Teaching and Learning for Employability: New Strategies in Higher Education

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Papers

**Teaching and Learning for Employability:
New Strategies in Higher Education**

Teaching and Learning for Employability: New Strategies in Higher Education

edited by
V. Boffo, M. Fedeli, F. Lo Presti, C. Melacarne, M. Vianello

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Introduction
*The Editors**

This book collects the main results of a three-year National research project (2013-2017) funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) whose main goal was to design new strategies in higher education to support students and young adults during an employment emergency, as a response to the socio-economic crisis.

This book is focused on the modernisation of higher education to support students' employability. The purpose is to foster new strategies, methods, practices and theoretical constructs that can enhance the capability of the University to support faculty development and students' learning processes required by the labour market.

The results of our research include examples, new theoretical and practical models that can inform universities, faculty, career services, administrative staff, and stakeholders in their job of designing learning activities including programs, guidance processes, placement, and tutoring actions.

Each chapter provides research results and discusses them in the light of the current literature.

The authors come from similar higher education contexts, but they each take a different approach to the research involving students, teachers, administrators and stakeholders. They all share the same willingness to transform teaching and learning practices, work-related processes, and guidance.

The book tackles topics that cover students' academic experiences from the beginning to the end, and beyond: Career Calling, Educational Guidance, Participatory and Work-Related Teaching and Learning Methods, Internship and Experiential Learning, Employability, etc.

The first chapter *An Integrative Model of Career Calling and Meta-analyses of its Nomological Network* provides an analysis of the dimensions of *Career Calling* and meta-analyses of its relations with both antecedents and outcomes, among which are motivation, satisfaction, engagement and well-being in life and at work. The chapter provides an integrative model of career calling that proposes a grouping structure over its many dimensions. In addition, the chapter quantitatively analyses calling's nomological network by providing

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meta-analytic estimates of its relations with predictors and outcomes. Career calling has frequently been defined as a subjective orientation toward a specific life role, in a work or non-work domain. Definitions of calling differ with regard to the very nature of the construct. Two of the most famous definitions of calling define it as "a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1005) and "a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness, and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427). Yet, a different operational definition of calling can be found for almost each study on career calling in the literature. The authors of this chapter argue that the lack of consensus among scientists regarding the very nature of a calling are slowing down the construction of a coherent corpus of empirical results from which to derive a solid theory on this rapidly emerging construct. Hence, they conducted an extensive theoretical analysis to understand what constitutes a calling and how it should be measured, providing a summary of the research outputs currently available with regard to the relationships between the dimensions of calling and important outcomes in the area of career development and well-being. They integrate previous empirical accounts of calling in one single view that emphasises commonalities across different contributions. The chapter closes discussing how future research can take advantage of this extensive analysis of what we know and what we should know about career calling.

The second chapter *The Pedagogical Approach of Guidance in Higher Education. An Educational Research Experience in Italian Universities* focuses on the particular segment of *guidance*, as one of the focal points that substantiate the effectiveness of a higher education system. In particular, it describes and assumes, a particular point of view about guidance, as a strategic action that needs an inherently educational quality (Bruner, 1990, 1996; Dewey, 1946; Gardner, 1983; Morin, 2013, 2015).

In recent decades the direction that best seems to characterise the transformation, both theoretical and in its repercussions on designing guidance interventions, focuses attention on the individual and his active and aware participation in a personal and professional project: a common theoretical thread blends most common approaches into a progressive reinterpretation of the role of the individual faced with the choice: first *actor*, then *agent*, finally *author* (Guichard, 2005; McAdams & Olson, 2010; Savickas, 2005).

In fact, the latter conception asserts an educational interpretation of guidance process, because it directs guidance actions starting from the individual and his interpretative paths, building knowledge and meaning.

The research is fed from this conception and aims, therefore, to define and

integrate, putting basic theoretical constructs in a pedagogical perspective and taking, as its specific object, guidance in the Italian University System. The goal is both to describe the approaches and practices actually in use, verifying their possible educational quality, and to highlight significant theoretical-methodological elements to merge them into phenomenological-constructivist educational planning (Husserl, 1913, 1950; Von Foerster, 1982; Von Glasersfeld, 1981), aimed at the development of guidance best practices.

Specifically, the research is divided in two phases. The first reports on an initial qualitative exploratory study aimed at examining in depth, through interviews with privileged witnesses of the Italian university context (delegates and practitioners), the inspirational horizons of university guidance, seeking the meaning, logics and educational dimension underlying the practices; the second describes the design and implementation of critical-reflective guidance paths, constructed by the focus group and specifically directed at the students, in order to identify their guidance needs and the individual and deeper aspects at the base of their choices and life-designing, as well as the possible guidance strategies to apply.

The reflections generated by both studies are intended to provide information and data to identify theoretical-methodological elements to be used for building and implementing an application model for the training of guidance professionals through a pedagogical approach.

The third chapter *Fostering Participatory and Learner-Centered Teaching in Higher Education* focuses on how and to what degree, in accordance with the students' perspectives, Italian university faculty engage students in *participatory and learner-centered teaching and learning methods* and the related implications for work-related learning. The chapter is based, first, on European documents on the modernisation and innovation processes of the higher education system (Commission of the European Communities, 2006, 2008, 2009; European Commission, 2011, 2013, 2016), and, second, by several bodies of literature including *learner-centered teaching* (Cranton, 2016; Weimer, 2013), *personalised learning* (Hartley, 2003, 2007; Shaikh & Khoja, 2012; Waldeck, 2007), *student voice* (Cook-Sather, 2002; Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Fielding, 2004, 2012; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004) and *work-related learning* (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Dirkx, 2011; Gardner & Barktus, 2014) forming the rationale for exploring how and in what ways faculty engage students in the higher education classroom. Based on a literature review of recent university teaching and learning method trends, the researchers created a questionnaire to obtain insight about teaching in Italian higher education across a variety of students, disciplines, settings, and universities. A larger aim of this study is also to identify and present essential ways to improve and modernise university didactics through engaging student voices, to overcome the dichotomy

between the university and work settings, to develop and reinforce the skills of university students to more effectively enter the labour market, and to create solid research results as basis for promoting faculty development in Italy.

The fourth chapter *Supporting Situated Learning in Higher Education Internships* focuses on the different planning and managing models of *internship activities*. The specific objective is to identify the best Italian and international practices in order to help and support university decision makers in planning effective and operational Job Placement Practices. Starting from a reflection on the Informal Learning perspective, the chapter uses the results of three surveys (2000 questionnaires have been collected and analysed) to answer the questions: Why is internship a core element for students and organisational learning? What do students think about learning by doing in their internship experience? How can we support student learning through internship programs?

Furthermore, internship activities are considered good practices to support students entering their working life (Susan, Matthew, Rosanne, Taylor, & Ellis, 2012).

Each University tries to plan internship programs with both expectations: supporting student learning process and increasing their employability. The objectives of this chapter are to discuss some different approaches to planning internship programs and to show how these approaches can be developed on the basis of data collection.

The main question of the survey presented in the last chapter *Employability Processes and Transition Strategies in Higher Education: an Evidence-Based Research Study* is based on the problem of understanding the transition process for young graduates from their degree course to seeking and entering employment. How do graduates look for work, how do they prepare for the transition phase, and, above all, how do they build their *employability* during their years of university studies?

Providing the backdrop are some lines of theory that pedagogical literature has touched on marginally, or not at all, such as the topic of competencies, re-interpreted through the concept of capability and the topic of employability, reviewed according to a definition of the concept which still has a remarkably rich variety of nuances (Harvey, 2001, 2003; Yorke & Knight, 2003, 2006).

The epistemological context of the research is of an ecological-naturalist type in which the ontological-relational dimension supports the survey. The interpretative approach is dictated by the need to analyse education and training and must be backed by a critical-phenomenological attitude of the researcher. The survey adopts a qualitative method and, since it aims to grasp

the phenomenon according to a map that is under constant adjustment, uses the grounded theory approach. The research adopts a case study strategy, hence providing precise indications on the procedures to follow in order to conduct the investigation process.

The data collected from the graduates selected can be used in countless ways, i.e., to understand self-perception as a future reflective professional and the competencies to build this perception. But what the research is interested in above all is the possibility of understanding the ways, desires and capacities of young people to become serious professionals, who are also qualified as responsible future citizens.

So, rather than providing answers, the book asks questions of the research in the field of higher education, touching on several of the most important key topics of the educational paths of first students and then citizens.

Our intention was to conduct research that would stimulate the scientific and academic community and first think and then act on preparation for work and professional life by developing strategies, methods and tools for reforming the institution of the University.

We thank all the collaborators who made up the five research groups and all the students of our courses and universities who allowed us, with a rare sense of collaboration, to develop and carry out this work in recent years.

The Editors

Barbara Barbieri, PhD is Associate Professor of Psychology of Human Resources at the University of Cagliari. Her principal research fields are: support in the workplace and psychological well-being; socialization processes at work; entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurship.

Sergio Bellantonio, PhD in Sciences of Human Movement and Health at Parthenope University of Naples. His research interests mainly concern the relationship between corporeality and education and educational guidance, such as pedagogical devices in a systemic and constructivist perspective.

Vanna Boffo, PhD is Associate Professor of General Pedagogy at the University of Florence, Rector's Delegate for Job Placement and President of the Master Degree Course in Adult and Continuing Education and Pedagogical Sciences. Her current research focuses on the Pedagogy of Work and Educational Strategies in Higher and Adult Education.

Stefano Bonometti, PhD is Associate Professor at the University of Molise. His research interests focus on Teamwork, Workplace Learning, Internship, Action Learning, Community of practices and e-Learning.

Anna Dalla Rosa is a PhD candidate in Social, Cultural and Group Psychology at the University of Padova. Her research interests focus on the development of Career Calling, Reproducibility in Psychological Science, and Implicit Social Cognition.

Giovanna Del Gobbo, PhD is Confirmed Researcher of Social Pedagogy at the University of Florence. Her main research areas are linked to the study of educational tools for the valorization of human potential in local and work contexts, the evaluation of learning organisations and quality assurance in Higher Education.

Monica Fedeli, PhD, is Associate Professor of teaching and learning, and organisational development at the University of Padova. Her current research interests include: participatory teaching and learning methods in higher education, organisation and human development, faculty development and faculty development in international settings.

Daniela Frison, PhD is Post-Doc Researcher and Adjunct Professor of Methodology of Training and Research-Intervention in Organisations at the University of Padova. Her current research interests are focused on: work-related learning and university-business cooperation, teaching and learning methods in higher and adult education.

Elisa Maria Galliani, PhD is Assistant Professor of Work and Organisational Psychology at the University of Padova. Her current research interests regard the origin and development of Career Calling and the role of Moral Emotions in Organisational Behavior.

Gaia Gioli, PhD is Post-Doc researcher and Adjunct Professor of Educational Project Management at the University of Florence. Her current research interests are focused on the study of youth transitions from University to the labour market and the construction of employability.

Valentina Grion, PhD, Researcher and Assistant Professor in Experimental Pedagogy at the University of Padova. Her main research interests are: Assessment and evaluation in educational contexts, Pre- and in-service teacher education, Educational Technologies and Participatory research methods.

Francesco Lo Presti, PhD is Assistant Professor in General and Social Pedagogy at the Parthenope University of Naples. His research interests focus on reflective practices for the critical management of educational relationships.

Claudio Melacarne, is Associate Professor in Social Pedagogy and Delegate of the Dean for Continuing Education at the University of Siena. His research is focused on Transformative Learning Theory, Adult Learning and Research Methods in Education.

Alessandra Priore, PhD in Psychological and Pedagogical Sciences at the Federico II University of Naples. Her research interests relate to teacher training in the perspective of reflexivity and guidance with narrative methods.

Giordana Szpunar, PhD is Assistant professor of General Pedagogy at the Department of Social and Developmental Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome. His research interests are: university internship, reflective practice and reflective narrative; role models and professional identity; educational strategies to reduce stereotypes and prejudices.

Francesca Torlone, PhD is Researcher of Pedagogy of Educational and Social Policies at the University of Florence. Her main research areas are linked to the identification and analysis of the individual and organisational demand of formation, the institutional learning processes, and the analysis of the lifelong learning policies.

Michelangelo Vianello, PhD is Associate Professor of Work and Organisational Psychology at the University of Padova. He is currently investigating the origin and development of Career Calling, the Reproducibility of Knowledge in Psychological Science, and Indirect Methods for the assessment of individual differences.

An Integrative Model of Career Calling and Meta-analyses of its Nomological Network

Anna Dalla Rosa, Elisa Maria Galliani, Michelangelo Vianello*

Introduction

In their educational and professional paths, persons are called upon to make several choices. Vocational psychology, also known as career psychology, is the scientific study of these choices, their antecedents, correlates and consequences. Many agree that vocational psychology is the scientific evolution of the Vocational Guidance Movement, founded on the work of Parsons in the early 1900s in order to provide scientific vocational counsellors for the young (Parsons, 1909; Savickas & Baker, 2005; Dawis, 1996).

Vocational psychology deals with three main themes according to a formula which has become famous as the *matching model* (Parsons, 1909; Hollingworth, 1916): *self-knowledge*, knowledge of one's aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions and resources; *occupational information*, knowledge of the requirements and conditions for success, limitations, advantages and opportunities in different lines of work; and the analysis of the *match* between these two groups of factors, to understand how people acquire information about the required characteristics for effectively performing work in order to choose the one best suited to one's aptitudes, needs and aspirations.

Among the constructs historically most studied by vocational psychology we find: vocational interests, aptitudes, motivation, self-efficacy, and other characteristics of the individual and context that, all together, constitute a solid base of knowledge on which to rely for the counsellor's interventions in the context of scholastic-professional orientation.

Recently, the concept of *calling* has been introduced in the field of vocational psychology. Initially used on in an ecclesial context to identify a religious vocation, calling has origins in Christian theology and it was only

with the Protestant Reformation that its meaning was extended to all areas of employment, acquiring the meaning of a vocation to diligently exercise a profession to contribute to the common good. Calling was further enriched with personal meanings by Calvin: it is no longer just a vocation to God, but it is closely linked to the talents that the person is called to express in work, through which, in turn, the transcendent relationship with God is realized. In the classical conception, calling is "that place in the world of productive work that one was created, designed, or destined to fill by virtue of God-given gifts and talents and the opportunities presented by one's station in life" (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009, p. 38). The spread of the concept of calling then led to its progressive secularization, to the exclusion of the divine dimension, as it is evident in the definition proposed by Bunderson and Thompson: "one's calling is that place in the occupational division of labour in society that one feels destined to fill by virtue of particular gifts, talents, and/or idiosyncratic life opportunities" (2009, p. 38).

Scientific research on calling is currently still in its infancy. However, the first results, although fragmentary and partial, are promising and suggest that feeling called to a given profession is the prelude to success and well-being at work (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997; Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013; Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012; Dik, Eldridge, Steger, & Duffy, 2012). Calling intervenes both at the time of career choices and in subsequent phases of active involvement in a professional career (Dobrow & Heller, 2014; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Research on calling can, perhaps, help us answer some fundamental questions of vocational psychology: why do people choose a career, how is this decision made and what influences their well-being and job performance. In order for this to happen, however, much research will be necessary and – above all – a unified and shared concept of calling. To this end, in this paper we present an analysis of the literature that will help understand the meaning of calling and analyze what we now know of its relations with work- and well-being-related outcomes. In fact, the literature contains various definitions of calling and a consensus on the elements that characterize it has not yet been reached. This fragmentation of views prevents the research from providing coherent answers about the relationships that calling has with any predictors and effects. In the first part of this chapter we analyze the multiple definitions and operationalizations of calling and propose a theoretical model that integrates previous contributions. In the second part of the chapter we review the existing evidence regarding the associations of calling with well-being, organisational behavior, the concept of self and career development.

1.1 Dimensions of Calling

Calling regards the sensation of *being called* to play a role or perform an activity. The call can relate to a profession, but also other areas of life. An exemplary case is the domain of studies: a person can feel a vocation for architecture, law, music, art or medicine.

Calling is a multidimensional construct: many definitions in the literature agree on its multi-factorial structure, although there is no agreement as to what these factors are. A systematic analysis of the theoretical models of the construct and its consequent operationalizations has allowed us to identify four categories of factors (see Table 1). The order of presentation of the factors is not meant to suggest different degrees of importance. The first component is *identitary* and concerns the role of calling in the definition of self, personal identity and self-concept. The second component defines the *spiritual* dimension of calling: the work or occupational domain appears to be linked to one's destiny, transcending the purely material level. In this category we have also included the component of *prosociality* because, in the context of studies on calling, it is seen for the most part as a tool available to individuals capable of building communities by *elevating* their behavior and aspirations to a dimension that goes beyond their own individuality. The third category of components is *motivational* and groups the constructs of commitment, perseverance and willingness to sacrifice. Finally, the fourth component is *affective* and includes the dimensions of passion for one's work, satisfaction and the intrinsic pleasure deriving from performing it. Now let us look at these dimensions in detail, analyzing how each helps to define the calling construct in the various theoretical models in the literature.

1.2 Self-concept

Having a calling contributes to the construction of personal identity (Treadgold, 1999), as it significantly influences self-representations regarding one's professional and/or social role. It can certainly be said that those related to the domain of one's vocation are core self-conceptions (Gergen, 1968), i.e., self-aware ideas and representations that constitute the core of self-concept and, as such, have a strong impact on behaviors. Then, calling, as a function of its stage of development, can influence self-concept in different ways. In the early stages of the career path, when people become aware of their vocation and decide to follow it, it acts as an ideal self-conception, and thus

determines choices, objectives and behaviors aimed at aligning the current self with the ideal self (Higgins, 1987). At the time the vocation is realized in people's concrete life, it then helps to determine actual self-conceptions, influencing the way in which they describe and represent themselves and, consequently, all the more important intrapsychic and interpersonal processes. In the various calling models, the dimensions related to self-concept concern the contribution it makes to the construction of personal and professional identity, identification with the role, the congruence between self and role, personal fulfillment, and the pervasiveness of role in life.

Table 1 – Dimensions of calling in the principal theoretical models and related operationalizations

		Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas (2011)	Dik & Duffy, (2009); Dik et al. (2012)	Wrzesniewski et al. (1997)	Bunderson & Thompson (2009)	Praskova, Creed, & Hood (2015)	Hagmeier & Abele (2012)
SELF-CONCEPT	Identity Identification	✓		✓			✓
	Person Job Fit				✓		
	Personal fulfillment					✓	✓
	Pervasiveness in life	✓		✓			
SPIRITUALITY	Transcendent summons		✓		✓	✓	✓
	Destiny Inevitability	✓			✓		✓
	Significance Purpose	✓	✓			✓	
	Prosociality		✓	✓		✓	✓
MOTIVATION	Sacrifice	✓					
	Commitment Perseverance	✓		✓		✓	
AFFECT	Passion	✓		✓*	✓	✓	✓
	Pleasure Satisfaction	✓		✓		✓	

* Not explicit in the measurement tool.

1.2.1 Identity and Identification

The vocation helps define a person's identity, for which the domain of interest, activity and fulfillment becomes a central element of one's self: "what [one] does for living is a vital part of who [one] is" (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997, p. 24), "The first thing I often think about when I describe myself to others is that I'm a musician/an artist/in business/a manager" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1048). In the operationalization of Hagmeier and Abele (2012), a calling brings those who live it to identify with their role: "I identify with my work" (p. 43).

