

Merit, competence and human capital

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Abstract. Contemporary pedagogy is called to measure itself against two categories, merit and competence, which have become central to the third millennium's cultural debate and educational policies. If merit is considered the only weapon against privilege, education based on skills is considered the only lever of social equalization. But the concept of merit, which has now entered the common language, open to an interpretative ambiguity because the economic meaning tends to prevail over the pedagogical one. The article identifies a clarifying passage by connecting merit to competence using the theory of human capital considered in the evolution from Becker to Heckman.

Keywords. Merit - Competence - Capability - Human Capital

1. Merit: an ambiguous concept

The word «merit» has largely been linguistically dissected. *Meritum* – from *Merere*, «to merit» – opens up a wide range to include a material meaning and also its opposite. It indicates both «to deserve a reward» and a material one, just to be clear; and by contrast the condition of one who is spiritually elevated and worthy of praise and esteem. In its material meaning, prevalent in modern-contemporary culture, the “term” merit refers to the Greek *Axios*, which indicates the economic value of a thing. On the other hand, in its immaterial dimension, merit was referred to by the ancients as fame, glory, honour, and was expressed with the term *Kleos*¹. Exactly from this point of view, in its connection to spiritual values that are remodeled over time, it has rightfully entered the field of education.

From an educational point of view, the merit is attributed to a spectrum of variables, not hierarchically distributed. It can be found in commitment, in self-discipline, in the effort of self-realisation and conquest of autonomy; it lies in the visibility one enjoys, coming from one's own planning capacity, from the possession of values, such as coherence, continuity, solidarity and openness towards others etc.; it is coherent with a life to improve oneself. Basically, on a strictly educational level, the connection to obstructive

¹ G. Tognon, *La democrazia del merito*. Roma, Salerno Editrice, 2016.

standards² is essential, but not so much as achieving that unity and harmony a subject can get by successfully resisting the contrasting pressures encountered in his existence³.

Nevertheless, the opposite is often the case. The space of spirituality referred to as merit is progressively restricted, in favour of a material conception. The yardstick is economic recognition, career progression, etc., which go hand in hand with meritocracy. As mentioned above, the imposition of objective standards gives rise to the variety and unpredictability of situations to the values expressed by the subject on its humanistic endowment.

Where and why does the mechanism of merit get stuck in a strict meritocratic vision? By virtue of his merits, his commitment to work, the game of luck, etc., the entrepreneur could conquer assets and social positions. Without giving any personal contribution, the next generation happens to live the high life, and with no merit gained on the field, on the well-being achieved, likely, with merit on the part of their parents. Living on the shoulders of society is an undeserved privilege – just, without any merit⁴. The circle quickly closes: the merit – claimed to counter privileges, resources inherited without a blow – ends up denying its *raison d'être*. The «principle of ascription – according to which the social position of an individual is attributed by the family or class to which he belongs – (*mits en demeure*) the principle of achievement, according to which the social position is achieved thanks to effort and perseverance conjugated with the talent that a subject shows to possess»⁵: a perfect example of the heterogenesis of ends. From a right and legitimate need, it turns into a conservative claim at the moment in which the harsh competition in life can be avoided by exploiting the positions reached by others⁶.

In addition, it takes more than those privileges. Age, too, is a kind of resource, and as such, it interferes in the sphere of merits. As a matter of course in human history, «the elderly have been the most enduring ruling class: once they have taken office, every aristocracy, every plutocracy has always been a gerontocracy as well; and even in a democracy, the government of the people, over the people, for the people, has meant the government of the elderly over the young, for the elderly»⁷. Put simply, the tendency to value experience more than merit is deeply rooted in our society, especially in the workplace. For the most capable, the most deserving, it is normal to «wait their turn». Informal but obligatory stages are obligatory and cannot be bypassed⁸. In this picture, the aporias in the idea of merit and the philosophy underpinning it are evident.

How to get out of this tangle of contradictions? Essentially we should manage to give space to the criterion of merit, the «principle of social organization based on

² R. Abravanel, *Meritocrazia. Quattro proposte concrete per valorizzare il talento e rendere il nostro paese più ricco e più giusto*, Milano, Garzanti, 2008.

³ G. Bertagna (ed.), *Educazione e formazione*, Roma, Studium, 2018.

