularly focussing on the idea that there are implications for our educational objectives if gender equality were to be put in question as one of the underlying paradigms with which to measure children's performance. It then looks at the work of some groups of Italian philosophers and educationalists who have not been translated into English and are consequently

less well known. Their work has been devoted to exploring Irigaray's challenge to re-think the world from the perspective of sexual difference. In particular, in tune with the theme of this special issue, this article shows how this work puts forward the practice and philosophy of relationship for consideration at different stages of the educational process, focussing particularly on Luisa Muraro's philosophical 'invention' of the symbolic order of the mother as a way to bring into the shared world the erased sexual difference that Irigaray had articulated. Muraro's work considers the meaning of the first relationship between mother and infant and suggests that the mother, or the one doing her work, is in fact the first and ongoing educator and transmitter of philosophy, a fact that is only partially recognised in our formal educational structures. The article introduces, finally, the idea that as the historical patterns of mainly women teaching younger children and men teaching older children are shifting, to understand the need for and argue for a more sexuate world, with both sexes participating in the educational process at all stages would allow for the possibility of a new discussion of concepts that are already central to educationalists such as equality, freedom, autonomy, authority, flourishing and the relationship with parents.

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## Introduction—Equality is not Enough: Bringing the Practice of Relationship into the Foreground

In the last centuries, in the Western world, educational systems and beliefs have undergone considerable changes. There has been a huge shift with respect to 'gender' equality due to the politics and thinking that argued for the inclusion of girls and women in formal education in absolutely the same conditions as boys and men. This goal has, in many ways, been achieved.

When we hear of horrendous situations for girls and women in other, more distant countries, it seems only natural to believe and support the idea that what would make life better for them would be to fight for educational rights such as Western children and youth now enjoy.<sup>1</sup>

The underlying assumption is that an equal opportunity to education implies a direct relationship with personal and social freedom. However, this assumption has been problematised in recent decades. It is a difficult subject to unpack and tackle because there is so much of value in the Western history of education as a whole, and so much work, courage and passion has gone into bringing about the present educational possibilities for both sexes. And yet, issues concerning equality remain. We are challenged frequently with the idea that girls are presently attaining at a higher level than boys at school. Indeed, in some European countries now, girls outnumber boys in university classrooms. Newspapers and research reports multiply, assessing the situation and discussing the implications for boys, as a quick Google search will demonstrate, bringing up many studies and reports in the last year alone which attempt to explain *why* this is the case and why it is a matter for concern. It is as if, having situated girls as the victims of an unfair situation for centuries, and fighting for them to be included on equal terms in the classroom, we now have a situation whereby the pendulum has swung the other

way to turn boys into the victims. This is a logical argument following on from one of the main aims of feminist movements to ensure an equality of opportunity for women and men at all levels of society. As long as our tools and paradigms for measuring the behaviour and performance of boys and girls remain anchored in the belief that the logical and just outcome should be one where neither sex outperforms the other, it is likely that we will continue to see questions such as this arising.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to go beyond this paradigm given that an influential feminist endeavour of the past few hundred years in the West has been to fight very hard for the right to inclusion in the public world on the same terms as the male sex. However, as we shall see below, a considerable amount of work has taken place in the last half century, put in motion by the question of Luce Irigaray 'Égales à qui? [Equal to Who?]', which invites us to start asking questions emphasising the signifier of sexual difference. These questions might enable us to go beyond the concern that boys and girls should perform to the same standards and produce the same results. Bringing the signifier of sexual difference into play means that we cannot take for granted that the same achievement (or not) in tests and exams is a reliable measure of children's flourishing.

If we consider Irigaray's idea that becoming equal to men might not be the clear path to female freedom that has been supposed and that sexual difference could reveal itself to be a signifier that releases the human potential of *both* sexes, then what constitutes equal education? In the same way as we might apply the signifier of sexual difference to the learning of girls and boys, we can also ask whether this signifier might be applied to male and female educators and begin to ask questions from a fresh perspective. What is taught? How is it taught? Who is it taught by? Is it possible that much of the substance of what is taught depends on a historically *male* version of what is important and a *male* interpretation of how the world works? How to change this to reflect a teaching environment whereby both sexes are free to flourish and bring their difference into the classroom?