1.2.2 Person-Job Fit

Conscious self-representations relating to one's professional identity also concern the perceived degree of fit between one's self and one's work role. People who feel called to play a certain role have the feeling of "being made for", of "having a gift for" that role: "I was meant to do the work I do", "I am definitely the sort of person who fits in my line of work" (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009, p. 56). The perception of adequacy towards the requirements of a role can also lead to defining the work performed as their place in the world: "The work I do feels like my niche in life" (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009, p. 56).

1.2.3 Personal Fulfillment

Together with the feeling of having "a gift" for a certain type of work, a calling allows those who live it to express their abilities and their potential: "Doing my job I can realize my full potential" (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012, p. 43). A calling therefore translates into a goal for personal growth: "Preparing for my career is contributing to my personal growth" (Praskova et al., 2015, p. 98). Through the identification and concretization of their vocations, people can fully realize themselves and find consistency between the self-representations of their attitudes and dispositions and concrete behavior.

1.2.4 Pervasiveness in Life (Calling Engulfs Consciousness)

Vocation is always present in the person's consciousness. As the cornerstone of the concept of self, it is conscious and always active in intrapsychic and relational processes. In the experience of students, this can translate, for example, into the tendency to identify links between different spheres of life with their call towards the domain of studies. The item that exemplifies this feeling is present in the scale developed by Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011): "Music/my artistic specialty/business/being a manager *is always in my mind* in some way" (p. 1049). But pervasiveness can also regard the presence of

the vocation as a constant in the life of the person. The vocation becomes a transverse dimension that translates, for example, into the tendency to bring work home, not because incapable of managing their time, but because the work is enjoyable and exciting enough to overflow into their personal life (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997).

1.3 Spirituality

As we have seen, the construct of calling has religious roots, and although the more modern conceptualization has moved away from this vision through a progressive secularization of the meaning given to the term, in some definitions the reference to a transcendent dimension remains. Transcendence, emphasized in the model by Dik and Duffy (2009) as a distinctive feature of calling with respect to the broader concept of Occupational Vocation, refers to the origin of the call, which is placed at a spiritual level. Thus, if the explicit reference to religion has disappeared, in contemporary definitions there remains a connotation of calling as an experience related to some extent to spirituality. Although the two concepts are intrinsically linked and have many overlaps, spirituality is distinguished from religion by the possibility of being detached from any reference to the divine, focusing rather on man's relationship with the natural environment (ecology and feeling of belonging and interconnection with the physical world) and on the relationship with humanity (prosociality and full realization of human potential) (Spilka, 1993). The definitions of spirituality in the psychological literature share multidimensionality: to varying degrees, all refer to several essential factors such as an ultimate concern, an integrating or unifying factor within the personality, authenticity, a source of yearning, a meaningful identity and purpose, a union with the whole (Hill et al., 2000). In some models of calling the reference to spirituality is evident, not only in the transcendent origin of the call, but also in experiencing it as destiny, in expressing meaningfulness and in attributing it a prosocial purpose. This latter aspect is, in reality, transverse to the spiritual and motivational dimensions of calling. The prosocial purpose directs, activates and sustains altruistic behaviors oriented to the common good. In fact, Dik and Duffy (2009) define the prosocial orientation in calling as a way "to approach a particular life role in a manner that holds […] other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (p. 427). Similarly, the experience of significance and purpose is closely related to the component of identity and self-concept. Realizing one's calling means attributing and actualizing a deep meaning to one's self and one's role in the world.

1.3.1 Transcendent Summons

One of the problems in the definition of calling resides in identifying the source of the call. The dimension of transcendent summons emphasizes the external origin of the push towards a role/activity/domain: "I was drawn by something beyond myself to pursue my current line of work" (Dik et al., 2012, p. 260). A call from a source outside the self is not, however, an element common to the different definitions. The sources of the calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy, Allan, Bott, & Dik, 2014) may be external to the person, such as God, destiny, a higher power, but also internal, such as the discovery of a talent or a special interest (Duffy & Dik, 2013). We believe that the dimension of summons is essential, but that the source does not necessarily have to be an external entity. A person may feel called from within to perform an activity. This push is manifested in the feeling of "being made for", "destined to". In this sense, the call originates in individuals as an uncontrollable force/push/motivation independent from a rational choice, and experienced by them as part of themselves: "An inner voice is guiding me in doing my job", "I follow an inner call that guides me on my career path" (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012). In any case, the results of a study by Duffy, Allan and colleagues in 2014 showed that different sources of calling do not lead to differences in the experience of the vocation and do not have a relevant impact on the association between vocation and satisfaction in life and work.

1.3.2 Destiny and Inevitability

This component regards a feeling of predetermination and finality associated with the conduct of the profession or activity to which one feels called: "I feel a sense of destiny about being a …" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1049), "It sometimes feels like I was destined to work with animals" (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009, p. 56), "I am destined to do exactly the job I do" (Hagmeier & Abele, 2012, p. 43). This is an aspect closely linked to the transcendence of the call, to the perception of a force that lies beyond the self or, in any case, beyond personal control and will. Therefore, responding to one's calling, or at least attempting to, seems inevitable. Destiny and inevitability have some elements in common with the feeling of being adequate for a particular domain: to be destined to a role or activity is associated with the feeling of having the necessary skills and abilities.

1.3.3 Significance and Purpose

Significance is one of the three dimensions of calling according to the formulation of Dik and Duffy (2009): "calling is a … summons to approach a particular life

role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness" (p. 427). A calling allows those who live it to recognize a precise purpose in their life and to perceive a deep meaning in the realization of this purpose: "My existence would be much less meaningful without my involvement in music …" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Significance is awareness of the value of an activity and how efforts to develop it help give meaning to one's life (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Praskova et al., 2015). Having a vocation means recognizing a deeper meaning linked to the possibility to realize one's self in an environment that responds to one's vocation: "My work helps me live out my life's purpose" (Dik et al., 2012), "I am looking for a work that will help me live out my life's purpose" (Dik et al., 2012), "I have chosen a career path that will give a real purpose to my life" (Praskova et al., 2015).

1.3.4 Prosociality

In most theoretical models, and the related operationalizations, the purpose and values of the activity recognized as calling tend to be associated, directly or indirectly, to the common good. Thus, regardless of the professional or discipline towards which the vocation is oriented, it brings benefits that go beyond the individual and are other-oriented: "It is my calling to benefit others in my future chosen career", "It is more important that my career benefits others, rather than just benefits me" (Praskova et al., 2015, p. 98). Prosocial orientation is one of three elements that define calling according Dik and colleagues (2012): "Making a difference for others is the primary motivation in my career" (p. 260). The vocation leads one to see one's work as a means to contributing to improve the living conditions of the whole society: "By doing my job I serve the common good" (Hagmeier & Abele, 2012, p. 43), "My work makes the world a better place" (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997, p. 25).

1.4 Motivation

According to some authors when people have a vocation they are pushed to respond through their own behavior: they set themselves objectives (such as career objectives) to achieve, make consistent choices and put them into practice, working daily to realize their vocations. For this reason, calling can act as a source of motivation and explain some behaviors. The motivational component of calling includes willingness to sacrifice, commitment and perseverance.

1.4.1 Sacrifice

Those who have a calling tend to be willing to sacrifice time, energy and

resources to achieve it (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). A proof supporting the association between vocation and sacrifice is the positive correlation between calling, measured according to the scale developed by Bunderson and Thompson (2009), and willingness to sacrifice ($r =.37$, $p < .01$, $N = 491$). However, this motivational component is directly measured only by Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas: "I would sacrifice everything to be a musician/an artist/in business/a manager" (p. 1048).

1.4.2 Commitment and Perseverance

The feeling of having a vocation is accompanied by a commitment to implementing it, in carrying out activities associated with it and perseverance in continuing to concretize it: "I do not waste time; it is like I am on a mission", "I take every opportunity to progress my career goals" (Praskova et al., 2015, p. 98). In Wrzesniewski, et al. (1997) this dimension is expressed by certain behaviors such as taking work home or on vacation, the desire to continue working and not retire.

In the scale developed by Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011) the presence of calling manifests itself in perseverance: "I would continue being a musician/ an artist/in business/a manager even in the face of severe obstacles" (p. 1048).

1.5 Affect

Calling has an emotional component that binds the person to the domain of interest. People express their vocation through passion for the domain, the pleasure they feel in carrying out the activities and the satisfaction that they derive from it.

1.5.1 Passion

The person who feels called to a domain – a job, a field of study, a sport – experiences passion for the activities associated with it. Passion is one of the crucial elements in the definition of Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011): in fact, for them calling is "a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain" (p. 1001). In Praskova et al. (2015) passion brings subjects to be interested only in their vocation to the point of being compared to an obsession: "I am obsessed about the career I am aiming for to the point that sometimes nothing else interests me" (p. 98). Even in Hagmeier and Abele (2012) passion for the work is one of the elements that characterize a calling. In the measure of calling developed by Bunderson and Thompson, the passion that defines the calling originates in childhood. In

Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) this component does not appear explicitly, but their operationalization of calling shows certain behaviors and attitudes that can be identified as signs of a strong passion for the work: "work is one of the most important parts of [their] life […they] love it" (p. 24).

1.5.2 Pleasure and Satisfaction

Engaging in the activity that corresponds to one's vocation is a source of pleasure and satisfaction for the person. Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas measure this component with items such as: "I enjoy playing music/engaging in my artistic specialty … more than anything else" and "Playing music/engaging in my artistic specialty … gives me immense personal satisfaction" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1048). For the subject, responding to one's vocation by carrying out an activity and playing a role in society should be a rewarding experience that gives satisfaction and generates enthusiasm: "Mr. C … is very pleased that he is in this line of work" (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997, p. 24).

Figure 1 – The dimensions of Calling
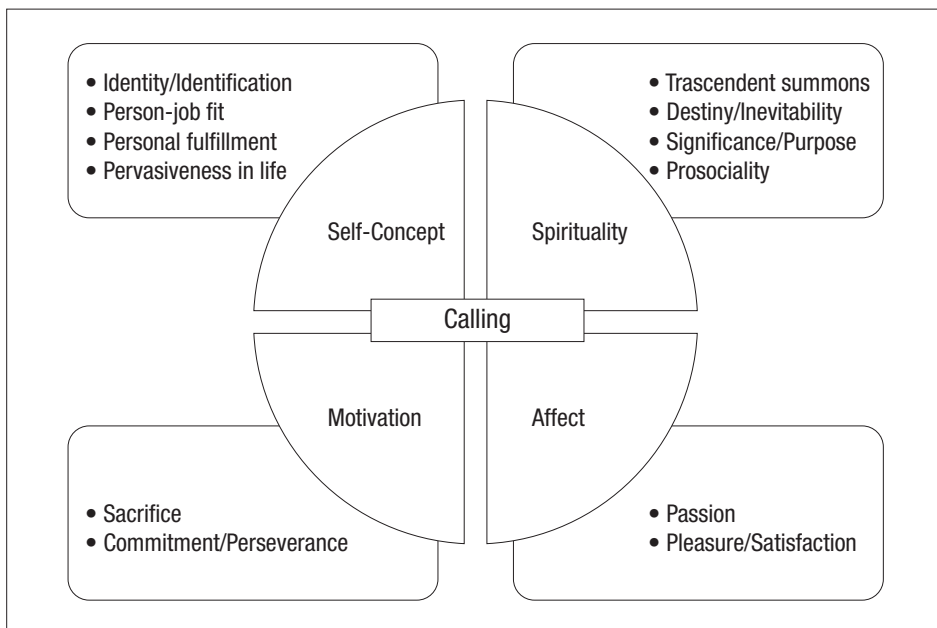
1.6 The Experience of Calling: Search, Presence and Living Out

Dik and Duffy (2009) and Dobrow (2013) believe that the time frame of calling is one's whole life. A calling is not a discovery that the person makes only once and that remains stable, but it is the result of an ongoing process, a continuous assessment of the significance and purpose of the profession and its prosocial contribution. There are three main moments that can be identified in the process of constructing a calling: the search for, the presence of, and the living out (Dik et al., 2012). Some people may, at their current state, not feel a precise vocation to a specific domain, but feel the need, the desire, and therefore seek it (*search for a calling*). Thinking of calling in terms of a search implies a maturation over time. The development of a calling is thus a process that, through the assessment of the congruence between one's individual dispositions, the opportunities offered by the external environment and personal experiences of significance leads to the identification of a predisposition, passion and call to a domain. In this sense, calling plays a central role in the process of constructing a professional identity and achieving clarity about one's career goals (Hirschi, 2011). Therefore, in the early stages of one's development, a calling helps to motivate and support searching for and testing multiple professional selves. Personal dispositions – interests, values, attitudes, orientations – could probably influence the direction and intensity that the quest for calling assumes. The outcome of the process will necessarily be determined by the interaction of individual characteristics with situational factors of a social, academic, occupational and organisational nature. The moment the search process isolates a specific work or a precise area of activity towards which to direct one's calling, then from search it becomes presence (*presence of calling*). When the calling is transformed from *search for* to *presence of*, it promotes involvement and commitment in the activity towards which it is addressed.

A further step in the process of the development and realization of the calling is the sense that one is currently living out one's calling (Duffy, Allan, & Bott, 2012). The distinction between having a calling and living a calling is linked to the presence of obstacles that may prevent people from realizing their vocations. The awareness of having a vocation is different from the experience of living one's core study or work activity as a vocation. The presence of a calling is the experience of an awareness, and presumably the desire to realize the vocation. Living out a calling is instead accompanied by the feeling of carrying a deeply meaningful and satisfying activity that corresponds to the actual realization of the call. The transition from awareness of one's vocation to its realization is not automatic. Real obstacles

and difficulties may prevent people from carrying out the activities to which they feel called. Furthermore, it is worth considering that the domain of the calling is not necessarily work or study, but may regard all the roles that a person can play in life (think of the calling in childrearing; Coulson, Oades, & Stoyles, 2012). For example, people carrying on a professional office activity who feel a vocation for manual activity could realize their vocation in their spare time. However, work and family commitments may keep them from devoting a satisfactory amount of time to their calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010).

1.7 A Nomological Network of Calling

Some of the elements that define calling are very similar and sometimes overlap with other psychological constructs. Analyzing the relationships between calling and these constructs allows meeting two needs: verifying their discriminability and understanding the mechanisms that link the experience of calling to other experiences, working and not. We will therefore try to place calling within a rational network of constructs highlighting associations and mutual influences.

In this presentation we will follow the structure suggested by our theoretical model investigating the association between calling and concepts related to self-concept, spirituality (specifically the role of meaning in life and in work), motivation and satisfaction. Finally, we will analyze the relationship between calling and career. In fact, calling is associated to identification with the profession, to perceived meaning in life and in work, and therefore the definition of the personal and professional self. In addition, calling, especially in its motivational dimension, manifests itself through engagement, commitment and the intrinsic motivation towards the domain of interest. The major areas of influence of calling relate to subjective well-being and attitude towards work and, more generally, towards life, involving satisfaction in work and life. Finally, calling is closely connected with the constructs related to the construction of career, such as selection, decision making, adaptability and self-efficacy.

Where possible we will present meta-analytic estimates of the association between calling and the constructs analyzed. Specifically, we will provide the average meta-analytic correlations (r) weighted by the inverse of the sample variance and its confidence intervals at 95% (95% CI). This will allow us to understand the overall strength of the association between the two constructs considered from time to time in the various studies. We will also provide heterogeneity indices of the effect size: Q test (Cochran, 1954; Hedges &

Olkin, 1985) and I^2, which quantify the degree of heterogeneity. I^2 can be interpreted as the percentage of total variance due to true heterogeneity and not sampling error. To interpret the index we consider values $I^2 = 25$, $I^2 = 50$, $I^2 = 70$ as indicators, respectively, of low, medium and high heterogeneity (Higgins & Thompson, 2002). The meta-analysis includes all groups of relations with more than three values. Different scales of the same construct were considered within the same group of effect sizes and then synthesized through a single estimate.

In reading the results of the review, it is worth considering the large number of different scales that have been used to measure calling. To this end, the following is a concise description.

1.7.1 Calling Measures

The results that we will present originate from studies that adopt one or more of the definitions of calling shown in Table 1. We will briefly present eight measurement scales of calling. For a detailed study of the psychometric characteristics of these scales (excluding Praskova et al., 2015) we refer the reader to Dalla Rosa, Galliani, and Vianello (2014).

Work-Life Questionnaire (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). It consists of measurements of orientation to the profession: a true/false questionnaire (hereafter referred to as "WLQ") consisting of 18 items, and three paragraphs (hereafter referred to as "WLP"), each describing a prototypical worker with, respectively, career, job and calling orientation. Subjects must indicate the degree of similarity between their work orientation and that of the three prototypical workers. The two tools can be used together or separately.

Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ; Dik et al., 2012). Consisting of 24 items, it is the only measure, together with the Brief Calling Scale (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012), which distinguishes between presence and search for calling. It is composed of 6 sub-scales that measure, respectively, the presence of and search for: transcendent summons, purposeful work and prosocial orientation.

Brief Calling Scale (BCS; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012). Based on the same theoretical model as the preceding, it is composed of 4 items, two for presence of and two for search for calling. However, it does not distinguish between different dimensions of calling (like the CVQ) because it uses the generic term "calling" in the items.

Integrated Calling Scale (ICS; Dobrow, 2006; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). Composed of 12 items, it is domain-specific: it can be adapted to any context, whether occupational or not, and is suitable for both samples of students or workers.

Multidimensional Calling Measure (MCM; Hagmaier & Abele, 2012). The

scale is composed of 9 items measuring 3 factors: identification and person-environment fit (IP); transcendent guiding force (TGF); sense, meaning and value-driven behavior (SMVB).

Neoclassical Calling Scale (NCS; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). It consists of 6 items and emphasizes the dimension of work as passion, source of transcendent meaning and perception of adequacy.

Living a calling scale (LCS; Duffy, Allan & Bott, 2012). Composed of 6 items, it is the only scale that measures the degree to which the subjects are currently living the career to which they feel called. Example items are: "I have regular opportunities to live out my calling" and "I am living out my calling right now in my job" (p. 474).

Career Calling Scale (CCS; Praskova et al., 2015). It is composed of 15 items measuring 3 factors: other-oriented meaning, personal meaning and active engagement.

1.7.2 Professional Identification

Identification with profession and occupation is the degree to which people are defined in terms of what they do and the prototypical characteristics of that profession (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). People who feel they have a vocation for a profession will tend to identify with it and consequently to experience work as more important and meaningful (Professional Identification, Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). In addition, people who have a calling orientation to their profession will tend also to identify with the organisation in which they work if they see the organisation itself as a tool for achieving their objectives (Organisational Identification, Cardador, Dane, & Pratt, 2011).

Table 2 – Zero order correlation between calling and professional and organisational identification

Measure of calling	*N*	Professional identification[a]	Study
WLQ – 7 items	364	.46[*]	Cardador, Dane, & Pratt (2011)
NCS	491	.36[**]	Bunderson & Thompson (2009)
Measure of calling	*N*	Organisational identification[b]	Study
WLQ – 7 items	364	.42[*]	Cardador et al. (2011)

[*] $p < .05$ [**] $p < .01$ [***] $p < .001$
[a] Mael and Ashforth (1992): "When someone criticizes the animal keeping profession, it feels like a personal insult."
[b] Mael and Ashforth (1992) adapted: "When someone criticizes my organisation it feels like a personal insult".
WLQ – Work-Life Questionnaire; Wrzesniewski et al. (1997).
NCS – Neoclassical Calling Scale; Bunderson and Thompson (2009).

Table 2 lists the correlation indexes between two measures of calling and some measures of professional and organisational identification. Calling is moderately and positively associated with identification with the profession.