⁴ M. Young, *L'avvento della meritocrazia*, trad. it. di C. Mannucci, Roma, Edizioni di Comunità, 2014 (ed. orig. *The Rise of Meritocracy 1870-2033: An Essay on Education and Equality*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1958), p. 14.

⁵ P. Barrotta, *I demeriti del merito. Una critica liberale alla meritocrazia*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 1999, p. 15.

⁶ M. Young, *L'avvento della meritocrazia*, cit., pp. 208 et seq.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 90-91.

⁸ G. Da Empoli, *La guerra del talento. Meritocrazia e mobilità nella nuova economia*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2000, p. 47.

the “criterion” of merit and not on the “power” of merit⁹. In Walzer’s view, the merit should be one, not the unique criterion for allocating resources, the distinction between merit and qualification, merit and competence being preliminary¹⁰. Merit deals, in fact, with the person, how he has fulfilled his duties, his duties; competence, on the other hand, though concerning the person¹¹, is also based on knowledge and skills pertaining to a particular position, to the role a specific service must guarantee. It can be simplified like this: for merit, we always look back at the work and professional path completed and the way and commitment that accompanied it. For the competence required by an office, the gaze is projected to the present future, having to predict the performance realistically expected from a subject.

2. Merit and pedagogy

The above must not lead to hasty delegitimations of the value of merit. Moreover, it represents the lever of the progress of democracy and, on a personal level, that of continuous improvement, which is the very basis of human educability. However, in pedagogy, the idea of merit requires further fine-tuning. Merit is a derivative, a concept of the second degree, concerning, as before said, the past, actions concluded, methods of intervention applied. Before merit comes the prerequisites of merit: individual talents and, above all, the conditions for developing them, starting precisely with the educational ones. You cannot draw a clear line between the before and after. In fact, the presence of merit is a constant; it is the motivational strategy par excellence that cannot be ignored, the guarantee to be recognized in an interactive process. This is what happens, for example, in the so-called «formative evaluation», the purpose of which is not to select the best but to offer support and help to face a critical phase in the learning process successfully.

We reiterate this point: merit is a derived concept, not a static reality, a model applicable *erga omnes*, in an abstract and generalised way. Indeed, it cannot escape a natural process of historicisation. Today, for example, school learning expectations coincide with the LEP, the essential levels of performance, and with the PECUP, the student’s educational, cultural and professional profile. However, it stops here; in pedagogy, you cannot formulate general and lasting standards to qualify merit, which is always personal and as such only recognizable in relation to the individual’s commitment, resources, and personal history. Farsighted and democratic choices such e.g. «equal opportunities» are only in view of their personalised application. We can know how to combine merit with actual needs and implement personalised educational interventions¹². As can be evident, we are in that line of educational reflection known as phonological pedagogy, which links

⁹ S. Zamagni, *Meritocrazie e meritorietà*, in https://www.aicon.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Meritocrazia_e_Meritorietà.pdf, ultima consultazione 10 maggio 2022, p. 4

¹⁰ M. Walzer, *Sfere di giustizia*, trad. it. Di G. Rigamonti, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1987 (ed. orig. *Sphere of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism And Equality*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 1983), pp. 141 et seq.

¹¹ A. Cegolon, *Competenza. Dalla performance alla persona competente*. Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2008; G. Bertagna, *Valutare tutti valutare ciascuno. Una prospettiva pedagogica*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2004.

¹² S. Kahn, *Pedagogia differenziata. Concetti e percorsi per la personalizzazione degli apprendimenti*, Brescia, Scholè, 2021; D. Miliband, L'apprendimento personalizzato: scegliere e avere voce in capitolo, in CERI (Centro per la ricerca e l'innovazione nell'insegnamento) e OCSE (Organizzazione per la cooperazione e lo sviluppo economico) (a cura di), *Personalizzare l'insegnamento*, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 33-48.

with the issue of capacitation where, while moving from the purely economic side, we can detect and exploit useful pedagogical ideas¹³.