At the same time, we have to ask questions about the way that the *relationships* between those who teach and those who are taught have been conceived in what is recognised by many as a patriarchal symbolic order that recognised male authority above all. Has the massive incorporation of the female sex in education changed this substance or method? The answers to this are far from clear, but it seems important to ask the questions (e.g. see Riddell *et al.*, 2005; Griffiths, 2006 ).

## Luce Irigaray and the Implications in Education of Her Challenge to Rethink the World

Luce Irigaray ( 1974 ) has presented us with a political as well as a philosophical challenge. Following Heidegger's idea that each age has something to think through anew, she suggests that sexual difference is that 'something' for our current era; in her view, Western philosophy and culture have been based on the experience and interpretation of only one of the sexes and that this one sex has utilised and usurped the experience and meaning of the other, 'different', sex. In her opinion, the female sex has not yet signified itself in a free way. In fact, neither has the male sex done so, given its history of dominance, usurpation, elimination or subjugation of that which was different from itself. So, for her, the feminist project to establish and ensure equality for women and men has developed into a more sophisticated questioning of whether this project was in fact sufficient for the true flourishing of

both sexes.<sup>3</sup>

To signify, or to name, is to make symbolic order.<sup>4</sup> Irigaray intimates that our symbolic order is biased, *out* of order, and proposed that we apply the signifier of sexual difference to it. That is, to reconsider how we might signify ourselves and our world, through the prism of sexual difference.

If we accept this challenge, no aspect of our world and the junctures at which our lives connect and interrelate to it remain the same. Education, in all its dimensions, is clearly at the heart of this challenge. Our educational systems and activities cannot help but be a reflection of the beliefs and values that underlie those of our symbolic order. Even more, we might contemplate that through educational structures an intensification of the transmission of the existing symbolic order is facilitated. What is being transmitted and the way in which this transmission takes place through the hierarchies of relationships mark the organisation of educational structures on every level, from the relationships between politicians of education, managers of education, teachers themselves and parents, particularly mothers, given the latter are, generally and to date those most involved with each child's formation from the very first. Thus, if Irigaray is correct and our symbolic order is seriously biased, this educational process may require serious interrogation. It is a symbolic order that has historically left women out in terms of recognising them as the first and ongoing teachers of children in their capacity as mothers, that has been late to incorporate women as formal teachers and philosophers of education, and that seems still to pay little attention to relationships of power and authority that may still be operating negatively in the politics of how education is organised. Further, the current symbolic order is unlikely to be one which happily recognises and works with female authority and the order that comes into being through the maternal relationship with an infant as soon as or even before it is born.

In Italy and Spain, groups of teachers and lecturers have been working on these issues for the past 40 years (see Puissi, 2013 ). The work of these educators shares aspects with educational theorists who seek to realign the close intersections between relationship and the educational enterprise—of which the articles in this special issue are a strong sample—but they are unique in grounding themselves in what has been called the politics of the symbolic or the politics of sexual difference. In this politics, we are asked to re-think ourselves as *sexuate* human beings, born of and brought into the world of shared meaning and language by a woman—our mother or the one in her place—and always relating to the world through this *sexuate* self. The practice of relationship itself is seen to be the central vehicle through which human beings learn and understand themselves, others, and the world around them.

This idea of a *sexuate* self has tremendous implications for theories and practices of education. This is particularly so, given a historically dominant model of educational philosophy that has seen the mother and the work she does in the first years of an infant's life as peripheral, both in terms of the influence that this work has on a human being and understanding it as the first main model of how learning takes place: that is, learning is always contingent upon relationship.<sup>5</sup> As a child grows older and passes through different educational phases, the idea that relationships are key to how learning transpires do not receive much attention. There is a strong recognition that teachers make a difference to learning<sup>6</sup> but not that *relationship* is the central and vital vehicle that ensures the transmission of knowledge.