Bunderson and Thompson (2009) measure calling as the perception of being destined to perform a work (spiritual dimension of calling). Their analyses show that identification with the profession partially mediates the relationship between the spiritual dimension of calling and work meaningfulness (from calling to work meaningfulness: $\beta = .18$; indirect effect: $\beta = .10$; ΔR^2 due to mediation = .10, $N = 491$), between calling and occupational importance (from calling to occupational importance: $\beta = .19$; *indirect* effect: $\beta = .10$; ΔR^2 due to mediation =.08, $N = 491$) and also the relationship between calling and willingness to sacrifice (from calling to willingness to sacrifice: $\beta = .14$; indirect effect: $\beta = .05$; ΔR^2 due to mediation =.11, $N = 491$) (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). A person who feels destined to perform a work attributes meaning to the activity, considers it important and is willing to sacrifice time and energy. The link between the spiritual component of calling (Neoclassical Calling Scale) and self-concept components (represented by work meaningfulness) and motivation (represented by willingness to sacrifice) is explained in part by identification with the profession. This result emphasizes the importance of the identity dimension in explaining the correlates of calling. Having a vocation contributes to the subjects' self-concept and it is through the process of identity construction that subjects find meaning in the activities they perform, consider important and are willing to make sacrifices to keep working. In other words, for people who identify with the profession, work is important, gives meaning to life and is something for which they are willing to sacrifice time and energy. The gain in terms of belonging, personal fulfillment and the feeling of living a meaningful life repays the subject for the sacrifices made.

Calling also correlates positively with identification with the organisation (Table 2; Cardador et al., 2011). The latter indicates the perception of unity with, and belonging to, the organisation. The relationship between calling and organisational identification remains significant and positive even controlling for identification with the profession and job satisfaction ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$, $N = 364$, $R^2 = .54$), demonstrating the strength of this relationship (Cardador et al., 2011). Calling regards the work and not the organisation, however, it proves to be associated with distal constructs such as organisational identification. The relationship between calling and identification with the organisation is explained by organisational instrumentality (Sobel test: $z = 4.08$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .59$), the perception that the organisation is a useful tool for achieving one's objectives (Cardador et al., 2011). This result suggests the importance of also analyzing the organisational and social context in which persons work and seek to realize their vocation.

1.7.3 Meaning in Life and Work

Meaning in life can be defined as "the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence" (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006, p. 81). The activity to which one feels a vocation should be in line with the meaning of one's life and allow the persons carrying it out to give meaning to their existence (Steger et al., 2012). The search for meaning would respond to the need to reinterpret the profession by integrating it with the sense of one's life. The person who lives a calling adopts a "subjective, self-relevant view of [the] meaning" (Dobrow, 2004, p. 20) of work and "approaches a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness" (Dik et al., 2012, p. 244).

The measurement scales of meaning most used in the literature on calling are the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) developed by Steger et al. (2012) and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006).

The scale of meaning in life (Steger et al., 2006) is divided into two sub-scales: presence ("My life has a clear sense of purpose") and search ("I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life"). A person can be aware of the meaning, purpose and importance of one's life, or be looking for something that provides a sense in life. Table 3 shows the correlations between calling measures and the dimensions of search and presence of meaning in life.

The presence of calling always correlates positively with the presence of meaning in life. Across studies, the meta-analytic mean is $r = .44$. The meta-analysis found a high level of heterogeneity in the effects, which is probably due to the variety of measures employed across studies and perhaps to other unknown moderators. In terms of scales, LCS and BCS show moderate associations with meaning in life, whereas the CCS shows strong associations with the same scale and the SSCCS weak associations. It is clear that the specific scale used by the authors to measure calling determines the strength of the correlation with the Meaning in Life construct. The search for calling correlates negatively with the presence of meaning in life ($r = -.16$). The search for meaning in life does not correlate significantly with the presence of calling ($r = .01$), but only with its search ($r = .30$). So, as the presence of calling increases, the meaning in life also increases, but not its search. However, those who search for a calling also tend to search for meaning in life. The different relationship patterns between the search for and presence of calling with meaning in life support the discriminant validity of the calling measures.

The Work and Meaning Inventory of Steger et al. (2012) consists of three dimensions: positive meaning ("I have found a meaningful career"), meaning making through work ("I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose") and greater good motivations ("The work I do serves a greater purpose"). Table 4 shows all the correlations between calling measures and meaning in work.

Table 3 – Zero order correlation between calling and meaning in life

Measure of calling	N	Meaning in life[a] – presence	Meaning in life[a] – search	Study
CVQ search	134	.16[ns]	.50***	Dik et al. (2012) – study 2
BCS search	134	−.19*	.46**	
	2432	−.18*	.28**	Duffy & Sedlacek (2010)
CVQ presence	312	.54*[d]	.54*[d]	Duffy, Allan, & Dik (2011)
	134	.50**	.13[ns]	Dik et al. (2012) – study 2
	134	.59**	.02[ns]	
BCS presence	292 (T1/T1)	.54*	.03[ns]	Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan (2014)
	292 (T1/T2)	.55*[e]	.02[ns]	
	292 (T2/T2)	.56*	.06[ns]	
	553	.39*	–	Duffy et al. (2013)
	2432	.39**	.00[ns]	Duffy & Sedlacek (2010)
	110 (T1/T1)	.37**	–	Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott (2011)
	68 (T1/T2)	.24**[e]	–	
	68 (T2/T2)	.45**	–	
LCS	553	.40*	–	Duffy et al. (2013)
SSCCS (average)[b]	509	.28***	−.01[ns]	
SSCCS – Life purpose	509	.29***	−.02[ns]	Coulson et al. (2012)
SSCCS – Awareness	509	.07[ns]	.08[ns]	
SSCCS – Passion	509	.37***	−.10*	
CCS	216 (T1/T1)	.59***[d]	.59***[d]	Praskova, Hood, & Creed (2014)
	216 (T1/T2)	.47***[e]	–	
	216 (T2/T2)	.67***	–	
Meta-Analysis calling search	r	−.16	.30	
	95% CI	[−.20, -.13]	[.27, .34]	
	Q	14.75 ($DF = 2$)	13.31 ($DF = 2$)	
	I^2	86.43	84.97	
Meta-Analysis calling presence	r	.44	.01	
	95% CI	[.42, .46]	[-.02, .04]	
	Q	87.58 ($DF = 12$)	3.2 ($DF = 5$)	
	I^2	86.30	0.00	

[a] MLQ; Steger et al., 2006.

[b] Calling factors: Life purpose, Awareness, Passion (respectively).

[c] Positive meaning, meaning making through work, greater good motivation.

[d] Correlation between calling and a composite score of Meaning in life presence and search. This effect size has only been included in the meta-analyses involving calling-presence and excluded in the meta-analyses involving calling-search.

[e] These longitudinal effect sizes have been excluded from the meta-analyses.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

CVQ – Calling and Vocation Questionnaire; Dik et al., 2012.

BCS – Brief Calling Scale; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012.

SSCCS – Subjective Sense of Calling in Childrearing Scale; Coulson et al., 2012.

CCS – Career Calling Scale; Praskova et al., 2015.

LCS – Living a calling scale; Duffy, Allan et al., 2012.

Table 4 – Zero order correlation between calling and work meaning

Measure of calling	N	Correlation with work meaning	Measure of work meaning	Study
BCS search	370	-.19*** (-.30***, .00[ns], -.17***) [a]	WAMI; Steger et al. (2012)	Steger et al. (2012)
BCS presence	370	.54*** (.51***, .47***, .42***) [a]		
	.201	.34*	Littman-Ovadia & Steger (2010)	Duffy, Bott et al. (2012)
	553	.30*	WAMI; Steger, Dik, & Duffy (2012)	Duffy et al. (2013)
LCS	201	.62*	Littman-Ovadia & Steger (2010)	Duffy, Bott et al. (2012)
	553	.73*	WAMI; Steger et al. (2012)	Duffy et al. (2013)
WLP calling	370	.61*** (.60***, .52***, .49***) [a]		Steger et al. (2012)
NCS	491	.37*	Spreitzer, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al. (1997); Pratt & Ashforth (2003)	Bunderson & Thompson (2009)
Meta-analysis – calling presence: $r = .52$, 95% CI [.37, .64] $Q_{(6)} = 145.58$, $I^2 = 95.88$				

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

[a] Meaningful work total score, in parentheses, respectively: positive meaning, meaning making through work, greater good motivations.

WLP – Work-Life Paragraphs; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997.

BCS – Brief Calling Scale; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012.

LCS – Living a calling scale; Duffy, Allan et al., 2012.

NCS – Neoclassical Calling Scale; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009.

Calling orientation and the presence of calling correlate positively with a sense that one's own work is meaningful and contributes both to the individual's personal growth and to a greater common good. The search for calling correlates negatively with the dimension of meaning in work. In other words, the more individuals feel that their work has no positive meaning, does not contribute to their personal growth and to the common good, the more they

say that they are searching for a vocation and a calling to a particular domain, which, however, has yet to be identified. Finally, the association between living a calling and meaning in work is positive and higher than the correlation between the presence of calling and meaning in work. Those who say they have a calling tend to experience work as meaningful, but those who say they are able to express their calling in the profession have higher levels of work meaning ($r = .73$, $N = 553$; $r = .62$, $N = 201$) and life meaning ($r = .40$, $N = 553$). Those who are searching for a vocation or do not have one, tend to judge their work as less meaningful.

The association between calling and meaning in work and in life depends in part on the overlap between the two constructs. Having a calling presupposes that the activity to which the person feels called is indeed meaningful and important, with a subjective sense. However, this association may also be explained by other factors such as, for example, occupational identification (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), i.e., the "perceived oneness with an organisation and the experience of the organisation's successes and failures as one's own" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p.103). People who feel a calling, experience their work as significant in part because they identify with the profession. In fact, we saw in the section on identification with occupation, that the association between calling and meaning in work is partially explained by how much persons identify with their work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

Several studies (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012; Duffy et al., 2013) have analyzed the role of life meaning and work meaning in explaining the relationship between calling and some outcomes, in particular satisfaction in life and in work. People who realize their professional vocation in work, experience their work as meaningful, are more satisfied with the profession, feel fulfilled and consider that their life is meaningful, and are, consequently, more satisfied with life in general. Meaning in life and work thus lies between calling and satisfaction in life and work. Experiencing life and work as meaningful partly explains why a person who lives or feels a vocation is also satisfied in life and work (Duffy et al., .2013; Duffy, Bott et al., 2012).

We can therefore say that calling is associated with meaning in life and work, but what is the temporal relationship between these two constructs? There seems to be more support for the hypothesis of life and work meaning as predictors of calling (Praskova, Hood, & Creed, 2014; Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2014; Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott, 2011). In fact, most of the longitudinal studies of this relationship have identified meaning in life and work as predictors of calling over time (Duffy, Douglass et al., 2014; Duffy, Manuel et al., 2011; Duffy, Allan et al., 2014); only one longitudinal study has identified calling as a predictor of meaning in life (Praskova, Hood & et al., 2014). The direction of the causal relationship is still a point to be clarified that future research will hopefully address.

1.7.4 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is the motivation to engage in something for love of the activity itself. People are involved, interested and satisfied with what they do. Extrinsic motivation is the incentive to do what is generated by elements external to the activity itself, such as forms of compensation, recognition or obligation (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994).

By definition, calling should be more in line with a motivational approach linked to intrinsic reasons. In fact, one of the components of calling is the affective dimension, which concerns the passion, pleasure and satisfaction associated with the domain, elements that also characterize intrinsic motivational orientation and that push the person to perform a task for the pleasure of doing it. A positive and strong correlation of calling with intrinsic motivation, and low or non-significant with extrinsic motivation would be consistent with the definition of calling. However, the results (Table 5) indicate that although the relationship between calling and intrinsic motivation is higher ($r = .34$) than the relationship between calling and extrinsic motivation ($r = .27$), both relationships are significant, indicating that having a vocation for one's work leads to being more motivated by external rewards and recognitions.

Intrinsic motivation is positively associated to all measures of presence of and search for calling through samples of students and workers. The exception is the low and non-significant correlation ($r = .06$) between intrinsic motivation and calling in the sample of business students. This result could be due to a specific and high extrinsic motivation that drives this sample of students.

The pattern of positive correlations between calling and intrinsic motivation is present in the samples of students engaged in absorbing activities that require perseverance and commitment, such as the development of musical and artistic skills (samples 1 and 2 in Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). In these two groups, the presence of a calling to music or art is associated with motivation in terms of pleasure experienced in carrying out the activities and enjoyment in solving problems or learning new things. People who have a vocation of this type, basically do not perform the activity because they are interested in receiving rewards or external recognition and, in fact, in these samples (only one exception for one measure in the second sample) there is no significant association between calling and extrinsic motivation.

Table 5 – Zero order correlation between calling and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Measure of calling	N	Intrinsic motivation[a]	Extrinsic motivation[a]	Study
ICS	Sample 1: 227 (T1 vs T2)	.28***	.09[ns]	Dobrow & Thosti-Kharas (2011)- Phase 3
	Sample 2: 31 (T1 vs T2)	.45**	.23[ns]	
	Sample 3: 142	.06[ns]	.21*	
	Sample 4: 241	.39***	.51***	
WLQ calling – 5 items	Sample 1: 120 (T4 vs T2)	.17*	.03[ns]	
	Sample 4: 241	.42***	.38***	
Adapted WLQ calling 5 items	Sample 1: 218	.34***	.06[ns]	
	Sample 2: 28	.59***	.46**	
	Sample 3: 142	.17*	.01[ns]	
NCS	Sample 4: 239	.42***	.37***	
BCS presence	Sample 4: 241	.48***	.36***	
CVQ presence	Sample 5: 456	.27**	.12*	Dik et al. (2012) Study 1
CVQ search [b]	Sample 5: 456	.31**	.16**	
Meta-analysis (T1/T1)	r	.34	.27	
	95% CI	[.30, .38]	[.22, .31]	
	Q	33.68 ($DF = 8$)	61.17 ($DF = 8$)	
	I^2	76.26	86.97	
Meta-analysis (Longitudinal relationships)	r	.26	.08	
	95% CI	[.16, .35]	[-.02, .18]	
	Q	2.49 ($DF = 2$)	1.98 ($DF = 2$)	
	I^2	33.08	0	

[a] WPI; Amabile et al., 1994.
[b] Study removed from meta-analysis.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$
T2: six weeks later; T4: 7 years later.
Sample 1: musicians. Age ($M = 17, .34$ $SD = .94$).
Sample 2: talented actors, visual artists, dancers, and writers. Age ($M = 16.91$, $SD = .93$).
Sample 3: business students. Age ($M = 22.95$, $SD = 4.83$).
Sample 4: professional managers employed full time. Age ($M = 45.97$, $SD = 6.99$).
Sample 5: college students from introductory psychology courses. Age ($M = 18.78$, $SD = 1.42$).
ICS – Integrated Calling Scale; Dobrow, 2006; Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas, 2011.
WLQ – Work-Life Questionnaire; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997.
NCS – Neoclassical Calling Scale; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009.
BCS – Brief Calling Scale; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012.
CVQ – Calling and Vocation Questionnaire; Dik et al., 2012.

Extrinsic motivation correlates significantly and positively with calling in the sample of workers (sample 4 – professional managers – in Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011), in the sample of students (sample 5 in Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011) and in an inconstant manner in the second and third sample, respectively, a group of persons enrolled in an art summer school (theatre, dance, writing and visual arts) and business students. The correlation between calling and motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is always strong and positive in the sample of professional managers.

It should be emphasized that extrinsic motivation in the WPI is represented by items that capture the motivation to show others one's skills and gain recognition (in both material and immaterial terms). The correlations between calling and extrinsic motivation, which we see in Table 5, may depend on the identitary component, on the desire to affirm and to realize themselves in the domain of their vocation. It could thus represent an association between calling and desire for recognition of their skills. The positive association that we observed could change by adopting different extrinsic motivation measures, for example by comparing calling with the desire to receive rewards or the motivation dictated by obligations or coercion. In summary, the presence of calling correlates clearly with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, even if for the latter the effect size is smaller and heterogeneity is greater. Feeling called to a domain increases the intrinsic push to commit themselves to that domain and obtain personal satisfaction, and also increases sensitivity to extrinsic rewards linked in particular to external recognition of their skills and successes.

Finally, it is useful to underline that the meta-analytic estimates of relationships at a distance in time are lower than those discussed so far, obtained at the same time. The longitudinal relationship between the presence of calling and intrinsic motivation drops to .26 (95% CI [.16, .35] but the relationship between calling and extrinsic motivation drops more if the observations are made after some time, in fact, the meta-analytic estimate is not different from zero ($r = .08$, 95% CI [-.02, .18]). One might think that the relationship between calling and extrinsic motivation, comparable to that with intrinsic motivation when the measurements are collected at the same time, is less resistant to the passage of time and tends to fade with the years between one measurement and the other.

1.7.5 Engagement (in Work, in Learning)

Work engagement is "a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor [energy and persistence], dedication [involvement and sense of meaning], and absorption [being absorbed and concentrated in the activity]" (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006, p. 702).

Engaged learning is "a positive energy invested in one's own learning,

evidenced by meaningful processing, attention to what is happening in the moment, and involvement in learning activities" (Schreiner & Louis, 2006, p. 6). In the model of Schreiner and Louis (2006) the three dimensions of engaged learning are: focused attention, active participation, meaningful processing. The two constructs have some elements in common. In both occupational and educational contexts, the people involved are energetic, active participants, are concentrated (absorption and active participation) and attribute meaning and importance (meaningful processing and dedication) to the activity they are performing. With respect to behavioral involvement, engagement also relates to a more general psychological component linked to effort, energy and commitment in the activity (Schreiner & Louis, 2006). Table 6 shows the correlations between different measures of calling and two measures, respectively, of engaged learning and work engagement.

Table 6 – Zero order correlation between calling and engagement

Measure of calling	*N*	Engagement	Measure	Study
ICS	F: 178 M: 92	F: .42* M: .33*	Engaged Learning; Schreiner & Louis (2006)	Phillips (2011)
	240	.58***	Work Engagement (UWES-9); Schaufeli et al. (2006)	Dobrow & Thosti-Kharas (2011)
NCS	239	.63***		
BCS presence	240	.61***		
WLP calling	240	.68***		
WLP career[a]	240	.49***		

Meta-analysis: $r = .58$, 95% CI [.54, .62], $Q_{(5)} = 25.72$, $I^2 = 80.56$

[a] excluded from meta-analysis.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$
Sample 4: professional manager employed full time. Age ($M = 45.97$, $SD = 6.99$).
ICS – Integrated Calling Scale; Dobrow, 2006; Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas, 2011.
NCS – Neoclassical Calling Scale; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009.
BCS – Brief Calling Scale; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012.
WLP – Work-Life Paragraphs; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997.

We observe that calling has basically high positive correlations with engagement in study ($r = .39$, 95% CI [.28, .29]) and work ($r = .63$, 95% CI [.59, .66]). A person who has a vocation for study or work manifests, therefore, passion for the activity, is focused on achieving results and is more involved and engaged in the study or professional activity.

Such high correlations may suggest an overlap between the two constructs. The calling orientation correlates $r = .63$ with involvement in work. By

analyzing the content of the scales, one can see that some of the dimensions of calling, as defined by Wrzesniewski et al. in 1997, are very close to the factors that characterize the behavior of a person involved in the work. For example, the dedication factor in the UWES-9 scale regards the meaning of work, enthusiasm and pride in performing the professional activity; elements that also characterize the calling orientation: pleasure in the work, the role of the profession in the definition of identity and meaning in life. Absorption in the activity, an engagement factor, is also found in calling orientation in reference to the tendency to bring work home and the desire to continue working and not retire.