The term *capacitation* is due to a great contemporary Indian scholar, A. Sen. This can be explained by the title of one of his famous essays, *Development as Freedom*. To understand the meaning of the equation, development-freedom, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the meaning of freedom, according to Sen. It owes a lot to adequate material and political conditions. However, it is achieved only by knowing how to make good use of the goods we need. The set of alternative combinations of functions that one can achieve is capability¹⁴. Nevertheless, where does it come from, and how this competence is created? Here is the point. Education and training are the necessary tools to promote and support the process of skills, the activation in the subject of his resources in view of mastering them. The capability approach, centred on what people can do and be, is based on an ideal representation of human life as worth living, such as driving the idea of merit in education. This interpretation of merit and justice has significantly boosted education and training regarding skills.

3. Merit, competence and human capital

Sen's assumption – development converging with pedagogical ones on competencies – is also crucial for another aspect. In fact, it is easier for us to deal with contemporary problems: complex and globalized societies require an ecological approach to grasp the present interdependence. In essence, the variety and intersections of the issues focus on an unescapable educational evolution: the increasing importance of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity and, by contrast, the impossibility of the various disciplines to entrench themselves in the epistemological-disciplinary localism. The contamination of disciplines will be beneficial in expanding their original field of action, as proved by the growing semantic-lexical enrichment.

In this specific case, we refer to the diffidence with which pedagogy generally relates, still today, to an important and cross-discipline such as economics, not yet fully included among the educational sciences¹⁵. The tendency to negatively connote economic reasoning, as if profit were not part of human life and could not relate to ethics¹⁶, shows how a cultural conditioning deeply acts in our imagination¹⁷, as evidenced by the dialectical, not to say conflictual, relationship with the concept of human capital.

The following point of view is sustained here: «human capital» is a metaphor which profitably transits from the world of economics into pedagogy, thus favouring the development and success of skills. From this point of view, human capital theories are an

¹³ A. Sen, *Lo sviluppo è libertà. Perché non c'è crescita senza democrazia*, trad. it. di G. Rigamonti, Segrate, Mondadori, 2014 (ed. orig., *Development as Freedom*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press 1999), pp. 78 et seq.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

¹⁵ M. Baldacci, M. E. Colicchi (Eds.), *Pedagogia al confine. Trame e demarcazione tra i saperi*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2018.

¹⁶ A. Genovesi, *Lezioni di economia civile*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 2013; S. Zamagni, *L'economia del bene comune*, Città Nuova, Roma, 2007; L. Bruni, S. Zamagni, *L'economia civile. Un'altra idea di mercato*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2013.

¹⁷ A. Cegolon, *Lavoro e pedagogia del lavoro. Origine, sviluppo, prospettive*, Studium, Roma, 2020.

interesting example of cultural hybridization between two spheres – economic and pedagogical – still too much spaced from each other. On the one hand, the theories of human capital have exercised, in fact, a real externality towards pedagogy, favouring learning aimed at promoting skills; on the other hand, they have stressed a *pedagogisation* process that has led to the discovery of basic educational principles in training actions.

A quick overview of how the theories of human capital have emerged and taken hold will account for their role today in our society. The starting point is a generic idea of information¹⁸; the following step is the «knowledge economy»¹⁹; hence the sponsorship of competences through what we have called the empowerment of the subject. In other words, the ground for Sen's ideas has been prepared by Chicago School theorists (Schultz, Mincer, Becker etc.), to second-generation economists, such as Hanushek and Heckman.

3.1 The human capital of skills

Capital in everyday language typically indicates any form of accumulated wealth that allows for a surplus to be obtained or, in any case, such as to promise an enjoyment, a profit, the means helping to produce more and better. All in all, it indicates any sum of money that bears or can yield a net gain²⁰.

The first author to introduce this concept was the classical economist Adam Smith. In his famous work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)²¹, he claims wage differentials consist in the difficulty of learning a trade and in the need to offset the costs of acquiring a specific qualification.

Only in the second half of the last century, thanks to the pioneering work of economists from the University of Chicago, such as the aforementioned Jacob Mincer, Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker, we are witnessing a revival of the issue, to which we owe the birth of the theory or, better, of the theories of human capital. The authors of the Chicago School try to provide a scientific justification for two beliefs through these two steps: the level of stock of human capital in people sets out a different level in people whose remuneration is in thus increased; the overall level of human capital influences the country's economic growth and development²².