The connection between this disregard of the centrality of relationship and a patriarchal order that did not tend to recognise female authority—and certainly did not consider women in terms of development of the mind or as producers of great knowledge—is not an innocent one. The work of Irigaray and then others, particularly Luisa Muraro, first opens up questions about what this means for formal education,

and second, brings women back on to the central stage for a new discussion about the potential for the meaning of sexual difference at all levels of education, formal and otherwise. A feminism that seeks equality with men can only do this to a certain extent, since the underlying male model remains strong and may resist the free movement of sexual difference, thus generating a lot of tension and confusion. One of the paradoxes when it comes to applying a theory of equality is that it allows little room for the reality of evident non-equality in the relationships between human beings. The truth is that nearly all human relationships, let alone those between women and men, are asymmetrical; there are moments of total dependence on the other, partial dependence and relative independence or interdependence. If we consider the arena of education, we see that framing relationships in terms of equality will not get us very far. A thinking that takes on fully the importance, on both a philosophical and practical level, of the centrality of relationship to education may prove more fruitful at this stage.

## Sexual Difference as Political Strategy

**Irigaray's** context at the time of writing *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974/1985) was both that of an exciting, rapidly developing women's movement but also that of a woman who had enjoyed access to an extensive level of education in a previously male-dominated intellectual world, a woman who had received the fruits of what women for various centuries had been striving for. It was from this position, however, that her *experience* entered into conflict with what must have seemed, in principle, the chance to enjoy privileges and apparent freedoms that previous women could only have dreamed of. *Speculum of the Other Woman* is perhaps the result of that collision between theory and experience, and, through that collision, a new theory is forged.

Was it, then, precisely this collision, between a woman (one of many of her generation) permitted finally to access areas of life that seemingly represented freedom, (education, for instance) and a symbolic order and intellectual tradition that in fact had little room for her *sexual* freedom that enabled her to bring forth the mediation that she did?

That Irigaray's thinking emerges from the feminist context of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the Western world is no accident. This period of women's history has had a huge impact in many places of the globe. I would say that her challenge, that of an urgent need to (re) think sexual difference is deeply rooted in and born out of the women's politics of that time. However, it may be that this has not been fully understood. In particular, there is a lack of recognition of its connections with the particular French-Italian-Spanish feminist movements from which it emerged.

## The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and Diotima: The Practice of Relationship Itself as a Political Form

Irigaray was translated into Italian by Luisa Muraro. Luisa Muraro was one of several women philosophers who, together with women from other spheres, created Diotima, the Women's Philosophical Community at the University of Verona in 1983. Prior to this, much of the philosophical thinking and women's politics referred to here had originated around the Milan Women's Bookstore,

whose book, *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1987), constitutes almost the only text that exists in an English translation of this history (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1990). Irigaray's incitement to re-think sexual difference had a significant impact on the directions that the above-mentioned Italian women were to take politically and theoretically. The contradictions they observed between feminist struggles in Italy at the time and women's actual experiences inspired them to take sexual difference as a starting point as they explored and invented what they called political figures—the practice of attributing new meaning to old words and concepts, this time including their experience as women seeking greater freedom in the world. In their work and thinking together, they began to formulate the idea that, for sexual difference to come more strongly and freely into being, the practice and naming of relationships between women might in fact be the ground of a new political point of departure:

It is very likely that none of us were taught that we needed to take special care of our relations with other women and to consider them an irreplaceable source of personal strength, originality of mind, and social self-assurance. And it is difficult to have a notion of how necessary this is because in the culture we receive, a few products of female origin have been preserved, but not their symbolic matrix, so that they appear to us as regenerated by male thought (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1990, p. 28).

The women of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and Diotima invented a word, *affidamento*, translated into English as entrustment. This particular concept developed into work on the figure of female authority, understanding authority as a relational, circulating political figure. Authority was perceived as a *relational* quality of symbolic wealth freely available to be used immediately between women; it does not require *a priori* access to echelons of power.