The strong association between calling and engagement could thus depend on a possible overlap between the two constructs. Specifically, engagement is very close to the motivational dimension of calling, which is manifested by commitment and involvement in the activity related to the vocation, perseverance in trying to realize it and achieve goals, all elements that also define involvement in work and study.

However, we also observe high correlations when the calling measure adopted does not present a clear overlap of content with the measure of work engagement, as in the case of the Brief Calling Scale and the Neoclassical Calling Scale. Evidently, active involvement in the activity towards which one feels called is an inevitable consequence of the call itself, which, however, has other aspects that go beyond engagement. We can therefore conclude that the relationship between calling and engagement is strong, but the two constructs do not overlap completely.

1.7.6 Career Commitment

Career commitment is a psychological state that characterizes workers' relationships with their professions and has been articulated by Meyer and Allen (1991) into three components: affective, continuance and normative commitment. A person who is affectively committed has a strong desire to continue to carry out the same profession; a person normatively committed feels obliged to remain and, finally, a person who has continuance commitment identifies high costs associated with abandoning the profession. Career commitment concerns a general attachment to a career or role, unlike commitment to the job and commitment to the organisation. Here we use the term career commitment, but it is important to emphasize that career, occupational or professional commitment refer to the same construct (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). Career commitment, like the work meaning previously analyzed, has been studied in the literature as a mediator in the relationship between calling and satisfaction in work and life (Duffy, Bott, et al., 2012; Duffy, Dik, et al., 2011; Duffy et al., 2013).

The Career Commitment Scale (Blau, 1985, 1988), adopted in the studies presented here, asks subjects to indicate the degree of engagement in certain professionally related activities ("I spend a significant amount of personal time reading nursing-related journals or books"; professional commitment), how strong is the desire to continue to practice even in the presence of alternatives ("If I had all the money I needed without working, I would probably still continue to work in the - newspaper, insurance ... - profession"; occupational commitment), and the general interest in a wide range of specific work activities associated with occupation ("I definitely want a career for myself in this profession [e.g., nursing]"; career orientation).

Having a calling towards work implies feeling passion for the activities associated with the profession, feeling connected to it as part of one's destiny and identity, orientating oneself positively to the work with commitment and determination to achieve results. Against this background, we expect that a person who has a high calling also has high career commitment.

Table 7 – Zero order correlation between calling and career commitment

Measure of calling	N	Career commitment[a]	Study
CVQ presence	370	.48**	Duffy, Dik et al. (2011)
BCS presence	201	.33**	Duffy, Bott et al. (2012)
	553	.20**	Duffy et al. (2013)
LCS	553	.69**	
	201	.68**	Duffy, Bott et al. (2012)
Meta-Analysis: $r = .50$, 95% CI [.27, .68], $Q_{(4)} = 3.38$, $I^2 = 0$.			

[a] Career Commitment Scale (Blau, 1985, 1988).
** $p < .01$
BCS – Brief Calling Scale; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012.
LCS – Living a calling scale; Duffy, Allan et al., 2012.
CVQ – Calling and Vocation Questionnaire; Dik et al., 2012.

As we can see in Table 7, which shows the correlations between calling and career commitment, those who claims to have a calling and are able to express it tend to be involved in the profession. The association between calling and career commitment is stronger when the calling measure used is the Living a Calling Scale, which measures the degree of realization of the vocation in the current profession (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012). If people have a vocation, they are more likely to feel linked to the current profession when it corresponds to their calling. The meta-analytic estimate of the correlation is very high ($r = .50$), and the effect size is not heterogeneous (beyond sampling error). This suggests

a strong overlap between the two constructs, which nevertheless cannot be considered equivalent: it should be noted that a person may be committed to the profession without this representing a vocation. In fact, the relationship is well distant from 1.

Many of the beneficial effects of having a vocation occur because persons are committed to the profession (mediation of career commitment) and realize their calling in the activity (moderation of living out a calling).

a) Living out a calling has emerged as a moderator of the relationship between calling and career commitment (effect of the interplay between perceiving and living the calling on career commitment: $\beta = .12$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.07, 1.23], $R^2 = .47$, $N = 201$) (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012). A person who has a vocation tends to be committed to the profession when it aligns with the calling. In addition, the effect of mediation of career commitment between calling and job satisfaction occurs only with high living a calling scores (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012, significant indirect effect only at the 90th percentile of living a calling: $\beta = .31$, $p < .05$, $N = 201$).

b) Career commitment explains some of the positive work-related outcomes of calling. Having a calling leads to greater satisfaction from work (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012; Duffy, Dik et al., 2011; Duffy et al., 2013), increased organisational commitment (Duffy, Dik et al., 2011) and reduction of withdrawal intention (Duffy, Dik et al., 2011), in part through career commitment.

1.7.7 Satisfaction in Work and in Life: the Mediators and the Role of Living out a Calling

When people have the opportunity of realizing their vocation they live a state of well-being (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). The relationship between calling and satisfaction is one of the most analyzed in the reference literature (Duffy et al. 2013; Duffy, Bott et al., 2012; Hagmeier & Abele, 2012; Duffy, Manuel et al., 2011; Hirshi & Herrmann, 2012; Peterson et al., 2009; Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2014). The positive association between satisfaction and calling seems to be transverse to the contexts, academic (Duffy, Allan et al., 2011) and occupational, and constant through conceptually different calling measurement tools.

In order to investigate the relationship between calling and satisfaction, we will examine some studies. The first group highlights the positive and significant relationships between calling and satisfaction. A second group of studies report contrasting results, which stress the importance of factors such as: the possibility of living a calling, involvement in the profession and the meaning attributed to work and life. Finally, we will see some results that will allow studying the complexity of the link between calling and satisfaction through the analysis of potential mediators and moderators.

Table 8 – Zero order correlation between calling and job satisfaction

Measure of calling	N	Job satisfaction	Measure of job satisfaction	Study
BCS presence	553	.17**	Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger (1998)	Duffy et al. (2013)
	204	.20**	Baillod & Semmer (1994)	Hagmeier & Abele (2012) Study 3
	85	.26*		Hagmeier & Abele (2012) Study 4
LCS	201	.23**	Judge et al. (1998)	Duffy, Bott, et al. (2012)
	201	.52**		
	553	.61**		Duffy et al. (2013)
WLP calling	364	.55*	Smith, Kendall, & Hulin (1969)	Cardador et al. (2011)
	9803	.54***	Single item	Peterson et al. (2009)
MCM-TGF	85	.31**	Baillod & Semmer (1994)	Hagmeier & Abele (2012) Study 4
	204	.24**		Hagmeier & Abele (2012) Study 3
MCM-SMVB	204	.29***		
	85	.38**		Hagmeier & Abele (2012) Study 4
MCM-IP	85	.42**		
	204	.60***		Hagmeier & Abele (2012) Study 3
SSCCS		.66***	Parenting Satisfaction Scale (PSS); Halverson & Duke (2001)	Coulson et al. (2012)
SSCCS Life purpose[b]	480-489	.61***		
SSCCS Awareness[b]		.43***		
SSCCS Passion[b]		.67***		
CVQ presence	312	.42*	Academic Satisfaction; Lent, Singley, Sheu, Schmidtt, & Schmidtt, (2007)	Duffy, Allan et al. (2011)

Meta-analysis: $r = .51$, 95% CI [.50, .53], $Q_{(15)} = 243.25$, $I^2 = 93.83$

Table 8 shows the correlations between calling measures and satisfaction in work. Calling, present or lived, always positively correlates with work satisfaction. Living out a calling and calling orientation have stronger correlations (range: .52 – .61) compared to other measures (range: .17 – .42) in particular Brief Calling Scale (BCS; Dik et al., 2012) and the measure of Hagmeier and Abele (2012). The association between calling and job satisfaction appears to be greater when the calling measure adopted regards the current profession and the specific attitude towards work, as in the case of the calling orientation measure and living out a calling. In support of this observation, in the study of Hagmeier and Abele (2012), of the three factors that make up the scale, only the dimension identification with one's work and person-environment fit significantly predicts satisfaction in work (Study 3: β = .73; t (152) = 9.57, p = .001, d = 1.55; Study 4: β = .28, p < .05). Guiding force, sense and meaning and value-driven behavior do not add explained variance to work satisfaction. From these first results we can see that being satisfied in work is accompanied by a specific vocation that regards the professional role actually played. It is more likely that people are satisfied when they have a vocation for the work they are doing and when the latter allows them to achieve it.

The pattern of correlations between calling and satisfaction in life (Table 9) is less consistent with respect to that observed for satisfaction in work.

The search for calling is negatively correlated with satisfaction in life, but the intensity of this association is trivial and meta-analytic estimate is not significantly different from zero. As regards presence and living out a calling, the meta-analytic average of the studies conducted to date is .28. Satisfaction in life depends on many factors and it is therefore understandable that the correlations with calling are lower than those of calling with satisfaction in work. The strongest correlations are highlighted, also in this case, between satisfaction in life and living out a calling (r =.48, p < .01, N = 553).

The results of the meta-analyses reported in Tables 8 and 9 show much heterogeneity in the strength of the associations between calling and satisfaction in life and work. This suggests the presence of moderating variables that can influencing the presence and direction of the relationship between vocation and satisfaction.

Table 9 – Zero order correlation between calling and life satisfaction

Measure of calling	N	Life satisfaction[a]	Study
CVQ search	333	$.09^{ns}$	Dik et al. (2012) – Study 1
	134	$.00^{ns}$	Dik et al. (2012) – Study 2
BCS search	134	$-.07^{ns}$	
	2432	-.12*	Duffy & Sedlacek (2010)
Meta-analysis (search): $r = -.09$, 95% CI [-.13, -.05], $Q_{(3)} = 14.11$, $I^2 = 78.73$			
BCS presence and search	194	.28**	Torrey & Duffy (2012)
BCS presence	553	.17**	Duffy et al. (2013)
	110 (T1 vs T1)	.25*	Duffy, Manuel et al. (2011)
	68 (T1 vs T2)[b]	$.19^{ns}$	
	68 (T2 vs T2)	$.17^{ns}$	
	134	$.01^{ns}$	Dik et al. (2012) – Study 2
	2432	.16**	Duffy & Sedlacek (2010)
CVQ presence	333	.14*	Dik et al. (2012) – Study 1
	134	$.08^{ns}$	Dik et al. (2012) – Study 2
WLP calling	134	$-.01^{ns}$	Dik et al. (2012) – Study 2
	9803	.32*	Peterson et al. (2009)
LCS	553	.48**	Duffy et al. (2013)
SSCCS		.27***	Coulson et al. (2012)
SSCCS - Life purpose	500 – 509	.26***	
SSCCS - Awareness		.09*	
SSCCS - Passion		.36***	
CCS	644	.25***	Praskova, Creed & Hood (2014)
Meta-analysis (presence): $r = .28$, 95% CI [.27, .30], $Q_{(12)} = 131.71$, $I^2 = 90.89$			

[a] SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin,1985.
[b] Removed from meta-analysis.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$
BCS – Brief Calling Scale; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012.
LCS – Living a calling scale; Duffy, Allan et al., 2012.
WLP – Work-Life Paragraphs; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997.
SSCCS – Subjective Sense of Calling in Childrearing Scale; Coulson et al., 2012.
CCS – Career Calling Scale; Praskova et al., 2015.
CVQ – Calling and Vocation Questionnaire; Dik et al., 2012.

One such condition is the presence of a context that favors the experience of the vocation, for example, a positive working environment, in which subjects feel involved in the activity and identify with the profession and/or the

organisation. In these cases, persons can claim to be living their vocation in the current profession. Living out a calling is one of the measures most associated with satisfaction in life and work, a result that underscores the importance of this construct, perhaps less evident in the relationships previously studied. The relationship between calling and satisfaction could also be explained by other factors, one of the most important is the meaning attributed to the life or activity carried out. We will discuss this in a later section.

1.7.7.1 When Calling is Not Associated with Satisfaction

In Table 9 we observed that calling and satisfaction in life are not always associated. The calling can lose impact on satisfaction when it is less salient than other dimensions of the individuals' psychological experience, or when they feel that they have a vocation, but cannot achieve it.

In the study by Steger et al. (2012), calling does not appear to be a significant predictor of satisfaction in life ($\beta = -.03$; 95% CI [–.31, .16]) or in work ($\beta = .04$; 95% CI [–.04, .14]). Calling emerges as a significant predictor, but negative ($\beta = -.09$; $p < .05$; 95% CI [–.21, –.02]), of satisfaction in work in a model that introduces as predictors ($R^2 = .62$, $p < .001$) intentions of abandonment ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .01$; 95% CI [–.41, –.25]), commitment to the organisation ($\beta = .36$, $p < .01$; 95% CI [.10, .17]) and meaning in work ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$; 95% CI [.09, .15]).

Calling is not significantly associated to satisfaction in life when meaning in life, job satisfaction ($\beta = -.03$; 95% CI [–.31, .16]; $R^2 = .36$) and meaning in work ($\beta = -.09$, 95% CI [–.48, .03]; $R^2 = .38$) are added as predictors. We can explain these results by noting that satisfaction in work and meaning in life and work are the main predictors of satisfaction in life. Consequently, the portion of variance accounted for by calling would be small or insignificant. It is therefore possible that calling is a "distal" predictor of satisfaction, i.e., that its effect on satisfaction in life and work is mediated and moderated by a number of factors, including occupational commitment, intention to abandon the work, meaning in life and that which the work itself has for the subject.

In the study by Duffy, Manuel et al. (2011), the satisfaction in life of a group of medical students was significantly associated with calling only at the beginning of their studies ($r = .25$, $p < .01$, $N = 110$), but measures of calling at the first and third year did not correlate with life satisfaction in the third year (calling T1: $r = .19$; calling T2: $r = .17$; $N = 68$).

Hirschi and Herrmann (2012) analyzed the relationship between calling and satisfaction in life 6 months apart. Calling does not correlate significantly with satisfaction in life measured six months later ($r = .00$, *ns*, $N = 269$). The relationship between calling and satisfaction becomes negative and significant ($\beta = -.183$, $p = .027$, $N = 269$) when controlled for vocational identity achievement. *Vocational identity achievement* is the level of development of

identity that manifests with high levels of security, involvement and exploration of identity (the two components of the construct are decidedness and career exploration). The effect of calling on satisfaction, not associated with the construction of identity, is negative. So, a person who has a calling, but has not developed a commitment and has not explored the possible characteristics of the professional role, tends to be less satisfied in life. However, we must carefully consider this result because the measure of satisfaction was collected at a distance of six months from that of calling.

1.7.7.2 Career Commitment, Work Meaning and Living a Calling: Mediation and Moderation Between Calling and Satisfaction

We have seen that calling is positively associated to satisfaction in life if it can be realized, if persons have decided, have a clear vocational identity and are prepared with regard to their career paths (Hirshi & Herrmann, 2012). The relationship between calling and satisfaction passes through several conditions. So, we can say that it is not direct. Specifically, there is evidence that having a calling increases satisfaction in life if it also increases the individuals' involvement in their work and the significance perceived by the individuals with regard to their work (Duffy, Dik et al., 2011; Duffy, Bott et al., 2012). If even just one of these relationships goes to zero, having a calling has no impact on satisfaction. Moreover, the call increases the individuals' satisfaction if it is actually lived out, such as if the individuals have the possibility to interact with the domain of their interest (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012; Duffy et al., 2013).

When career commitment is high, indicating a correspondence between the domain to which they feel called and the one in which they are currently engaged, people are satisfied with their work. In the study by Duffy, Dik et al. (2011), career commitment (Blau, 1985, 1988; Allen & Meyer, 1990) completely mediates the relationship between calling and job satisfaction ($\beta = .34$, $p = .001$). Having a sense of calling leads to greater satisfaction in work through emotional attachment, involvement and identification with one's career.

In the study by Duffy, Bott et al. (2012) the relationship between perceiving a calling and satisfaction in work is completely explained by career commitment and work meaning. In addition, living a calling moderates and strengthens the relationship between having a calling and positive workplace outcomes. Career commitment ($\beta = .46$, $p < .01$) and work meaning ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$) are predictors of satisfaction in work controlling for the shared variance between these two variables and the independent variable (perceiving a calling). The relationship between perceiving a calling and satisfaction becomes insignificant and assumes a negative direction ($\beta = -.21$, *ns*) when the two mediators (career commitment and work meaning) are included in the model, indicating a total mediation. Living a calling moderates the relationship between perceiving a calling and meaning in work ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$) and between perceiving a calling

and career commitment ($\beta = .04$, $p < .05$). Moreover, when persons claim to live their calling in their current work, the link between perceiving a calling and commitment to the profession, and the relationship between perceiving a calling and meaning associated to the profession are stronger. When, instead, a person has low living a calling, the relationship between the perception of having a calling and the two work-related outcomes studied (career commitment and work meaning) vanishes or becomes negative.

Living the calling also has an effect on the mediation relationship between perceiving the calling and satisfaction in work. In fact, the indirect association between perceiving a calling and satisfaction in work, mediated by work meaning and career commitment, is significant only for persons who have a high or medium living a calling level (it is significant for individuals who place in the 90th percentile for career commitment, and in the 75th and 90th percentile for work meaning).

In conclusion, if persons are able to recognize their vocation, but cannot live it, it is unlikely they will receive benefits from the vocation in terms of involvement, meaning and satisfaction. These are the first results (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012) to suggest that when the profession does not match the sense of calling experienced by the person, the calling can have a negative impact on the satisfaction and well-being of workers. We refer the reader to other studies for an analysis of the possible negative consequences of calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Berg et al., 2010).

As we have seen, the relationship between calling and satisfaction was analyzed not only in relation to profession, but also to general well-being. Living one's calling is associated with greater satisfaction in life, thanks to the increase of the meaning attributed to existence and greater professional satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2013). Perceiving a calling is significantly associated with satisfaction in life ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .03$), but the main predictor is the experience of realizing and living one's calling (by introducing living a calling in the regression equation, the coefficient of perceiving a calling becomes insignificant: $\beta = .01$, and R^2 increases significantly, $\Delta R^2 = .20$, $F = 83.63$). Living a calling is therefore a key moderator of the relationship between calling perceived and satisfaction in life ($\beta = .48$, $N = 553$, $R^2 = .23$). Persons who realize their professional vocation in work are more satisfied with the profession (job satisfaction), feel realized (life meaning), consider that their life is significant and, consequently, are more satisfied with life in general. In fact, living a calling ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$), life meaning ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) directly predict life satisfaction explaining 52% of the variance. The results also confirm the role of mediators of work meaning (Confidence interval for indirect effect: 95% CI [.09, .17]) and career commitment (Confidence interval for indirect effect: 95% CI [.001, .01]) in explaining the relationship between living

the calling and job satisfaction. Finally, life meaning, career commitment, work meaning, and job satisfaction mediate the relationship between living a calling and satisfaction in life (95 % CI [.09, .19]).

1.7.7.3 Another Possible Mediator of the Relationship Between Calling and Satisfaction: Core Self-evaluations

Person who have a vocation also tends to have higher self-esteem and belief in their abilities. *Core self-evaluations* are a measure of the assessment of one's merit, efficacy and ability as a person (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). They consist of four elements: *self-esteem* (the overall value that people attribute to themselves), *generalized self-efficacy* (the assessment of how capable they are in a variety of situations), *neuroticism* (tendency to focus on negative aspects of the self and to adopt a cognitive and explicative style tending towards the pessimistic) and *locus of control* (beliefs about the causes of events). *Core self-evaluations* are positively associated and seem to predict satisfaction in life, in work and performance (Judge et al., 2003; Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001). In Torrey and Duffy (2012) and in Hirshi and Herrmann (2012), the presence of calling correlates positively with *core self-evaluations* (respectively: $r = .37$, $p < .01$, $N = 194$; $r = .18$, $p < .01$, $N = 269$). Furthermore, *core self-evaluations* seem to mediate the relationship between calling and satisfaction in life independently of work status.