In the authors just quoted, the expression «human capital» alludes to the set of knowledge, skills and competencies possessed as agents capable of producing income within the economic system. More generally, it refers to the complex of qualified human resources available to companies²³.

This increasing attention to the person, considered in economic language the intangible component of the economic enterprise, is the outcome of a less standardized consideration of work. Work is beginning to be appreciated as the most important manifestation of human capital when the tayloristic impersonal-scientific approach establishes an alli-

¹⁸ D. Foray, *Leconomia della conoscenza*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006.

¹⁹ E. Rullani, *La fabbrica dell'immateriale. Produrre valori con la conoscenza*. Roma, Carocci, 2004a; Id, *Economia della conoscenza. creatività e valori nel capitalismo delle reti*, Roma, Carocci, 2004b.

²⁰ A. Cegolon, *Il valore del capitale umano*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2012, pp. 29 et seq.

²¹ A. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*. Wordsworth Classics of World Literature. Ware, UK, Wordsworth Editions, 2012.

²² L. Biggeri, *Il capitale umano come risorsa strategica*. Global Collection, n.6, 2006.

²³ F. Praussello, M. Marengo, *Economia dell'istruzione e del capitale umano*, Bari: Laterza, 1996.

ance with people recognizing the value and dignity of workers. It is understood, in fact, that the quantity and quality of work depend on the state of health of the worker, on his physical and cognitive abilities, and on his skills and knowledge. In this way, we begin to define human capital in relation to physical capital²⁴.

The steps leading to the definition of human capital can be summarized as follows. Like physical capital, human capital is a resource produced and accumulated thanks to the investment process, for which present consumption is renounced in view of future benefits²⁵. Just as the investment of economic capital can ensure a future income, the school investment of a part of one's time allows for the accumulation of a wealth of knowledge, skills and competencies (human capital), which will translate into greater employment prospects and salary.

Like physical capital, human capital is not immune from the risk of depreciation and obsolescence²⁶. Knowledge and skills acquired over time can be forgotten or subsequently overcome by technological progress²⁷. Unlike physical commodities, it cannot be resold (unless the hypothesis of enslavement is considered). Neither is it possible to mortgage it since it is not allowed, for example, to finance the studies of children by hypothecating their increased future earning capacity. Furthermore, unlike physical resources, it is incorporated into a person. It coincides with knowledge, skills and competencies, which are unique in his way: they are not observable but only indirectly and partially detectable in the quality of his performance²⁸. Being at one with their holders, in order to provide for higher remuneration, the direct participation of the subjects involved is essential. (The opposite, for instance, occurs with the physical capital, which generates profit independently of the owner's direct participation, whose only task is enjoying his property rights). Another distinguishing trait is its precariousness. The path is signed by two impassable boundaries: time and space. In fact, good health or a high level of education cannot be expanded at will. They are termed. A final remark is on risk. The human capital is much more uncertain than the material one. To the uncertainty of the possibility of reaching the desired remuneration outlets, another factor must be duly evaluated and is linked to the fate, to what escapes any human control. The successful outcome of studies, all calculated in the duration of an entire active life, is not a matter of fact. The imponderable – accidents, obsolescence, conjunctures, etc. – can get the upper hand and completely change the course of our life²⁹.

It is not necessary to linger that much to bring out the forcing in an attempt to superimpose two concepts as different as human capital and physical capital. They are different; the only common idea is to accumulate as an investment aimed at production. However, the capitalised resources are so different that the initial attempt to assimilate them quickly shows how and how they differ from each other. Basically, the human capital gradually moves away from its economic matrix to discover a pedagogical dimension.

²⁴D. N. Weil, *Crescita economica. Problemi, dati e metodi di analisi*, Milano, Hoepli, 2007.

²⁵F. Prassuello, M. Marengo, *op. cit.* p. 20.

²⁶D. N. Weil, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-163.

²⁷G. S. Becker, *Il capitale umano*, trad. it. di M. Staiano, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2009 (ed. orig. *Il capitale umano*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2009 2014 (ed. orig., *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*. New York, NY, National Bureau of Economic Research, 1964), p. 114.

²⁸D. Checchi, *La disuguaglianza. Istruzione e mercato del lavoro*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 1997, pp-128-129.

²⁹A. Page, *Economia dell'istruzione*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1974, p. 14.