The women of Milan and Diotima saw the relationships between women as of *primary political* importance. They believed that one of the first keys to bringing sexual difference into the world more strongly was to start by giving more significance to relationships between women as a site where sexual difference could be developed and nurtured, then to be made stronger in the shared world.

To illustrate this, they take and rework Virginia Woolf's proposal of a room of one's own (Woolf, 1929). It is not enough, they say, to have a physical, material room, because without a new symbolic placement, we may not know what to do there. If women manage to acquire that room, and the economic means to occupy it, they may, nevertheless, not know how to use it, since it cannot be a question of merely adopting the ways in which men have used similar space:

Virginia Woolf maintained that in order to do intellectual work, one needs a room of one's own. However, it may be impossible to keep still and apply oneself to work in that room because the texts and their subjects seem like extraneous, oppressive blocks of words and facts through which the mind cannot make its way, paralysed as it is by emotions which have no corresponding terms in language. The room of one's own must be understood differently, then, as a symbolic placement, a space-time furnished with female gendered references, where one goes for meaningful preparation before work, and

confirmation after (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, 1990 , p. 26).

According to this idea, however much apparent equality and power in the given world women might achieve, however many laws are passed to protect and guarantee their theoretical freedom, the point remains that without this symbolic placement, rooted and nurtured in the relationships between them, women and girls will continue to be fragile in the world.

## The Symbolic Order of the Mother- Luisa Muraro

Luisa Muraro in her book *L'ordine simbolico della madre* [ *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* ] (Muraro, 1991a ),<sup>7</sup> sets out to investigate the point of departure of what she calls the free existence of women in the world. As a philosopher at the University of Verona who also participated in Diotima and the Milan Women's Bookstore, she found herself with the problem of having been drawn to the discipline of philosophy only to discover that the philosophy she learned at university was not able to provide her with what she was looking for. She explains in her book:

Philosophy attracted me because I was looking for symbolic independence from given reality. I wanted to never again find myself at the mercy of casual and unforeseen happenings. But I did not achieve it because, as I finally understood, the philosophy that was able to shelter me from the capricious domain of the real, at the same time set me against my mother, whose work I judged, implicitly, to be badly done. I wanted to go to the beginning of things to understand and to understand myself; however, I was going against my mother (1994, p. 8).

That is, Muraro wanted to go back to the 'origins' in order to understand herself and her position in the world and had seen philosophy as the language and discipline that would enable her to do so. However, she discovered that those origins contemplated by philosophical thought made almost no mention of her mother—her mother was conspicuous by her absence. Muraro writes of the importance in philosophy of the starting point, referring back to Plato, Descartes and Husserl and suggests that they were missing something. They were lacking in something because, as Irigaray suggests, the basis of Western philosophical thinking was predicated on the usurpation of the female sex, not least the work of the mother. So, the starting point had been taken from that work but disguised and presented as something else that excluded the mother. In seeking reference points from those male thinkers, Muraro discovers that she is being asked to go against the work of her mother. What is more, a part of her is attracted to this possibility. The symbolic independence from chance events that she seeks, offered to her by her philosophical predecessors, tempts her to forget that her origins lie in the work of her mother:

Because in me there was, without my knowing it, a dark aversion towards the author of my life, which philosophy came to reanimate in a kind of way, and because between this and

that dark feeling a vicious circle had been formed (1994, p. 8).

This is a paradox that, on reflection, is almost inevitable for women educated through a male model of education who have believed for centuries that accessing and participating in it was their route to freedom. From this new perspective, however, we can see that the issue is more complex and in terms of sexual freedom, will inevitably lead to contradictions and distortions. Muraro set to finding a way out of this vicious circle, and this was the lever for her discovery of a new starting point, a founding stone that signalled a 'fresh' place from which to think the self and the world. This founding stone was to be found in the work of the mother, a work of relationship which, in male thought, had barely been symbolised.