Torrey and Duffy (2012) analyze the relationship between calling and satisfaction in life through the mediation of *core self-evaluations*. In the sample of non-workers, calling is associated with satisfaction in life only through the mediation of this construct ($SE = .07$, CI [.06, .33]). For employed subjects and non-workers by choice, calling is associated with satisfaction in work both directly ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$) or through the mediation of core self-evaluations ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$; $SE = .06$, CI [.07, .29]). Persons who do not have a job, despite looking for one, do not have the opportunity to express their vocation in the profession. In contrast, subjects who are employed, or unemployed by choice, have a positive association between calling and satisfaction, which is partly explained by the perception of ability and merit. Employment status (employed, unemployed, voluntarily unemployed) can determine in the subject the opportunity to live the vocation or not, an element that we have seen act as a moderator in the relationship between perceiving a vocation and satisfaction. However, persons can be satisfied by also realizing their vocations in alternative contexts to a profession; this is the case, for example, of the unemployed by choice who still have a positive association between calling and satisfaction in life also independently of core self-evaluations.

1.7.8 Career Adaptability, Self-efficacy, Decidedness

We have analyzed the association of calling with several constructs related to work experience. In the academic field, having a calling should contribute to the positive development of career. People who feel a vocation for a particular discipline are also future-oriented, have a clear vision of their goals, are persevering in achieving them and confront the obstacles that they will meet in their career paths. Having a calling also promotes a sense of efficacy in career decisions (Duffy, Allan, & Dik, 2011; Phillips, 2011; Douglass & Duffy, 2015) and towards the career in general (Dobrow & Thosti-Kharas, 2011). In this section we will see how calling is associated with a number of variables related to preparation for the career and its development: career adaptability, career decision self-efficacy, career related self-efficacy, and career decidedness.

1.7.8.1 Career Adaptability

Career adaptability (Career Construction Theory; Savickas, 2002) measures "the self-regulation strengths or capacities that a person may draw upon to solve […] problems presented by vocational developmental tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas" (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 662). They are resources or skills that the person develops in interaction with the environment and that shape the coping strategies and actions of the subject. Adaptable persons are oriented and prepared for the future (*concern*), are disciplined and persevering (*control*), explore future possibilities and alternatives (*curiosity*) and are secure in their ability to solve problems (*confidence*). In the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) the subjects are asked to indicate how strongly they have developed several skills such as: "Thinking about what my future will be like" (concern), "Counting on myself" (control), "Looking for opportunities to grow as a person" (curiosity), "Overcoming obstacles" (confidence).

Calling is positively and significantly associated to the four dimensions of adaptability. In the study by Douglass and Duffy (2015), the correlations range from .19 to .37 ($p < .001$, $N = 330$). In the study by Guo et al. (2014), only *concern* ($r = .19$, $p < .01$, $N = 270$) and *curiosity* ($r = .19$, $p < .01$, $N = 270$) are significant and positive. Career concern (95% CI [.01, .10]) and curiosity (95% CI [.01, .14]) predict the development of professional skills through calling (Guo et al., 2014). Therefore, future-oriented people, who have developed planning skills (concern) and are open to experiences and opportunities for growth (curiosity) are more likely to develop an awareness of their calling. In turn, high levels of calling guide the individual in the development of professional skills.

In the light of the empirical evidence in the literature (Praskova, Hood et al., 2014; Hirshi & Herrmann, 2013) and theoretical considerations, we believe

that the association between calling and the dimensions of adaptability assumes different forms. Curiosity predicts calling: persons with high levels of curiosity explore possible alternatives and thus can discover their vocations. Concern and calling influence each other: being future-oriented and a career-planner can facilitate the discovery of a calling and, in turn, the presence of a calling can encourage the development of career planning skills. Confidence and control, i.e., the feeling of security in career tasks, perseverance and commitment in reaching goals are likely effects of a calling.

The research results of Douglass and Duffy (2015) also suggest that some adaptability components play a role in explaining the relationship between the calling and career decision self-efficacy. Concern ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.05, .16], $N = 330$) and confidence ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.05, .15], $N = 330$) mediate the relationship between calling and career decision self-efficacy. Students with a vocation feel more effective in making career decisions, in part because they have developed skills in preparing for the future and planning how to achieve goals (concern) and consider themselves to be effective in solving problems, overcoming obstacles and performing tasks efficiently (confidence). Curiosity in turn predicts career decision self-efficacy when subjects use their strengths (indirect effects significant for individuals 1 SD below the mean: $\beta = -.03$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $= [-.08, -.01]$ and 1 SD above the mean: $\beta = .04$, $p < .05$, 95% CI $= [.01, .09]$).

1.7.8.2 Occupational Self-efficacy, Career-related Self-efficacy and Career Decision Self-efficacy

A person who has the feeling of being called or intended to pursue a profession manifests more security and sense of efficacy in making decisions or perform important tasks for the career. Calling was analyzed in association with various measures of self-efficacy.

Career-related self-efficacy (Higgins, Dobrow, & Chandler, 2008) measures the sense of confidence in one's ability to grow ("I am confident in my ability to grow and improve professionally"), to confront problems ("I seem capable of dealing with most problems that come up in my career"), of making the best career decisions ("When I make career decisions, I am confident that they are good ones"). *Occupational self-efficacy* (Rigotti, Schyns, & Mohr, 2008) is a measure of confidence linked to problem solving and the perception of being able to manage work demands ("I feel prepared for most of the demands in my job") (Rigotti et al., 2008).

The calling correlates positively and moderately with the two measures of self-efficacy (Table 10). The only insignificant correlations are those between calling orientation towards music and career related self-efficacy measured in a sample of musicians. However, the correlation is significant and positive using the measure of general calling orientation.

Table 10 – Zero order correlation between calling and career related self-efficacy

Measure of calling	N	Career related self-efficacy	Measure	Study
ICS	Sample 1: 214 (T1 vs T3)	.20**		
	Sample 1: 191 (T1 vs T4)	.21**		
	Sample 3: 244	.29***		
	Sample 4: 240	.30***		
Adapted WLP calling	Sample 1: 132 (T2 vs T3)	.03ns	Higgins et al., 2008	Dobrow & Thosti-Kharas (2011) – Phase 4
	Sample 1: 120 (T2 vs T4)	.12ns		
	Sample 3: 244	.28***		
WLP calling	Sample 1: 187 (T4 vs T4)	.36***		
	Sample 3: 169	.26***		
	Sample 4: 240	.36***		
NCS	Sample 4: 239	.43***		
BCS presence	Sample 4: 240	.47***		

Meta-Analysis (same time): $r = .35$, 95% CI [.31, .39], $Q_{(7)} = 12.03$, $I^2 = 41.79$.
Meta-Analysis (longitudinal): $r = .16$, 95% CI [.08, .23], $Q_{(3)} = 3.27$, $I^2 = 8.25$.

Measure of calling	N	Occupational self-efficacy	Measure	Study
BCS presence	T1: 633	.31***	Rigotti, et al. (2008)	Hirshi & Herrmann (2013)
	T2: 760	.32***		
	T3: 505	.41***		

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$
T2: six weeks later; T3: three years later; T4: 7 years later.
Sample 1: musicians. Age ($M = 17.34$ $SD = .94$).
Sample 3: graduated business students. Age ($M = 22.95$, $SD = 4.83$).
Sample 4: professional managers employed full time. Age ($M = 45.97$, $SD = 6.99$).
Sample 5: college students from introductory psychology courses. Age ($M = 18.78$, $SD = 1.42$).
ICS – Integrated Calling Scale; Dobrow, 2006; Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas, 2011.
WLP – Work-Life Paragraphs; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997.
NCS – Neoclassical Calling Scale; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009.
BCS – Brief Calling Scale; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012.

Career decision self-efficacy, which is measured through the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale – Short Form (SF-CDSE; Betz, Hammond, & Multon, 2005; Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996) is confidence and sense of effectiveness in performing several tasks required for making good career choices. The measurement scale developed by Betz et al. asks subjects to indicate their level of confidence ("How much confidence do you have that you could") in

activities such as: "prepare a good resume", "choose a career that will fit your preferred life style", "determine what your ideal job would be", "Choose a major or career that will fit your interests".

All measures of the presence of calling (Table 11) positively correlate with career decision self-efficacy. Having a vocation is associated with greater confidence in the choice of education or professional path and the ability to perform several tasks related to the career.

Table 11 – Zero order correlation between calling and career decision self-efficacy

Measure of calling	N	Career decision self-efficacy	Study
ICS	270	M: .36** F: .31**	Phillips (2011)
BCS presence	330	.42***	Douglass & Duffy (2015)
CVQ search	333	.11ns	Dik et al. (2012) study 1
CVQ presence	333	.17*	
	312	.45*	Duffy, Allan et al. (2011)

Meta- Analysis (presence): $r = .35$, 95% CI [.30, .40], $Q_{(4)} = 19.26$, $I^2 = 79.24$.

a CDSE-SF; Betz et al., 2005; Betz et al., 1996.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$
ICS – Integrated Calling Scale; Dobrow, 2006; Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas, 2011.
CVQ – Calling and Vocation Questionnaire; Dik et al., 2012.
BCS – Brief Calling Scale; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007; Dik et al., 2012.

Confidence and clarity in career decisions are definitely positive aspects in a person's educational path. In fact, Duffy, Allan et al. (2011) observed that career decision self-efficacy is associated to academic satisfaction ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$) and mediates the relationship between calling and satisfaction ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$; $SE = .037$, CI [.07, .21]).

Having a calling could help strengthen the subject's sense of efficacy because it provides a clear career goal. However, we believe that having a calling, a specific interest in a domain, is not sufficient to develop a sense of confidence in making decisions. Other subjective variables (such as high general self-efficacy, personality factors such as extroversion and openness to change) and contextual variables (such as social support in decision-making, presence of role models, an environment conducive to exploration and rich in information) intervene in facilitating the subject's efficacy in the career path. In support of this observation, we have seen that some components of career adaptability intervene in explaining the association between calling and sense of efficacy (Douglass & Duffy, 2015).

1.7.8.3 Career Decidedness and Career Choice Comfort

Other constructs related to career development that are associated with calling are: career decidedness and career choice comfort. Career development, according to Jones's (1989) model, is characterized by four variables that predict career decidedness and career choice comfort: self-clarity, indecisiveness, work-choice salience, and knowledge about occupations and training. S*elf-Clarity* is the degree of awareness about the interests, abilities and personality characteristics suitable for a certain occupation. *Indecisiveness* measures the perception of ability to make decisions without delay, difficulties and independently. *Work-Choice Salience* is a measure of how important the individual feels it is (at the time of the response) to choose to work in a specific occupation. *Occupational-Educational Information* is the degree to which persons feel well-informed about educational and career paths that are in line with their interests. Students that experience a calling have a good awareness of their professional interests and abilities, are confident in career decisions and know the work they want to do or the professional area they want to enter (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). For those who live a calling, career decisions and identification of their professional path are important and meaningful (Dik & Duffy, 2009). The results of the study by Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) show that those who live their university career as a calling (presence) show greater decidedness ($r = .58$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$), comfort in career choice ($r = .54$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$), self-clarity ($r = .55$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$), and work-choice salience ($r = .43$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$). Furthermore, the presence of calling negatively correlates with indecision ($r = -.27$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$) and the lack of educational information ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$).

In this study, there is a clear distinction between presence and search for a calling because the pattern of the correlations is different. In fact, the search for calling correlates positively with indecisiveness ($r = .25$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$) and lack of educational information ($r = .29$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$), negatively with decidedness ($r = -.44$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$), comfort ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$), self-clarity ($r = -.56$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$), and work-choice salience ($r = -.28$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$). Those searching for their professional vocation tend to be more indecisive, have difficulty making career choices, lack clear ideas about their professional interests and are more likely to say that they lack information about career paths. The negative correlation between search-calling and work-choice salience could be an indicator of the different stage of maturity in the career path that characterizes subjects with a calling and those who are still searching. It is probable that persons who still do not know their vocations, or are searching for them, have not reached the stage of maturity necessary to consider career choices salient.

The presence and search for calling contribute significantly to predicting the level of career choice comfort (presence: $R^2 = .45$, $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p < .01$; search: $R^2 = .45$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$) and career decidedness (presence: $R^2 = .43$, $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $p < .01$; search: $R^2 = .45$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .01$, $N = 3091$) over and above the effects of self-clarity, indecisiveness, work-choice salience, and knowledge about occupations and training. This indicates that the calling contributes significantly and uniquely to explaining comfort in decision-making and career decidedness. It is an interesting result that urges us to investigate how calling can contribute to facilitating career decisions by making the person more decided and comfortable.

The association between calling and career decidedness (Jones, 1989) is also confirmed by the findings of Steger et al. (2010) ($r = .36$, $p < .001$, $N = 242$), and it appears to be stable over time. Hirshi and Herrmann (2013) analyzed the reaction between calling, decidedness (Holland, Daiger & Power, 1980; Jörin, Stoll, Bergmann & Eder, 2004), planning and self-efficacy over time (three waves in one year). Over time, calling is associated with greater confidence in career choices and the path one wants to take ($r_{t1} = .48$, $N = 633$; $r_{t2} = .47$, $N = 760$; $r_{t3} = .46$, $N = 505$), with the tendency to plan ($r_{t1} = .46$, $N = 633$; $r_{t2} = .45$, $N = 760$; $r_{t3} = .45$, $N = 505$) and greater career-related self-efficacy ($r_{t1} = .31$, $N = 633$; $r_{t2} = .32$, $N = 760$; $r_{t3} = .41$, $N = 505$).

Decidedness and exploration are also important because they are associated with academic satisfaction (Hirshi & Herrmann, 2012). Calling (measured only at t1) predicts career decidedness and career exploration six months later ($\beta = .207$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .04$). In turn, career decidedness and exploration (indicators of the achievement of a clear identity), controlling for calling and self-evaluation, predict life satisfaction ($\beta = -.183$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .28$). Controlling for career decidedness and exploration, the relationship between the calling and satisfaction becomes negative and significant ($\beta = -.183$, $p = .027$). This indicates that when calling is not associated with the two components of identity construction (decidedness and exploration) it acts as a suppressor of satisfaction in life.

In general, calling is associated with a feeling of greater comfort with respect to career and planning choices. Those who know their vocation are more confident of making the right choices. Finally, confidence and clarity of one's vocation are also associated with greater satisfaction (also in Duffy, Allan et al., 2011).

Figure 2 summarized the associations and meta-analytic estimates between calling and the constructs we reported in this chapter.

Figure 2 – The nomological network of calling. Where possible, meta-analytic estimates of the association between calling and the other constructs are reported (solid line)
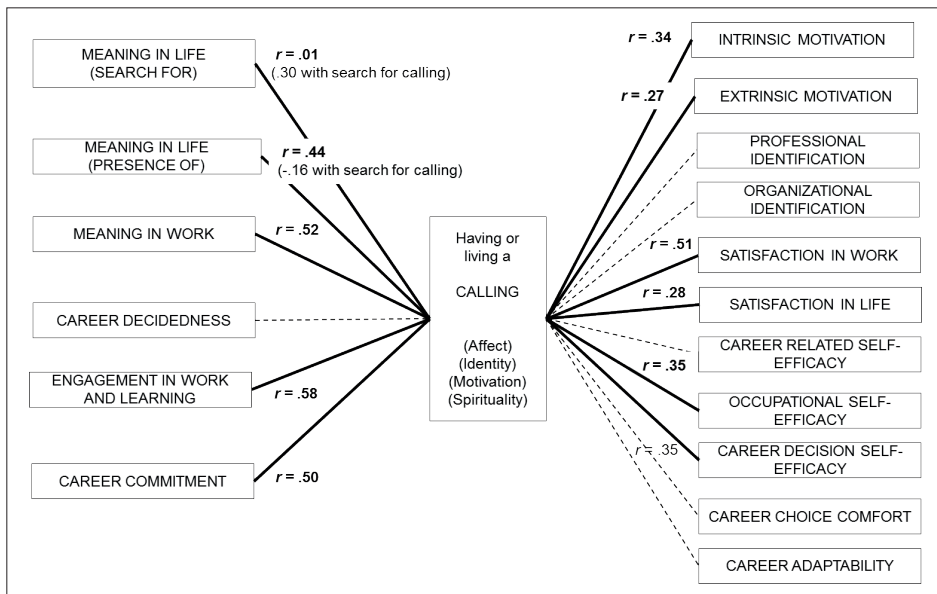
Conclusions

The integrative model of calling that we proposed in this chapter draws from the widely diverse literature published so far on calling. We identified four main dimensions of calling: self-concept, spirituality, affect and motivation. Also, this chapter provides a quantitative review of the most studied relationships of calling with close constructs, be they antecedents or consequences. The direction of these relationships is by and large theoretical, and needs to be validated by future empirical research. The meta-analytic estimates that we provided for most of the relationships that we have reviewed helped us to understand the construct of calling in more depth (Figure 2). For instance, we found that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are less related to calling than Meaning in work, Job satisfaction, Work engagement and Career Commitment. Calling is not only a motivational construct. Perhaps the motivational components of calling are even less important than previously thought. The Affective and Identitarian components of calling that we included in our integrative model of calling seem to be more important in defining the construct

and its relationships than the Motivational or Spiritual components. We also found that for some relationships there is high heterogeneity in the effect sizes that we combined meta-analytically. The heterogeneity of the relationships between calling and a) Meaning in life, b) Work meaning, c) Engagement, d) Job Satisfaction, and e) Life satisfaction, is higher than 80% (controlling for sampling error), indicating the presence of unknown moderators. It is likely that the scheme of relationships between these constructs and calling is very complex and worthy of deeper scrutiny. We urge future research to identify and analyze this scheme of mediations and moderations to theoretically clarify the (perhaps too simple) nomological network of calling that we presented. To this end, we discussed possible moderators of the relationship between calling and Satisfaction in job and life: Career commitment, Work meaning, the difference between having and living a calling, and the Core-self-evaluations. Still in terms of variability in effect sizes, the relationships between calling and self-efficacy are less heterogeneous but still range from 30% to more than 70%. The only relationship that apparently is not moderated is between calling and commitment. Heterogeneity is absent in this case. This result may speak in favor of a direct relationship with calling and might support the role of commitment as a moderator between calling and satisfaction.

Then, we found empirical evidence in favor of the distinction between the three "stages" of calling: search, presence and living out. Evidence supporting the discriminant validity of the measure of calling are the different strength of the association between calling, as measured by presence, search and living out and measures of presence and search for meaning in life and work, the measure of decisiveness, clarity in the decisions taken and the presence of career information. We have observed that those who have a vocation, compared to those who are searching for their calling, are not seeking meaning in life, are more decided, more confident in making career choices, have clearer ideas about their professional interests and are more about alternatives and possible development paths. In addition, living out a calling has the strongest association with meaning in work with respect to the measures of presence and searching for a calling.

We have analyzed the nomological network of calling, identifying three blocks of dimensions: the link between calling and well-being, the association between calling and attitude towards the domain of calling, the role of the vocation in the development of self-concept and career.

Calling plays a role in the *well-being* of the person through the positive, but distal, link between calling and satisfaction in life and work. Calling is positively associated with satisfaction in life and work, especially when it is measured with reference to a specific profession or relative to the current profession. A key element of the relationship between calling and satisfaction seems to be the possibility of realizing one's calling and the presence of pleasure and passion in carrying out one's work.