It turns out to be something like a chapter in the book of training aiming to mobilise our human capability globally. Our purpose is now to account for this evolution.

3.2 Investing in the capacity of the person

In the speech *Investment in Human Capital*, held in 1960 at the American Economic Association, Theodore Schultz is the first economist to set off the importance of the human capital in development economics, particularly in agriculture³⁰. He notes that the skills acquired by farmers through education are of primary importance for the modernization of the agricultural sector. Like capital goods, skills are actual means of production, an investment, in fact, in human capital.

In the analysis of the human capital, Schultz is also to be taken for having highlighted the correlation between two opposite phenomena: on one side, the costs – expenses for school fees, books, transport, etc.; on the other, the foregone earnings, which an individual could have obtained if he had entered the labour market rather than continuing to attend school.

Schultz's research has been continued by Jacob Mincer, to whom we owe the explanation of the distribution of salaries among individuals. In his view, individual differences among workforce members are driven exclusively by their educational levels. He, too, identifies in the human capital – i.e. the years of schooling to acquire competence and skills in work – the variable that best accounts for the asymmetry of work pay³¹. Mincer's model leaves out the natural differences between men. Thus, the wage differences between the various jobs are due to the different duration of studies. In the case of the same profession exercised by different people, the gap is attributed to the experience accumulated in the workplace.

Unlike previous authors, Gary Becker emphasizes the differences between individuals. Different talents, intelligence, motivation, etc., are profoundly influential in education choice. Analyzing the characteristics of students who enrolled in college after high school, Becker noted a more average endowment of natural talent (identified on the basis of intelligence quotients in IQ tests) than those who interrupted their training careers at high school training³². On these data, Becker could demonstrate a positive correlation between ability and level of education. In short, the American economist concluded that it is reasonable to believe that, for the same number of years of study, the most capable people can be more productive and, in the future, earn higher incomes.

It was necessary to wait for the Coleman Report of 1966 for human capital scholars to include in their investigations “quantity” and the “quality” of education³³. The issue of school quality is considered through two approaches:

³⁰ T. W. Schultz, *Investment in Human Capital*, in «The American Economic Review», 51(1), pp. 1-17, 1961.

³¹ J. Mincer, *Schooling, Experience and Earnings*, New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 1974.

³² G.S Becker, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-254; P. Lovaglio, G. Vittadini, *Il concetto di capitale umano e la sua stima*, in M. Pellegatti, M. (Ed.), *Studi in ricordo di Marco Martini*, Milano, Giuffrè, 2004, pp. 147-167.

³³ J. S. Coleman, *Equality of Education Opportunity*, Washington, DC, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1966.

- i. measurement of student performance in standardized tests;
- ii. identification of the determinants that play a consistent role as a proxy for the quality of the school (eg. the experience of teachers, teacher education, the student/teacher ratio and so on (School Improvement)).

In this context rises, gaining ground, international research on assessment, such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The surveys on educational achievement are headed by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to analyse knowledge, skills and competencies. But above all is the Program for International Student Assessment managed by OECD whose surveys mark a significant turning point in the deepening of human capital. Unlike TIMSS and PIRLS.

Unlike TIMSS and PIRLS, PISA evaluates, on the one hand, not so much curricular knowledge and skills, but rather the ability of students to use them in certain areas (mathematics, reading and reading comprehension, science and problem solving) to work on concrete problems of everyday life; on the other hand, with two aims: to face extracurricular components, such as learning motivations, opinion and self-concept and learning strategies. In other words, students' actual competence is assessed, their ability to give answers to complex questions. The most critical data, which marks a real turning point, is the strategy adopted: the questions are not expressed abstractly but must concern concrete context such to mobilize students' intellectual resources.

Hanusheck's research is based on this line, according to which the quality of the school also has an indirect effect encouraging further education since there is a significant relationship between school participation and school quality³⁴. However, it is above all with Heckman that research on human capital formation converges with that of lifelong education. Not only with school, the training path begins in the family, after developing not only throughout the life span but also during the working period. In particular, according to Heckman, human capital is the result of the dynamic interaction of two sets of skills: *cognitive* abilities and *non-cognitive* abilities.