Luisa Muraro distinguishes between speaking of the mother as a metaphor and speaking of her symbolically. This is perhaps a fundamental but difficult point. It is possibly this confusion that leads to critiques of this thinking as a kind of idealised matriarchy, an essentialist utopian thinking that clashes clearly with both women and men's experience of real women who are, like men, flawed human beings capable of causing harm as well as good. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that when Muraro brings the term *symbolic order of the mother* into being, she is deeply rooted in the politics of sexual difference and seeks to avoid such idealisations.

She acknowledges herself to be poor in her own knowledge of this symbolic order and unclear at first as to where it might lead, but suggests that one way to explore this is to resort to the real experiences that we have as infants in relation to our mother, or the one in her place. That is, it is not necessary to make of our mothers a metaphor, a romantic idealisation. It is a question of restoring that relationship to a different place, allowing us to unravel the confusion of having started off in that relationship and having received our first philosophical base there, receiving language and meaning through that primary first relationship, to then be introduced through the general culture and formal schooling to the notion that the generation of meaning and the philosophical have little to do with the mother.

In Muraro's training as a philosopher at university the mother had been absent. That her mother was the author, literally, of Muraro's life, was of course an undeniable fact. But as the transmitter and creator of meaning through that first relationship via which an infant is brought into the shared world of understanding (the symbolic order), she was absent. So, Muraro is saying, our political task is to symbolise (attribute meaning to/make philosophy of) the process that takes place between mother and infant and understand that this is the starting point of philosophy—for both sexes:

I will write to say my meaning of mother. But first, I should say that the non-metaphorical symbolism of the mother was not waiting for me to discover it in order to have a place; it already has a place, in fact, and a very strong place, a fortress, in our infancy... I entrust, therefore, to the little girl that I was, those with whom I grew up, the little girls and boys that live amongst us, the task of affirming the non-metaphoric symbolism of the mother. I will take on board the task, a secondary one, of translating it into philosophy (1994, p. 20).

We might question the idea that the task of translating this into philosophy is a secondary one. In fact,

the endeavour undertaken by Muraro is potentially a radical operation, since, if we accept it, we are challenged to rethink our conceptual framings of the world from an entirely new starting point. That said, the point being made by Muraro is that this symbolic work is already being and has always been done, by mothers or the one in her place. The confusion arises in that what is taught and transmitted as the work and thought of philosophy has been deprived of the recognition of its origins. She says:

As we know, philosophers have been inspired by the figure and the work of the mother. They, however, inverting the order of the operation carried out, have presented the maternal work as a copy (and many times a bad copy) of the real thing. In this they have been complicit with the patriarchy, which presents the father as the true author of life (1994, p. 20).

She sees her task then to restore this to language, to translate what is in fact already happening in the primary relationship with the infant into the philosophy that circulates in the world.

Dependence, in this case that of an infant on the adults who care for her, is a notion that is crystallising into a 'new' understanding of our conceptualisation of relational structures.<sup>8</sup> The reality of dependence as a necessary element of many relationships acts as a stumbling block when we want to perceive ourselves as autonomous subjects who can be guaranteed protection in that autonomy through law. This dependence on the mother (or the one in her place) presents us with a paradigm then for a different philosophy of relationship. Muraro explains that she is (only) introducing into philosophy that which in reality she was given by her mother:

I introduce into philosophy what my mother signifies for me, basing myself on what it meant when my need and dependence on her was total. But I should add that it was her who introduced me to philosophy, as she did to everything else that I know. How this happened, I still do not know very well, but it has to be taken literally and not in the manner of the philosophers (1994, p. 20).

In continuation, Muraro writes of the way in which feminism, in its more recent history, had tried to deconstruct the patriarchal system in order to be free of it, an endeavour which has proved to be never ending. Muraro claims that once the vicious circle is broken, through restoring the mother and her work to philosophy, the path to the dismantling of patriarchal systems changes and becomes far less tiring. A free sense of existence will be found, she argues, neither in the philosophical systems which have based their development on the usurpation of the maternal work nor in the arduous attempt to challenge those systems on every level in order to transform them. There is a simpler route. She argues that it is rather gratitude and recognition of that first work of the symbolic order that will open up a place of freedom for both sexes.