A second section of the nomological network concerns the relationship between several *behaviors* or *attitudes* towards work or the domain of the vocation. Calling is positively associated with involvement in work and study, commitment to the profession and motivation.

A third section of the nomological network concerns the role of calling in the development of *identity* and *self-concept.* We have identified positive relationships between calling and identification with the profession, identification with the organisation and meaning in life and work. These constructs seem to be closely intertwined. The feeling of unity with one's profession and the organisation favors the perception of meaning in the work and life in general. In turn, having a vocation that contributes to giving meaning to life and substance to identity promotes well-being and thus satisfaction in life and work. Experiencing life and work as meaningful partly explains why a person who lives or feels a vocation is also satisfied in life and work.

Finally, a last section of the nomological network regards the association between calling and the characteristics of the subject in *career development* such as self-efficacy, decidedness and ability to deal with problems related to vocational development. Calling is associated to the exploration of alternatives, attention to the future, career planning, confidence in decisions and perseverance in achieving goals. Having a calling should thus help making decisions with greater confidence and attempting to carry them out through the development of strategies and through commitment. The link between having a vocation and feeling confident in the career path favors the well-being of those who show a greater sense of satisfaction and comfort in decision-making.

The variety of tools and knowledge available in the field of vocational psychology raises the question of the actual need and utility of introducing a new construct. The results presented in this chapter provide a fairly clear answer: if, on the one hand, there is a strong correlation between calling and career commitment, meaning in work and work engagement, on the other, this relationship is far from its theoretical and empirical maximum. There is a part of variance tackled by the construct of calling that is not accounted for by any of the constructs reviewed in this paper. It remains to clarify if all these constructs, used together, can succeed in explaining all the inter-individual variability that calling encompasses. In this case, the construct of calling would be better defined as clusters of other variables than as an autonomous and independent construct.

The results analyzed reveal several needs for deeper study that could guide future developments in research on calling. We have identified three that are particularly relevant: the role of context and social relationships in the associations between calling and constructs related to behavior, the association between calling and stable individual characteristics, and finally the temporal development of calling and its predictors and effects.

In our view, the role of context is fundamental: some of the relationships analyzed present a great internal variability that suggests the presence of possible moderators. Specifically, the relationship between calling and satisfaction may depend on the ability to realize the vocation in work and thus also on the characteristics of the work context. Even the relationship between calling and identification with the profession depends on the perception that the subjects have of the organisation, specifically on how much people feel they can achieve their personal and professional growth objectives in the work environment (Cardador et al., 2011). In addition, the possibility of living the work as a vocation seems to depend on the possibility of putting one's strengths into practice and having positive experiences at work (Harzer & Rusch, 2012).

Individual characteristics are another crucial element to be analyzed. Are there personality traits that predispose one to experience work as a vocation? Calling was only analyzed in relation to ability, religiosity and spirituality. This line of research will help in understanding if the vocation is the result of individual characteristics, if it results from interaction with the environment and how it is linked to other constructs, such, for example, personality and interests, which are fundamental for predicting organisational behavior, well-being and career choices.

Finally, we would like to stress that future research could focus on analyzing the development of calling and its nomological network at the longitudinal level. There are currently few longitudinal studies of calling and the available results are sometimes contradictory. The direction of the relationship is not yet clear between calling and positive outcomes such as success, commitment, involvement, meaning in life, self-efficacy and career planning. Longitudinal research could allow clarifying the direction of cause between one construct and another. Finally, the data currently available suggest a decrease in calling over time but it is not clear what could cause this decrease and what generates a change of the level of calling in the individual.

In summary, this contribution has allowed us to better understand what calling is, what it is not, on which aspects the literature is expected to reach a consensus and on which aspects empirical research could work in order to understand how calling acts in our lives.

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The Pedagogical Approach of Guidance in Higher Education.
An Educational Research Experience in Italian Universities

Francesco Lo Presti, Alessandra Priore, Sergio Bellantonio*

2.1 The Theoretical Background

2.1.1 The Choice of Perspective: How to Monitor Guidance

Guidance is a process affected by many variables that, for the most part, refer to dimensions characterized by irreducible differences; they are, for example, personal experiences, contextual conditions, ways of interpreting and constructing meaning with respect to one's choices and education; dimensions that feel the effects of the singularities and specificities of experience and that, therefore, cannot be understood through simplifications or reductionist perspectives intended to merely classify or standardize what is observed. In our opinion, in the case of guidance it is appropriate, instead, to resort to an observation point from which to contemplate the multifaceted nature of the object, using a research method that enters into relationship with the depth and density of *subjective experience*, as a key for interpreting the type of experience to which it is linked. This does not allow expressing "last words" on the processes in question, which can be extended to the plurality of experiences produced in this field, but certainly allows acquiring very significant information about the nature of the processes, creating, at the same time, the possibility of suggesting methods and strategies for guiding these processes starting from the recognition of traits, albeit idiosyncratic, but in some way also generalizable and transferable within sets of experiences that overlap due to similarity.

So, the choice of perspective arises from the need to study guidance in the training process of the person as an educational problem, and therefore aims to support and enrich a pedagogical approach to the subject that refers, on the one hand, to the *constructivist concept of knowledge*, for which the latter

is a *process* in which the person is the main actor and in charge (Von Foerster, 1982; Von Glasersfeld, 1981, 1995; Watzlawick, 1981) and, on the other, to a *phenomenological* theoretical background (Husserl, 1954; Bertin & Contini, 1983; Bertolini, 1988), which identifies, in reflection about the singularity and density of individual subjective experience, the key to the interpretation of growth and training processes (Schön, 1987): *educating* implies teaching to reflect on one's interpretations of self and experience; reflecting critically on one's existence and acting in the world implies the ability of *self-guidance*.

Therefore, the fundamental core on which the development of perspective is grafted consists of the theme of comparison with the personal modes through which a person attributes sense and direction to his training experiences (Bertolini, 1988; Cavana & Casadei, 2016), understood as idiosyncratic, concrete and situated experiences that serve as the context for the maturation of interpretative and theoretical-procedural lines.

The main issue concerning guidance, in the context of this perspective, is expressed, therefore, in the objective of identifying a clear link with training, according to a declination of *self-training* and *self-guidance*. In this sense, guidance becomes educational theory and practice placed in line with the improvement (Cunti, 2015) of both the forms and contexts of training and the methods through which the world of the professions and work is articulated.

2.1.2 Constructs

The main constructs on which to develop a reflection at the root of a coherent guidance-educational plan consistent with the perspective adopted are *identity*, *life plan*, *reflexivity* and *narrative*.

Identity

Most of the conditions and problems that characterize daily life and individual and collective reality, call into question who we are, who we aspire to be and the way we relate to others (Serino, 2001).

Identity is a cognitive filter that allows each person to construct meanings with respect to what happens, according to specific trajectories that are the result of a particular collocation of the Self. Having an identity means assuming a position that acts as a guide in the relationship with ourselves and with the world.

The search for stability is one of the central features of the experience. The sense of unity and continuity of the Self corresponds to an important point of reference from which to confront and manage social life and relationships with others (Remotti, 1996); therein lies the basis of our abilities to confront and control the world. At the same time, however, identity is *change*: during the span of life everything that surrounds us, including ourselves, is constantly immersed in the experience of transformation; change constitutes the core of experience,

because the life cycle corresponds to a path traversed by a series of continuous, random or determined, modifications linked to the plurality of contexts of life and existential transitions, with respect to which individuals try to reconstruct their place, constantly *renegotiating* the idea of self (Cunti, 2008).

Identity is, therefore, *one and stable* and at the same time *plural and changeable*; it is influenced by biological, psycho-social, emotional and cultural variables; it thus corresponds to a *process*, more than to a *product*, to a continuous search path fueled by the need to construct a collocation of self in the world that can allow effective access to the physical, social and cultural reality, in other words, adequately *orienting oneself* in it.

When reality proves complex and muddled, identity itself becomes confused, since fragmentation and plurality act as variables that, by putting into question the ability to order and control reality, also put into question the sense of unity, continuity and confidence at the core of our relationship with the context, what Neisser calls the "extended self". Perceiving one's identity as uncertain or threatened is thus equivalent to feeling disoriented, lost, in danger, and this is what happens to someone who has to deal with the changes of life that, as such, reconfigure the meaning and role of the interacting parts (Self/others, *internal/external*).

The ways to cope with the uncertainty produced by change concern singular conditions that, therefore, cannot be generalized and are related to specific situations and contexts. While acknowledging that the concept of transition, of transformation, of not being permanently collocated in a certain position is the fulcrum of the condition of life in modernity, it is important to emphasize that, as a general trait, the difficulties of transition are subjective difficulties, linked to one's individual experience and that have their foundation in a particular system of circumstances and, especially, in the context of constructions of meaning that the person will use to give sense and direction to that experience.

The primary hub that, therefore, becomes functional with respect to the use of the construct of identity in educational planning for guidance relates to the role of the subjective interpretation of the Self in relation to the environment, since it is this interpretation that, in anticipate and, therefore, will travel.

Therefore, fueling the ability to guide oneself in making the choices that will comprise the educational and professional careers of individuals implies that the subjective interpretation of one's sense of identity, "who I am", becomes a conscious object of reflection. In this sense, awareness of the idea of self and of the forces, pressures and conditions that determine it, constitutes a prerequisite for understanding and guiding one's actions and choices along a recursive path of the changes that constitute the life cycle. Observing the dynamics that make up one's identity, as a complex construct, is equivalent to assume a perspective on one's own life and, above all, moves towards competency in self-design.

Life Plan

Connecting awareness of the personal identity story with one's *life plan* stimulates the ability to recognize and construct training and career opportunities, starting certainly from the recognition of concrete opportunities, but also, and above all, from the ability to *interpret and reconstruct one's self* in relation to them. This implies the capacity to responsibly assume the burden of one's choices, recognizing the generative nature of life paths and expectations that make each individual unique and at the same time aware.

The life plan is, therefore, the result of a conscious idea of oneself; in this sense, it is not triggered merely by the opportunities or random effects that the experience offers, but becomes the result of the ability to *recognize* those opportunities and such randomness as elements of development and, thus, as events characterized by precise meanings that can guide one in the construction of a path of choices. The maturation of awareness in making choices implies the ability to effectively take note of one's vocation, intellectual profile, skills and competencies, which schools and other educational institutions should generally promote.

The profound relationship between *life plan* and *identity awareness* is, therefore, the central node. It is the moment of connection, the logical, constructive and constitutive relationship that hold together the plural dimensions of Self. Focus attention on the relationship between life plan and identity regards the ability to recognize the overall, unified picture that, even though not always consistent, defines the singularity of personal formative experience. It means, therefore, overcoming a logic internal to the *world of objective and recognizable opportunities*, replacing it with a *world of constructions* that free up the value of the singularities and differences, and recognize local elements (de Mennato, 2006): the person is at the center of his own training path, since he is its builder starting from what he is able to see or not, to hypothesize or not: *what we construct and believe possible becomes, in fact, a possibility*.

Helping students become aware of their own unique life plan involves guiding them to enter into a deep connection with the processes of consciousness from which an idea of self and the future are triggered; this implies not reducing guidance to providing information about the individual opportunities that socio-historical conditions offer to individuals, but defining it as a device for the critical ability to recognize the connections between these opportunities – which undeniably each area offers in different measure and quality – through the exercise and the maturation of an effective competence in implementing their own plan (de Mennato, 2006), which moves from the sense of Self.

Educational action hinges, therefore, on the construction of *reflexive exercises* of *self-observation* aimed at creating the ability of *learning to learn*, by systematically reflecting on oneself and one's choices (Cunti, Priore, &

Bellantonio, 2015); exercises and practices that are capable, in other words, of creating a dialogue between personal knowledge and broader experience, with one's culture, personal identitary story and with the concrete conditions that delimit one's life and training environment (Lo Presti, 2005). In this direction, guidance is *educational*, as it helps to shape the training course as a life plan in a non-random, non-ineluctable direction, but above all making it non-extraneous to personal life (de Mennato, 2006).

Reflexivity

Because the guidance process is constructed as an educational process and, therefore, of *self-guidance*, it is essential that educational actions be implemented to stimulate processes of a *reflexive* nature (Schön, 1987); the use of reflexive tools or practices that involve the exercise of a regulated reflection upon oneself is essential to the educational function. In that sense, the key is an idea of *training* as a *theory of action* (Alberici, 2002) that, declined, in the particular context of guidance, becomes a *theory of personal identity* for the *life plan*. In this sense, the story of one's identity is interpreted as a process through which it becomes, at the same time, object, theory and action. Reflexive training is, therefore, understood as a functional process that concerns not only the object identified as learning, but which also accommodates learning modes and perspectives, in the sense of *learning to learn*. Reflexivity presupposes *self-direction* in learning.

Perception, thought, feeling and action can be given in a regular and/or mediated manner, but in both cases these activities can generally be significantly influenced by content or process errors and distorted by unfounded epistemological, social or psychological assumptions deriving from prior learning. Through the development of a self-reflexive capacity, however, continuous learning comes to depend on a critical re-examination of what we have learned (content), how we learned it (process) and the validity of our assumptions about it (premises). Reflexivity is, thus, demonstrated to be the central dynamic of intentional, critical and aware learning, problem solving and the verification of validity. The intentional learning focuses on the explanation of the meaning of an experience, the reinterpretation of that meaning or its application in mediated action. Therefore, reflection allows carrying out enlightened action regarding the subjective *re-interpretation* of meanings and the *validation* of learning (Mezirow, 1991/2003).

Reflexivity is a fundamental construct in an educational context, as it formalizes an investigative, critical and self-regulated method and allows, among the persons who acquire its criteria of use, to exclude premature cognitive constraints, to emerge from the influence of the implicit in the construction of personal knowledge, to develop a better self-concept, to achieve greater productivity and greater awareness in the workplace and to deal adequately

with innovation and change. So, reflexive learning has a transformative value and gives rise to new and aware systems and perspectives of meaning (Mezirow, 1991/2003); therefore, it is a privileged way for the distancing, observation and re-interpretation of the relationship between *identitary story* and *life plan*.

Specifically, the objects of reflexivity declined in the context of the self-guidance process are both subjective ways of constructing meaning about experience and situational forces (people, relationships, past events and transitions) that, by intervening in the characterization of the context of change, have produced subjective responses that, implicitly, have shaped one's identitary path and choices: it is not so much what happens to people, as the way they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines the course of life. So, the personal ways of expressing one's experience describe a flow of growth in which there is an *emblematic decisional dynamic* (Massa & Demetrio, 1991) that is the mirror of the person's choices. The sense of being someone or something is the result of personal memory that, by constructing permanence and continuity within a story, returns (through a selection of experiences, situations and relationships) the complex of values, desires and ambitions – but also of anxieties and fears – that determines the *destiny* of individuals.

Reflexively tracing and reconstructing the transformative and generative process that led and leads an individual through the transformations of identity that characterize a personal story is equivalent to understanding the course and outcomes and, therefore, providing awareness of the relationship of influence between sense of self and planning skills.

Narrative

Within the framework outlined, individual memories represent a privileged experience for the construction of personal and professional identity, since they are an inexhaustible resource for the development of a planning centered to a greater extent on authentic self-expression (Massa & Demetrio, 1991).

Narrative is one of the universal ways for assigning and transmitting meaning (Smorti, 1997), a model of knowledge, but above all an ontological mode of identity construction. Constructing meaning is an activity that, consciously or not, we perform throughout our lives to try to predict what will happen to us and to exercise some control over our paths.

Narrative has the ineluctable character of subjectivity: it is not only produced by the person, but belongs to the person and coincides with him. In expressing these prerogatives, it is thus a useful tool of decentralization and change, a way of *observing oneself from the outside*. As Demetrio (1996) said, the narrative of self is precisely that "educational journey" that facilitates the distancing from oneself that, however, would not be possible if not deeply immersed in oneself. In other words, it is a process of *sense-making*, a reflexive work of construction and dialogue on one's identity, also defined of *making*

oneself self (Guichard & Pouyaud, 2015). It is, in fact, the ability to be a tool able to develop and refine that reflective competence necessary for observing critically and identifying limitations and potentialities that the formative nature of self-narration inscribes.

Thanks precisely to its function of re-shaping experiences disorder (Eco, 1993), narrative is inserted between the reflective devices used to a greater extent in the context of guidance interventions. In fact, in recent years we have seen a paradigmatic shift of guidance practices that consisted in the adoption of a more qualitative approach. The turnaround coincided with what has been called the epochal "narrative turn" or the growing interest that, beginning with the contributions of Jerome Bruner (1990), there has been in narrative. The person, his *agency* and its ability to seek and construct meaning have thus become the focus around which to construct a guidance process that is embodied in the continuous construction and deconstruction of the individual stories, exploration, on the level of imaginative thought, of the possible roles to fill in the various contexts of life, and finally, in the translation of desires in terms of the achievable life and professional paths.

Narrative, understood as a tool of personalized training-guidance, predisposes to forms of *transformative learning* (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009) beginning from processes of re-signification of one's experience, which naturally trigger a strong cognitive, emotional-affective and motivational involvement of the individual.

Becoming aware and being protagonists of one's own existential plan are thus the key elements of guidance understood in the narrative sense, i.e., as problematic construction of the relationship with oneself. Clearly seeing and not overlooking the nuances that define one's life story offers an opportunity to make predictions about the future, to simulate the assumption of different roles and to identify new directions to follow, in short, to choose for oneself starting from oneself. This makes writing and one's narrative a particular form of *self-care* (Cambi, 2003) which is embodied in a process of re-attribution of sense, especially starting from elements that often escape our attention, but which, nevertheless, act on our choices.

Guidance processes aimed at supporting individuals in the construction of possible existential plans cannot, therefore, ignore the importance and necessity of *creating a narrative of self* (Bruner, 1990). This is done through those learning mechanisms that allow our mind, for the duration of our lives, to pass through and tolerate the plurality and discontinuity that characterize existence today and feed the sense of self through a continuous process of reconstruction.

The role that work on oneself assumes in guidance processes is thus linked to a different idea of planning than in the past, which is not reduced to a simple *wanting to do,* but it is realized only through a clear *wanting to be*. So,

we can say that, in the context of a person-centered pedagogical guidance, the narration of experience is an intense and necessary event in the training plan, since it responds to the need to recognize the presence and deployment of aspects of personal identity that are the basis for the choices to be made to pursue a given profession and, therefore, provide a specific direction to one's *life plan*.

2.2 Research

2.2.1 Subject, Objective and Methodological Choices

Starting from the theoretical and methodological background outlined, the research presented here took as its specific object *university guidance* in the context of both the most widespread practices in the Italian university system and the models to which they refer, with the specific intention of identifying the characterizing dimensions in an educational direction, when present, and above all with the objective of highlighting significant theoretical and methodological elements to bring together within a pedagogical design of a phenomenological-constructivist approach, aimed at the implementation of best guidance practices.

The phenomenological approach (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) defines the framework that delimits the methodological choices. Therefore, the assumption of this theoretical horizon will guide our interest not to the mere facts, but in the direction of the impact that these have on the persons and the meaning they assume in their lives, "phenomenology is seeking realities, not pursuing Truth" (Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010, p. 18).

In this sense, in defining the object of investigation, a central role is played by both the view of the researcher and all participants in the research process and the significance of the individual case. These latter aspects corroborate an idea of reality understood as a complex social construction that is not reducible to an objective picture of the phenomena that characterize it.