Cognitive skills are the result of two types of intelligence:

- «fluid» (Gf) or fluid reasoning, i.e. the ability to think logically and solve problems in all-new situations, regardless of the knowledge acquired (i.e. the ability to analyze new problems, identify underlying patterns and relationships to extrapolate a solution using logical reasoning);
- «crystallized» (Gc), represented by the depth and breadth of general knowledge individually possessed, as well as by the richness of vocabulary, the ability to reason using words and numbers (it is the product of educational and cultural experiences, constant interaction with fluid intelligence).
- *Non-cognitive abilities*. They are interpersonal skills, that is, the socio-emotional and relational traits typical of each personality, such as motivation, self-control, concentration, perseverance, self-esteem, etc.³⁵.

³⁴ E. A. Hanusheck, The importance of School Quality, in P. E. Peterson, (ed.). *Our Schools and Our Future: Are We Still at Risk?*, Stanford, CA, Hoover Institution Press, 2003, pp. 141-173.

³⁵ T. Kautz, J. J. Heckman, R. Diris, B. ter Weel, L. Borghans, *Fostering and Measuring Skills: Improving Cognitive and Non-cognitive Skills to Promote Lifetime Success*, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 110, Paris,

Like pedagogical theories, Heckman argues that our human capital comprises cognitive and socio-emotional (non-cognitive) skills. Empirical evidence shows that these skills have a casual link with multiple outcomes, such as wages, school, health, non-risk behaviours (such as smoking, alcohol consumption, crime), and many other social and economic life aspects. They are both the result of the genetic endowment (natural abilities) but are also highly correlated with factors of the family context, such as education and family income. Differences in skills (gaps) between people and socio-economic groups arise from the earliest years, both on cognitive and non-cognitive levels.

To sum up, the path, here briefly recalled in the fundamental passages, demonstrates how research on human capital begins with the identification of objective components external to the subject, such as the duration of schooling, completely ignoring the subject (Schultz), who features no significant differences from the point of view of learning (Mincer). The diversity of outcomes, which are also recorded, are subsequently attributed rather to the quality of the school, even considering that not all students face the school commitment with the same skills and motivations. Gradually the focus of the research shifts toward the intangible components of the human capital, such as knowledge, skills and competencies. Here, however, the behaviourist approach begins to be overcome since the need to monitor, to use Sen's language, the process of empowerment in the person is primarily shared. All in all, it is evident that any difference in education – between the action just oriented towards the integral development of the subject and the action aimed at investing in human capital – falls away. Indeed, as Sen points out, «this objective which is narrower, can fall within the one based on human capacity, which is broader»³⁶.

4. Conclusion

The acknowledgement of these cultural developments in the economic field should favour the overcoming of our prejudices and bring closer two disciplines – pedagogy and economics – which move on the solid ground of practice and, therefore, are equally involved in issues about the core of human action, in every context. Whether it is a question of achieving an academic or work results, success in studies or work, lower is the impact of external factors – naturally objective – compared to internal, which have a subjective characterisation. Much of the expected result depends, in fact, on the protagonism of the subject who has to act in a situation. When economic theories recognise the centrality of human connotation in the human capital, the consequence is to acknowledge the specificity of the logic in humanistic accumulation: which, by the way, is not so much based on the accumulation of exogenous resources – in this case years of schooling – but on the mobilisation of endogenous powers, on cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, consistently oriented to certify the identity of the person and, therefore, his or her formation. Moreover, to stick to the contemporary pedagogical vocabulary, we argue that human formation translates into the agency – i.e. the capacity for autonomous personal and critical creative action – honesty merit sends back to human capital theories.

OECD Publishing, 2014

³⁶ A. Sen, *cit.*, p. 293.

They have contributed to the evolution of educational training, being a pragmatic turning point for pedagogy. An indirect proof comes from the training proposed in terms of skills, which is a more concrete way of dealing with learning and making the concept of merit more democratic.

For this reason, it is the right time to assign more educational centrality to the human capital, emphasising the positive effects on other aspects of life. Together with the production, we are the other agents of change. It is right and far-fetched to prize the relevance and scope of the human capital in pedagogy, but this is not enough; we need to take a further step. Perhaps it is fitting to acknowledge the supremacy of the capability approach, which, together with productivity, brings together both the idea of personal training/improvement and social change, thus operating the semantic synthesis of competence and merit.

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