To illustrate this operation, she writes of her own experience in relation to her own discipline. Once able to translate the reality of her philosophical origins in her relationship with her mother into symbolic wealth/order (that is, she found a language for it), she discovered a philosophical freedom that

liberated her from the need to fight against what she now perceived as false attempts to appropriate those origins. Once she had discovered this new route, she no longer felt that she had to put her energies into arguing against the existing systems of philosophy.

She writes of how, once she had reached this point and named it, the previous ideas, which she had spent years learning and working with, ceased to bother her. It might have been thought that a long process would have had to take place for her to liberate herself. However, this proved not to be so—this apprenticeship to the philosophy that had evolved through a long patriarchal history merely slipped from her. Neither did she need to reject this learning; it seemed to resituate itself into a place that was simply no longer problematic for her:

I have found the following explanation: it is obvious that anti-maternal contents exist in (my) philosophical culture, but they have not been able to take root profoundly in me for the simple reason that precisely the anti-maternal meaning of a great part of philosophy has prevented me from learning it well. In other words, whilst admitting that the most rigorous feminism may be right about the need to unlearn patriarchal culture, and I accept this, the problem for me is turning out to be very simple, because in my case it is a matter of unlearning something that I never managed to learn (1994, p. 18).

A new operation had taken place, then, one that Muraro and others were to understand and name as an operation of the symbolic. She understood that this operation was vital if the efforts of feminism to break through patriarchy were to take effect, and not, as seen throughout women's history, be partially erased generation after generation. Muraro writes:

Feminism has produced a profound critique of the patriarchy and of the multiple philosophical and religious complicities which have sustained its system of domination. But this work of criticism, although it is vast and precise, will be erased within one or two generations if it does not find its affirmation. Only that can return to society, and above all, to women, the symbolic strength contained in the female relationship to the mother and neutralised by male dominion (1994, p. 21).

## Questions in Education

Returning the mother, or rather, the work of the mother,<sup>9</sup> to philosophy, particularly educational philosophy, opens us up to a whole new landscape. One of the paradoxes we are presented with is that a great part of the work of formal education for arguably the most formative years of children's lives is already carried out mostly by women in many cultures. If this work is understood in philosophical terms as a continuation of the work already begun by the mother, if there is not a violent rupture with that order, presumably this transition will be more harmonious.

There are many questions raised by the thinking of Irigaray and Muraro, and little scope to develop them here. If the idea is that change can come about through women authorising one another in their experience as women, as sexuate subjects (and the same applies to the male sexuate difference), bringing change into the classroom would require an *a priori* recognition of this fact. It might lead to a situation in which men and women teachers would understand that embracing this sexuate difference and working *with* it could generate a new awareness of how relationships between them might change. The initial idea would be to transform our rather fearful and conservative need to all be the same, into a journey towards a whole new plethora of possibilities emerging from the idea that the difference between the sexes, as Irigaray had postulated (1974, 1984) may well be an exciting point of departure.

If we acknowledge the historical omission of mothers and women as the first philosophers in their work to bring children into a shared symbolic order, we are able to see that restoring this knowledge to philosophy requires us to look again at every stage of the educational process. As that process continues, more men are introduced as teachers of children. The politics of sexual difference insists that the flourishing of sexuate difference in both women and men, girls and boys, relies, ultimately, on *both* sexes taking up the challenge to rethink themselves and the world.

In terms of education, there is a relative lack of men at earlier stages of children's lives. By the time young people reach further education, however, they may learn with more male teachers than female. There are many issues at stake here if we consider that, by the time of university, until recently, teachers have been predominantly male and transmitting knowledge often still predicated on the usurpation of the maternal work. That is, as education progresses, culture and knowledge is ever more stripped of both the recognition of the symbolic order of the mother, and, until relatively recently, the real presence of women as teachers.