The research presented has an exploratory-constructive character; during the conversation between researcher and participants, both actively co-construct the object of research: the statements of the participants, their interpretive categories and the vocabulary they use are decrypted taking into account their *situatedness* and significance, i.e., they stimulate the researcher to assume a reflexive *habitus*. It is in these components that it is possible to trace the distinctive aspect of the qualitative method, namely that it "requires a thought, is exposed to debate, to dialectical interpretation" (Merrill & West, 2009/2012, p. XX); that it constructs "bottom-up" theories rather than seeking

explanations in abstract theories, involving the protagonists of the phenomena to find the meaning that they attribute to them.

The perspective outlined supports the use of the Grounded Theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), based on a comparative analysis able to generate a theory based on the data. Grounded Theory has shown itself to be particularly suited to the exploration of the processes and dynamics underlying non-static phenomena little investigated in the literature, focusing on a *bottom up* research approach that aims to construct a theory rooted in data collected in the field that gradually, from a descriptive level, assumes an increasingly complex conceptual level (Tarozzi, 2007). In these terms, the analysis method accompanies the whole research process, defining and modifying it along the way.

Even the tools chosen to collect the research data are qualitative in nature, *semi-structured interviews* and *focus groups*. Both were designed and constructed to achieve a deep, critical and situated understanding of the object of investigation, involving key partners from academia and institutional representatives, on the one hand, and students, on the other.

The research presented is divided into two phases. We proceeded with a first exploratory study aimed at examining the university guidance system in depth and seeking the meaning, logic and educational dimensions that underlie practices, in order to outline a framework of approaches and models through which it is organised and implemented in the Italian institutional context. To this end, we interviewed key figures in the national university context (guidance directors and staff).

While the second research phase involved the users of university guidance services, the students, directly with the aim of identifying their guidance needs, the individual and deeper aspects underlying their choices and life planning, as well as possible guidance strategies to respond to them. In this case, the tool chosen and considered most suitable for achieving the established goals is the focus group (Merton & Kendal, 1946), which, with its interactive mode is a valuable means of activating that reflexive posture underlying each process of guidance of persons. The results obtained from both studies are intended to provide information and data for the identification of theoretical and methodological elements to be used for the construction and implementation of an application model for training guidance staff according to a pedagogical approach.

2.2.2 The First Research Phase

2.2.2.1 Tool, Participants and Procedure

The first phase of exploratory research involved 10 key informants operating in the context of university guidance management as directors appointed by the rector for guidance and operators of the guidance offices at several universities in north, central and southern Italy.

The tool used is the semi-structured interview, constructed *ad hoc* based on specific thematic areas of interest that regard the description of the services offered, the *mission* and approach pursued, the organisation and management of the activity, the methodology and tools used, the professionalism and related skills involved, the evaluation of practices, the system actions taken and the link between guidance and university teaching. Although the interview topics are provided by the researcher, these have the function of reminders and are not used as a series of questions according to a style of directing the interviewee; the latter is free to choose the content to be discussed and focused on, the sequence and the style with which to present it.

It is important to note that initially only directors appointed by the rector for guidance were interviewed but, following a theoretical sampling, in line with the Grounded Theory method and based on different assumptions from probabilistic sampling on a statistical basis, during data collection we decided to progressively extend the number and characteristics of the participants following the gaps in the emerging theory, so as to "saturate" the categories by involving persons with precisely those characteristics on which the theory was still weak, i.e., operators who directly manage guidance offices.

The interviews were conducted with a guarantee of anonymity at the various universities, by choosing a quiet, tranquil place that could help stimulate a positive and spontaneous attitude of the interviewee. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and then transcribed in full.

2.2.2.2 Data Analysis and Results

It should be reiterated that the data analysis method, in line with the phenomenological-constructivist approach, is that of the Grounded Theory, in the classic version of Strauss and Corbin (1990), taken up by Tarozzi (2008). The corpus of interviews was subject to categorical analysis supported by the Atlas-ti 6.0 software package (Muhr, 2000), based on a network structure composed of a set of hermeneutical units and on an intuitive and creative approach in the use of the data.

The generative research question that motivated the categorical analysis was created based on the famous formula expressed by Glaser (1998) "What's going on here" and has been articulated by us in "How does guidance take place in Italian university contexts, what approach underlies the practice?"

The analysis of the corpus was divided into three phases: *initial or open coding*, which consists in the line-by-line analysis of texts according to the assumption "all is data" to identify the minimal meaning units (pieces of text) and the thematic recurrences in the form of "labelled phenomena" precisely defined; *focused coding*, which allows identifying conceptually more extensive macro-categories through the redefinition of the first labels and their transformation into more mature concepts; *axial coding*, which allows developing a conceptual model that integrates the major categories.

In the initial coding phase, 85 codes were identified (*code map*) referring to all the sensitizing concepts that emerged from the first analysis of the corpus, referring to the initial research question. Subsequently, the codes created and deemed redundant were merged into a smaller number (32), then further reduced to 21. In the focused coding phase, the codes became 9 more extensive macro-categories that, through conceptual work, were appropriately renamed and connected through semantic links. Starting from these relationships, in the last phase (theoretical coding), the central category was identified inductively by proceeding in the hierarchical work on the categories that emerged from the data, from which a theory of the process of university guidance, illustrated in the diagram that follows (Graphic 1), was integrated and delimited.

Graphic 1 – Network derived from the Atlas-ti 6.0 software package
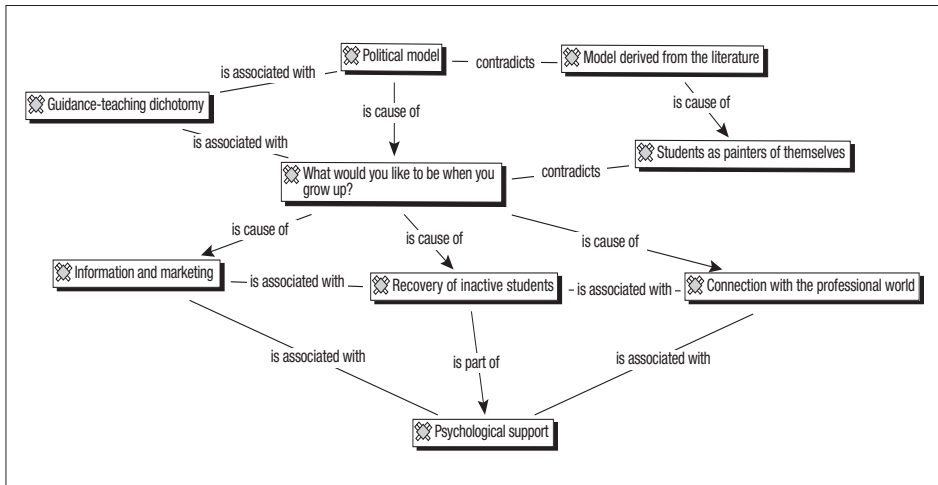
The *core category* was defined as *What would you like to be when you grow up?* and is the central concept with the most branches of the system that emerged from the data. This category makes reference to an approach to guidance understood as *matching*, in which the choice is depicted as the best result of the relationship between the individual and the university educational offering. In this sense, guidance becomes the tool that connects what the student likes to do with the corresponding undergraduate degree (Table 1). This guidance approach draws on person-environment adaptation theories, defined precisely as *matching* theories (Parsons, 1909), which describe the choice as the more "economical" result in the relationship between the characteristics of the individual and those of the environment. One notes a general shift of guidance, more often in the universities, that is assuming the features of a *marketing* strategy, aimed at influencing and attracting large indistinct crowds of students in which the individuality of each one is cancelled (Demarie & Molina, 2007).

The strategy that best supports this type of guidance interventions, which would seem to be that of revealing something predetermined, is certainly informative in nature and is characterized by immediate utility, namely that the information assumes the illuminating power to provide students the tools for recognizing themselves in their future. The *core category* stresses that the individual and institutional dimensions blend to promote the needs of the latter, but at the expense of recognizing those of the former, when, in fact, the individual needs to plan, construct and give meaning to existence, should become the purposes of university guidance.

Although according to recent theoretical models, guidance interventions should provide a response to the person's need for self-reflection and self-knowledge in order to construct a life plan that fully represents him, it is, instead, clear that these models do not in fact find a precise correspondence between theoretical-declarative and practical-application aspects, in the perpetuation of an essentially informational-divulgative approach.

Table 1 – Some live quotes from the "What would you like to be when you grow up?" category

Quotations
"We want to facilitate academic success and minimize dispersion"
"If he has already decided we are saved because we only have to explain the employment opportunities"

Around the core just described, eight other macro-categories revolve, connected to each other by semantic links that explain university guidance practices and provide an opportunity to critically reflect on them:

- *political model;*
- *model derived from the literature;*
- *students as painters of themselves;*
- *information and marketing;*
- *recovery of inactive students;*
- *psychological support;*
- *connection with the professional world;*
- *guidance-teaching dichotomy*.

The guidance approach emerging from the *core category* appears to be linked and inspired by a *political model* of reference suggested by institutional bodies such as the Rector and the Academic Senate (Table 2). This category clearly shows a top-down method for the determination of planning with reference to guidance strategies; in other words, the role played by university *governance* is of primary importance in the definition and application of a specific idea

of guidance that, at least apparently, rarely contemplates the participative involvement of the recipients of assistance and experts in the field of guidance. The rules, visions and educational values that guidance conveys seem, therefore, dropped from above and, rather than being tailored to individual student, are designed to meet the needs of the university system.

Table 2 – Some live quotes from the "Political Model" category

Quotations
"For guidance, we follow the planning of the Academic Senate"
"The Rector is the political reference for guidance strategies"

However, the interviewees demonstrated an awareness of the role of a theoretical model of guidance in the literature that complements the political model; however, this model, which is shown in connection with a definition of guidance that conceives the education of the *Students as painters of themselves* (Table 3), appears unmoored from the design of practices, remaining on the background of a merely declarative dimension of lines of principle. Specifically, it is possible to deduce that the theoretical patrimony of reference on the subject, although present as a frame element, is difficult to translate into practices consistent with it.

The *model derived from the literature,* which generally places the individual and his characteristics at the center of guidance processes, would, in fact, define an alternative to the political model, in conceiving the paths that lead individuals to construct their own identities, their own educational paths and their own careers. But, for reasons probably traceable to both problems of a logistical and infrastructural nature and to a widespread difficulty in clearly identifying a widely recognized and shared theoretical-methodological background, this type of model is struggling to be consistently and effectively placed to guide planning.

In fact, in the model in question, attention has shifted to the complex dynamics that interact in individual decision-making processes, among which the process of signification of the narrative realities of the individual plays an important role (Savickas et al., 2009). This is possible only if the persons themselves develop a sense of self through a deep reflexive process that puts internal motivations, activities, intentions and expectations in the foreground through a work of personalization (Guichard, 2012). According to this approach, the construction process of the self takes shape through a reflexive activity that supports the individual in assuming that critical attitude that allows creating a narration of his experience and looking to the future.

In fact, as we will clarify further, the significant share of the methods and practices put in place does not implement these theoretical premises.

Table 3 – Some live quotes from the "Students as painters of themselves" and "Model derived from the literature" categories

Quotations "Students as painters of themselves"	Quotations "Model derived from the literature"
"Guidance is a process of knowledge and self-knowledge that leads students to find the direction, to become painters of themselves"	"We refer to the career counselling model [...] we follow international guidelines and the scientific literature"
"The purpose of guidance is planning for life"	"We follow the social-cognitive model and work on the sense of self-efficacy"

In fact, the approach based on *matching,* allows recognizing in the *political model* mentioned above, the reference that determines planning and operational developments in the context of guidance strategies. In this sense, the phases into which the university guidance process is articulated seem to be substantially three: an entry phase defined *Information and Marketing,* designed for the recruitment of students in secondary schools; an *ongoing* phase of *Recovery of inactive students,* through tutoring services for those who are stuck on their educational path and which is further articulated in *Psychological support*, which addresses the student's personal questions considered separate from the purposes of guidance and, finally, an exit phase of *Connection with the professional world* (Table 4). The process outlined by an analysis of the categories of the corpus shows guidance in the entry, ongoing and exit phases are understood as coherently linked to each other based on a vision of a linear path in which the choice is interpreted as already clearly present in the person and, consequently, is placed in direct connection with a specific educational path and thus with a supposed context of the professional world that corresponds to it. All this does not take into account that the scenarios that characterize the actual situation, fascinating in some ways and very elusive for others, place the person constantly in front of the challenge to be flexible, to constantly rework his choices, by addressing and supporting change throughout his lifetime; which would imply that, instead, precisely the places of learning should be primarily responsible with respect to this task; the task, i.e., of offering space, time and methods for experimenting and consciously cultivating choices in an increasingly active learning process of re-orientation, re-definition and care of the Self.

Table 4 – Some live quotes from the categories that explain the university guidance process

Quotations "Information and Marketing"	Quotations "Recovery of inactive students"	Quotations "Connection with the professional world"
"Entry guidance is a bridge to reaching kids in secondary school"	"Along the way, we recover students who are not taking exams with non-stop tutoring"	"We put graduates in contact with the workplace"
"We help choose a degree program even through trickery"	"We hold classes on how to study for students who are stalled or inactive"	"Our activities include job placement, the internships and career days"
"We provide information about degree programs but there is the risk of losing students who discover they have a vocation for a course the university doesn't offer"	**Quotation "Psychological support"** "When someone makes the wrong choice [...] there are personal issues that do not concern guidance"	"We offer a counselling service for orientation to work"

The last category, *Guidance-teaching dichotomy,* refers to the failure to recognize a significant relationship between guidance and teaching, as if teaching doesn't incorporate in itself a guidance prerogative. In other words, planning guidance and managing "normal" teaching appear as disjointed functions: teaching is generally not involved in guidance purposes and does not take advantage of actions implemented by guidance services, except in circumstances where it is considered that it could take advantage of the presence of previously well-guided students (Table 5). Therefore, teaching and guidance are represented as two fields unrelated to each other, although the learning experience never plays a neutral role in processes of guiding the person, whether this is intentional or unintentional. University teaching, as it is designed, does not seem to take into account the guidance needs of the person and the means through which it can support him. While guidance-oriented teaching would presuppose that the teacher has specific transversal skills that, regardless of the discipline, call into question vital aspects of each education plan, i.e., the care of knowledge processes that consciously *direct* the person towards the future.

Table 5 – Some live quotes from the "Guidance-teaching dichotomy" category

Quotations
"During the normal teaching what guidance is there to do?"
"If guidance is done well, the kids are motivated and teaching goes better"

Moreover, many operators, while defining a certain timeliness of the guidance process characterizing the organisation of belonging, are not able to clearly evoke a disciplinary or cultural perspective of reference that lends credence to practices, makes them shareable, and testable by different regional contexts and that, above all, permits a serious and systematic monitoring of the results. So, there seems to be a lack of a system logic and a reference to a shared horizon of methods and practices, that could give a "name" and a sense to the practices implemented. On the other hand, where a reference is expressed to reflexive strategies or narrative tools, thus making clear reference to a specific approach to the subject (widely mentioned here), one sees the implementation of counselling actions or practical-operational paths that are primarily of an informational and support character and that, therefore, do not demonstrate themselves to be really connected in any way to the approach to which reference is made, if only through terminology. In other words, it is as if there were a certain confusion in understanding the *definitions* of some devices that, while nominally referring to a precise theoretical horizon, are in substance translated into practices that are distant and inconsistent with it, which are in fact implemented starting from an interpretation of their sense and use that, in some cases, is rather random or arbitrary.

The theoretical system derived from the qualitative analysis of the data leads to the conclusion that, in the persons involved, the prevailing concept of university guidance, although basically structured according to an approach and a *mission* defined on the basis of more or less clear theoretical orientations, has some shortcomings, among which we must emphasize the disconnect with respect to the person's strong need to be accompanied in the hard task of giving meaning to their life plan and project themselves into a future that, more than presenting itself as a promise or a possibility, is experienced as a threat (Benasayag & Schmit, 2004). While post-modern society imposes individual development paths based on flexibility and change, the opinions and ideas presented in the interviews seem far from this possibility, since not oriented towards a critical rethinking of traditional theoretical and intervention models on the subject of guidance. Probably because this requires the cultivation of those skills that in formal educational contexts are still considered *invisible* and therefore not pursuable.

In short, the critical issues that seem to emerge are the following:

– Disconnect between emerging models and the quality of the actual practices developed
– Lack of reference to a shared system of planning and managing guidance (absence of a recognized and unambiguous patrimony)
– Unspecified direction of guidance activities on the educational side
– Lack of recognition of the elements of individualization and centering on the subject.

In recent decades, the change that, to the greatest extent, has characterized both the theoretical reflection and its effects on planning guidance interventions, regards the shift of attention from the development of linear, pre-established trajectories, that corresponded in a prototypical way to certain characteristics of the person and the environment, towards his active and conscious participation in the design of his professional and life plan. As Morin (2001) pointed out, education is first called to intercept uncertainties and guide the person in "the unknown adventure" that is life, in search of small "islands of certainty" that illuminate his path. Therefore, according to this perspective, places of formal learning, in addition to being delegated to construct knowledge, become the crucible of a profound reform based on the mission of "teaching to live" (Morin, 2015), i.e., allowing each person to develop their own individuality, testing themselves in the here and now in view of an imagined future. From the educational point of view, this means not leaving persons in a state of solitude, but taking responsibility for the construction of their choices and their futures by confronting together the ineluctable component of uncertainty, transforming limits into opportunities to explore themselves and the world.

2.2.3 The Second Research Phase

2.2.3.1 Tool, Participants and Procedure

The second research phase involved university students and was designed as a short "training course" during which participants could discuss and exchange views with each other on the issue of guidance. In this case, the use of a focus group is linked to the choice of using narration to activate reflexive dynamics about complex issues that relate to the guidance of the person, within a group interaction context, understood as a useful resource for collecting information, viewpoints, personal issues and positions, but also to collectively produce alternative ideas and possible solutions (Duggleby, 2005; Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The planning that preceded the focus groups was articulated into a phase of conceiving and developing themes and the related questions and techniques; a phase of selecting and recruiting possible participants and, finally, a phase of logistics and planning related to the conduct of the discussion and of the moderators to be involved.

The implementation of the actual focus groups was preceded by a pilot focus group used to test questions and conduction methods and, therefore, to change, along the way, aspects deemed weak or ill-suited to achieving the objectives of the research.

The participants were students enrolled in various active three-year degree courses at the universities involved in the national research project, recruited

through guidance office lists with a personal e-mail requesting participation. Starting from the consensus achieved, heterogeneous groups were created by age and educational context with the aim of favoring greater variety and exchanges of viewpoints and promoting a certain dynamism in discussion.

As regards the implementation phases, we proceeded with groups of 12 members and a moderator team composed of a moderator, who was responsible for presenting the questions and stimulus materials, facilitating discussion and promoting and encouraging the students to participate; and an assistant moderator, as suggested by Krueger (1994), with the task of video-recording the sessions and writing any memos. The selected conduction method was mixed and, in principle, the moderator played a marginal role during group discussion and an active role in presenting the issues and supporting discussion with reinforcement and restating of the meaning.

The setting of the discussion was warm, friendly, permissive and non-threatening (Krueger, 1994), in a neutral space on campus, usually frequented by students and, therefore, familiar to them and non-inhibitory. Taking into account the complexity and multidimensionality of the object of the focus groups, it was decided to hold three sessions per group, a week apart, so as to allow the time necessary for reflection on the personal aspects emerging from the discussion and for the production of narrative materials useful for the next session.