This article holds that key concepts already very central to many of those committed to educational philosophy, such as equality, freedom, autonomy, authority, flourishing and the relationship with parents, could well be nourished and enriched through a consideration of the work taking place that as yet is little known in the English language. At the same time, if we refer back to the questions posed in the introduction ('What is taught and learnt? Why is it taught and learnt? How is it taught and learnt? Who is it taught and learnt by?'), we can see that there may be some value in reconsidering these concepts in the light of this work.

Whilst this article has sought to show the already existing work attempting to change our symbolic order undertaken by specific groups of women, the fact is that this is a philosophical and political project that ultimately relies on both sexes if it is to prosper. To bring sexuate difference into education in such a way as to enrich and transform cannot be done beyond a certain point unless both women and men agree that it is a fruitful way to go forward. The aim of this article has been to try to introduce the work already done and to point to areas for future consideration.

Education, and the right to it, has been and still is, one of the most important tenets of the women's movement. The relationship between education and freedom is evidently very strong, although it could benefit perhaps from deeper questioning at this stage, if we agree that there is a need to consider that the history of educational philosophy was for a long time based on a model taken from the experience of only one sex.

There is not the scope here to go into the question of authority, female or male, despite the fact that it forms part of the areas in which the Italian women referred to previously work very seriously, following on from **Hannah Arendt's** analysis of a crisis in authority in the Western world (1958). The discussion of authority is therefore a significant missing dimension from this text that would contribute in perhaps important ways to enriching the discussion that the author seeks to open up. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that it would be absolutely impossible to cover the enormous body of work undertaken by the authors referred to in this article over the past forty years. This article, thus, is seeking first of all to point to work and thought that for some reason is largely unknown of in the English-speaking world with the desire of opening up discussion. As such, some of the concepts and ideas referred to in the article may appear, at first sight, difficult.

This article has brought several elements to the fore. First, it has explored the emergence of a whole new philosophical idea, brought into being by Luce Irigaray in the context of the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Europe. Second, it outlined how this idea was developed in Italy and Spain to restore the work of the mother to the origins of what we understand as education and philosophy, emphasising the need to bring relationship itself as the vehicle for this process onto centre stage *and keep it there*.

## Notes

- 1 The complexity of how this plays out is discussed by Rebecca Adami in this issue.
- 2 In this issue, Christine Winter shows us how problematic certain current prescriptive stances are when it comes to measuring academic attainment and success, if we care about allowing for and nurturing the otherness of each student.
- 3 As well as *Speculum*, interested readers who know little of Irigaray's opus might like to start with *Ethique de la différence sexuelle* (Irigaray, **1984**), translated into English as *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, (Irigaray, **1993**). Also see Hoveid and Finne, and Jones (this issue).
- 4 Readers interested in my usage of the term 'symbolic order' (a term used from Plato through to Lacan with varying interpretations) are referred to the forthcoming book of the same title (Wilson, **2014**).
- 5 It is important to note that there are exceptions to this and some interesting work does exist which ties in with this idea. Luisa Muraro, whose work we shall consider further on refers, for example, to the thinking of Winnicott in this area.
- 6 See, for example, Biesta, **2006**. In the UK, both Scottish and English governments focus on the role of teachers as highly significant. In Scotland, see the Donaldson report:<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/337626/0110852.pdf> and in England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-importance-of-teaching-the-schools-white-paper-2010>.

- 7 As this text is not translated into English, all quotes have been translated by myself, from the Spanish version (Muraro, [1991b](#) ).
- 8 Amy Shuffleton, in this issue, seeks to unravel and explore the reality of dependency in our lives as an ongoing fact.
- 9 It seems really important to me, especially given common misunderstandings in the interpretation of the thinking of sexual difference such as describing it as essentialist, to clarify that this does not mean an idealised version of woman but a recognition that sexual difference does reveal itself through the two different sexes and has done so historically. Arguments for gender neutrality and equality may only serve to diminish the potential for symbolic wealth revealed by the idea of the sexuate as signifier.

## References

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