The structure of the sessions of the focus group was inspired by the way Savickas and Hartung (2012) organised the production of the career story according to the famous formula *Telling-Hearing-Enacting My Story*, which in the case of this research was adapted to the *educational story* which becomes *life plan*.

First Session.
  – *Introduction*: This phase includes welcoming the students, a brief sharing of the research objectives and specifically the topic of the focus group, the use to be made of the data collected and the role of the moderator and assistant moderator.
  – *Preparation:* it provides for a favorable moment for creating a positive climate, which put the participants at ease, during which they can introduce themselves and begin to interact.
  – *Guidelines and rules of focus group*: in this phase, the group is provided all information useful for the conduct of the focus group, i.e., how it will be organised, what rules must be followed (for example, there are no right or wrong answers, but only points of view; don't judge, speak one at a time, etc.) and the participants are asked to consent to the video recording of the session.
  – *First question*: the moderator formulates a first, non-specific question not

regarding personal aspects of the participants (*"What is guidance?"*) and proposes brainstorming as a technique for "breaking the ice" and giving free expression to everything that comes to mind without thinking about the quality, plausibility and applicability of the ideas produced. In turn, brainstorming consists of several phases:

– a phase of warming up and simulating the procedure, during which the participants produce the first ideas and together with moderator create the right climate for the actual brainstorming;

– a phase of producing ideas, in which students take turns and freely express their point of view, which is transcribed on a poster on the wall;

– a phase of further ideas, in which the moderator stimulates students to produce more interesting ideas when the initial ones seem to have run out;

– a phase of assessing the ideas, during which the participants are divided into small groups with the objective of assessing the transcribed ideas and selecting those considered best for explanation and re-discussion in the group for the last time.

– *Final discussion*: starting from the ideas produced in the brainstorming, the moderator asks the students to connect the issues regarding guidance to their individual educational stories and guidance needs.

– *Restating*: the moderator restates the main themes discussed and emerging issues and invites the participants to produce a narrative ("*Try to tell how your formative experiences – related to both institutional education and to those of personal life that have shaped and oriented you – have helped to give and/or change meaning in your life*") to be delivered in the next session.

Second Session.

– *Reading narratives on the Meaning of Life*: The session opens with the reading of the narratives produced during the week off.

– *Discussion of issues raised by the narratives:* the group focuses on the way in which the meaning of life is constructed, also through education and the presence of significant institutional figures or among family/friends.

– *Second question*: the moderator introduces the theme of the story of education and suggests that students try to tell it and situate themselves within it, highlighting choices, transitions, changes and more personal aspects.

– *Third question*: on the basis of the personal education stories that emerge, the participants reflect on the questions *Who am I?* and *Who will I become?*

– *Fourth question*: the answers to the questions addressed in the previous

phase allow the moderator to introduce the theme of Vocation by reading some passages from the writings produced on the subject by students of other universities. As a result of the stimulus provided, a group discussion begins on how it comes about and on the aspects and factors of the modifiability of vocation.

– *Restating*: the moderator restates the main themes and emerging issues and invites participants to think of a metaphor that represents themselves in their educational path. The metaphor can be narrated or graphically illustrated and represents the work to be carried out during the week off.

Third session.

– *Presentation of the metaphors* that emerged: each student explains to the group the meaning of his metaphor and its connection with his own educational path.

– *Discussion of the metaphors*: the group discusses the reasons of the choice and the meanings to which the metaphors refer to understand what they want to say with respect to education.

– *Fifth question*: starting from the issues raised about educational paths, the moderator returns to a theme from the first session, i.e., guidance needs, and asks the group to try to redefine them taking into account the path of reflection followed up to that moment. The purpose is to bring out aspects not discussed in the first, superficial discussion of the theme but, at this point, easily connectable to personal experiences linked to education.

– *Identification of guidance strategies*: after redefining guidance needs more clearly, the students discuss as a group to arrive at practical proposals concerning the strategies and methods by which the university could support their educational paths with specific guidance actions.

– *Final evaluation*: the last session concludes with a brief discussion on the possible changes experienced by the students during the realization of the various sessions. In this regard, the participants are given an evaluation questionnaire centering on organisational elements, content and method, and the student's personal change. The questionnaire consists of a closed-response part that contains a series of statements to which the student is asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (*not at all*, *somewhat*, *enough*, *very*, *very much*) or dichotomously (*yes, no*); and an open narrative part that asks the student to discuss more deeply the evaluation of the path in which he participated.[1] Finally, the students are asked to fill out the questionnaire anonymously to avoid only desirable answers.

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[1] It should be clarified that the purpose of the final questionnaire is not to assess dimensions related to the person, from which to make a quantitative estimate of possible change, but to identify elements of the educational experience that could make a greater contribution to it through an in-depth analysis of the participants' experience.

In the work described, the focus group is used as a qualitative tool for data collection, but also as an educational opportunity for the students involved and an opportunity for the research group to construct a pedagogical proposal of university guidance that goes in the direction of a definition in the educational sense.

2.3.3.2 Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected through the three focus group sessions was subjected to categorical and content analysis with the support of Atlas.ti software package, while the quantitative data derived from the administration of the course evaluation questionnaires was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis.

This paragraph illustrates and discusses the data obtained from the narratives on Meaning in Life and from the evaluation questionnaire, while the data related to brainstorming and metaphors will be subject to further analysis and publications.

Results of Narratives on Meaning in Life

The analysis of the corpus was divided into three phases: *initial or open coding*, during which significant extracts containing the sensitizing concepts (60 codes) have been identified; *focused coding*, during which the labeling work was redefined to labeling and conceptually more extended macro-categories (20 codes) were identified; *theoretical coding*, during which the more mature concepts were identified and processed in the form of a conceptual model (9 codes). The analysis, therefore, allowed formulating a theory that explains the process that leads participants to develop and/or change their meaning in life (Graphic 2).

Graphic 2 – Network derived by the Atlas-ti 6 software package related to the analysis of the corpus on Meaning in Life
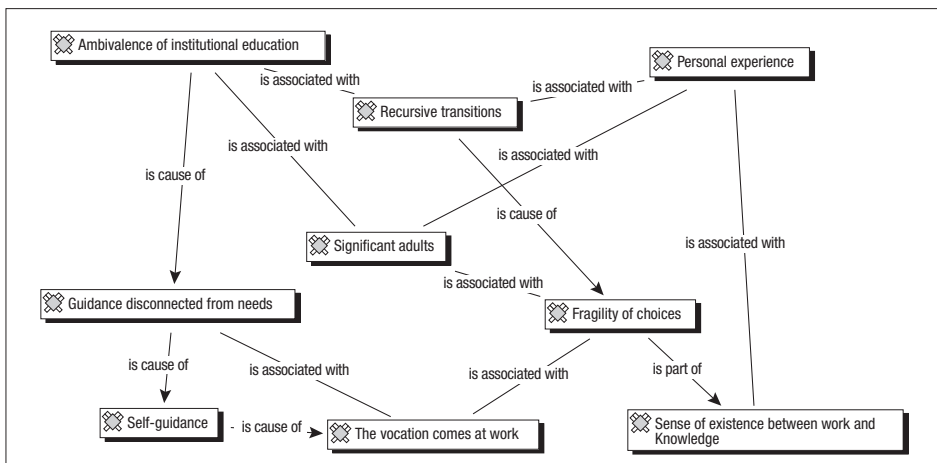
The core of the conceptual system was defined *Fragility of choices* (Table 6) and represents the most extensive and articulated category that emerges from the textual analysis. The theme of the choices appears redundantly in the participants' narratives of the participants and is described as an element that pervasively characterizes their life paths, in that, although, on the one hand, it represents an opportunity for personal growth and education of the person, on the other, it seems to be experienced in negative terms, i.e., as a *weight to carry on their shoulders* and a moment of difficulty to face. In fact, the description of the choices emerging from the analysis refers to dimensions such as those of obligation, conditioning by others, renunciation and especially the absence of those fundamental aspects – knowledge, passions, interests – starting from which to make decisions that take into account both rational and emotional-affective aspects. In other words, the *core category* reveals that choices assume profound meanings that transcend a simple selection between different alternatives and have a deterministic effect on the future. This not only produces the fear of not making sufficiently informed and profitable choices, but even before that, it does not tolerate the possibility of making mistakes.

Table 6 – Some live quotes from the "Fragility of choices" category

Quotations
"Overall I am not unhappy with my academic path, I just learned that before you choose you need to know, so I think that, today, the issue of guidance is viewed too superficially, when it is actually crucial for all educational and professional paths"
"During the course of life each of us is obliged to make choices, not only from an educational and professional point of view, but also in terms of social and personal aspects"

Around the core just described, eight other macro-categories revolve, connected to each other by semantic links that explain how the participants construct their meaning in life:

– *Recursive transitions;*
– *Ambivalence of institutional education;*
– *Personal experience;*
– *Significant adults;*
– *Guidance disconnected from needs;*
– *Self-guidance;*
– *The vocation comes at work;*
– *Sense of existence between work and knowledge.*

The imminence and obligation of choices is intensified because of, and in

conjunction with, *recursive transitions* (Table 7) that mark the participants' life path. The transitions referred to are, for example, those canonical ones that affect the collectivity of adolescents and young adults in the transition between different orders and levels of education. In fact, although now change and transition represent a structural feature of the person's entire life cycle, those described in narratives seem to possess a potential criticality precisely due to the need to make choices that evidently also involve the resolution of conflicts with themselves and with their surroundings. So, what seemed to have, at least in earlier decades, an evolutive potential for emancipatory change (transition as exclusively positive event), is today also characterized by its regressive character, procrastination and/or stagnation. It is evident, therefore, that the participants show a preoccupation linked to the need to identify educational and professional paths that are satisfying and congruent with their expectations and aspirations.

Table 7 – Some live quotes from the "Recursive transitions" category

Quotations
"Certainly the transitions from one school to another have had great importance in my life. Being able to grow and acclimate, to create links, whether good or bad, being able to listen to the opinions of others and to respect the diversity of people in the class"
"The first important choice that I had to face in my life was the decision of the path to take at the end of lower secondary school. This phase of school life is essential for each student since it ends the first educational cycle, during which everyone follows the same study plan and learns the basics for profitably attending an upper secondary school"

Obviously, these transitions are conditioned by the two fundamental educational environments: on the one hand formal, as an essential context in which the transitions are the norm, and the formative experiences that relate to the personal context and are fed by them. In the first case, we find the *ambivalence of institutional education* (Table 8) that, despite being for individuals one of the privileged contexts in which to be "formed", in the sense of the acquisition of a specific way of being and living, ultimately turns out to be of little use in supporting and educating for making choices. In this regard, there emerges, in particular, the fact that compulsory school is described as a path that, instead of welcoming persons and keeping them "inside", "alienates" them as a place in which adolescents do not perceive the possibility of recognizing themselves.

While, in the second case, it seems that *personal experience* (Table 9) makes a greater contribution to the construction of the identities and self-awareness that come before the choice and that clarify life plans.

Table 8 – Some live quotes from the "Ambivalence of institutional education" category

Quotations
"Being compulsory, institutional places, often, especially during the early years, can be experienced as disconnected from one's self and this leads to the search for meaning in one's life outside of them. Almost as if the institution in itself alienates people from their path"
"For me, university education alone was not enough to represent all the facets needed to figure out what path to take, to understand if it was the right one and to give me possible alternatives"

Table 9 – Some live quotes from the "Personal experience" category

Quotations
"I think it was more my experiences outside of school, on my own, that helped me understand my path immediately and without much difficulty"
"From the point of view of my personal growth, the illnesses of my mother and cousin were very important. They made me aware of the importance of life, of the value of small everyday things, that it is useless to get angry over trivial things when life is an important gift and there is no time to lose because everything can change in a second"

The process that leads to choosing for oneself clearly involves the presence of others, in particular *significant adults* (Table 10), parents and teachers, which in a few cases offer adolescents the tools for the autonomous construction of paths of choice, for example by serving as examples or guides, since they are more often engaged in providing instructions and advice that channel their own idea of the other into predetermined paths.

Table 10 – Some live quotes from the "Significant adults" category

Quotations
"Middle School: at the end of the third year the teachers gave each student a "recommendation" of the most appropriate type of high school. I was advised to attend an artistic high school. So it was and, for "closeness", I chose a vocational school for "clothing and fashion""
"It was when I began to see that my results were important to my parents that I began to get interested and not because I was afraid of punishment, but because I wanted to make them happy"

What emerges from the quality of the educational work of teachers reflects substantially the sense that *guidance* (Table 11) assumes in institutional contexts. According to the participants, guidance is undervalued, addressed superficially, not supported by specially trained educational figures and follows

an informational approach considered practically useless in responding to their needs. However, the participants identify an alternative guidance policy in work experience. In fact, it is one of the most meaningful guidance occasions for understanding what one wants to be, since it offers the opportunity to try out professional roles by putting into play knowledge, skills and attitudes that only in this way they discover that they have. It follows that *vocation comes at work* (Table 12) through the discovery of aspects of self related to the professional sphere that were previously latent.

Table 11 – Some live quotes from the "Guidance disconnected from needs" category

Quotations
"In hindsight, I realize that this transition was not adequately supported (at least in my case), also because at that age, i.e., at the height of adolescence, you're not really in a position to make important choices about your future, so we need to be accompanied in this choice by appropriate educational figures"
"In my personal educational journey, this right was almost non-existent, and this has led me to make hasty and often wrong choices"
"During the last year, we did not receive much information about university guidance, except for a visit to the Mostra d'Oltremare exhibition center, where I got to take a simulated engineering admissions test"

Table 12 – Some live quotes from the "Vocation comes at work" category

Quotations
"At seventeen I worked at a summer camp with children with various problems (family problems, deaf, hyperactive and epileptic children) and I think this was the experience that most marked my life, making me realize that being a counselor was what I wanted to do and could do without getting tired"
"In the meantime, while attending school, I worked as a counselor in various associations (mentoring, school support, afternoon activities for autistic children, summer camps etc.) and I realized that I was made for this work"

Guidance is, therefore, described by the participants not as a *habitus* that is created and developed in contexts of formal education, but as a form of *self-guidance* (Table 13) that takes on the traits of an adaptive response to the lack of educational actions directed in this sense. In other words, the participants autonomously seek the tools necessary for making choices that are not hasty and superficial outside institutional contexts.

Table 13 – Some live quotes from the "Self-Guidance" category

Quotations
"Real experiences in the professional world: at this point, a troubled path of "self-guidance" begins. After leaving various small jobs, I made the choice, evaluating independently, to start university. I chose the course of study by comparing the various university websites, without support from other people"
"Very often we see or read something that strikes us and changes, in even only a very small part, what we were thinking before; I think that it is from the sum of these things that, in the end, we construct and modify meanings. So I think the most important guideline is up to us and can happen at any time, every day. The various courses and different outside experiences can help us understand where to go to find information or the most appropriate advice for us"

This entire interrelated system of contexts, processes, significant figures and dichotomies that regard the personal and professional sphere together contribute to determining what is their meaning in life. In this case, what drives and motivates the *sense of existence* (Table 14) is concretized in elements such as personal realization and satisfaction in work and, assuming a more general perspective, the need to know and to discover oneself and the surrounding world to find constructive forms of self-expression.

Table 14 – Some live quotes from the "Sense of existence between work and knowledge" category

Quotations
"The ultimate meaning that I was able to find in my life, after it had been demolished, was that in the eyes of history most of us are entirely insignificant, a number in demographic statistics or among the dead for some war. Nevertheless we have all lived on a planet that hides wonderful secrets, and among people who each conceal a little big history, and before I die I want to know as much as possible about this planet and the people who are walking, or have walked, on it"
"The contribution of these experiences in providing/modifying the meaning of my life regards the knowledge of new realities (discoveries) and at the same time the reflection of an inner, personal, universe"
"I think it is important to reconsider work as something to focus on for personal fulfillment and not just as a means to survive"

A certain degree of independence seems to emerge in making choices, in the ability to guide oneself that, however, is more the result of force majeure, which appeals to the natural inclination to orient oneself rather than to a sense of responsibility and self-awareness. In other words, the choices and paths guided autonomously by persons are accompanied by a continuous and latent sense of unease, as a result of a "leap in the dark", rather than as a result of planning that combines self-knowledge and opportunities. This seems to be an expression of a tendential ineffectiveness of educational responsibilities, which do not

emerge as significant in the persons' perception and interpretation of their guidance needs. In this direction, the reference to work and the category of direct experience appears relevant as the principal source of guidance; a source that is, however, linked to chance and, most of all, not filtered by a systematic critical exercise of the subjective value that it can have. In other words, in the persons' interpretation, "personal experience" teaches more than educational institutions, although this does not directly imply that the experience itself is the object of a critical analysis.

Results of the evaluation questionnaire

As regards the part of the questionnaire dedicated to an **evaluation of organisational aspects**, the students' responses show that the goal of the focus groups was clearly defined by the moderator in the initial phases of the sessions and, therefore, maintained consistent along the way. In fact, more than half of the students (55.5%) said that the goal was clear, selecting the option "*very*", 27.8% "*very much*", 16.7% "*enough*" and no one answered "*somewhat*" or "*not at all*" (Graphic 1). Even clearer were the responses given by the students with respect to the choice of dividing the course into three sessions of two hours each (around 83% considered it appropriate), and leaving a week for reflection between sessions (about 94%).

Graphic 1 – Percentage distribution of students' responses regarding the clarity of the goal of the focus groups
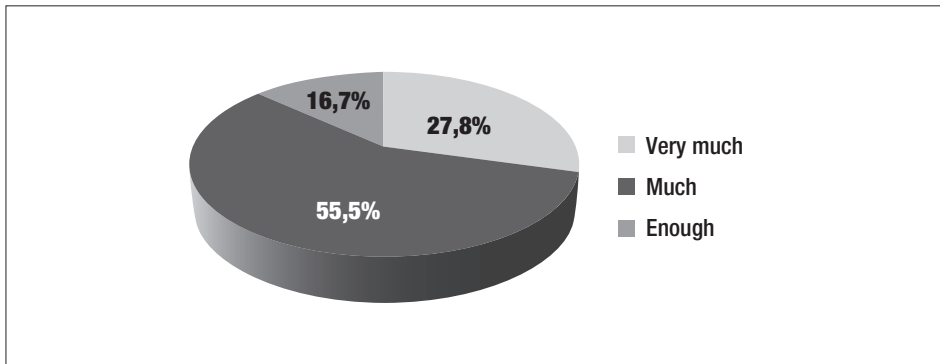
In regard to the **evaluation of aspects related to content and method**, the data show that the topics discussed during the focus groups were effective and interesting (for 33.4% very much, for 44.5% very and for 22.1% enough) (Graphic 2); in the case of the choice of narrative stimuli given to the students, the percentages were distributed with 27.8% of the cases on very much, 44.5% on very and 27.9% enough (Graphic 3); as regards the use of brainstorming, 34.3% of the students chose very much, 50% very and only 15.7 enough (Graphic 4); while,

with respect to the use of metaphor, 5.2% considered it somewhat adequate, 27.7% enough, 45% very and 22.1% very much (Graphic 5); Finally, the group discussion was the most appreciated by the students with 61% choosing "very much", 22.3% "very" and only 16.7 "enough" (Graphic 6).

With regard to the atmosphere created during the focus groups, almost all the students (about 94%) felt that it was a positive and welcoming climate where they could freely express their opinions. In explaining this choice, some students described the climate in these terms: "*it was a healthy environment without pressure*"; "*participatory climate, relaxed and purposeful*"; "*tranquil sharing of different opinions*"; "*we all communicated with enthusiasm*".

Graphic 2 – Percentage distribution of students' responses regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the topics of the focus group
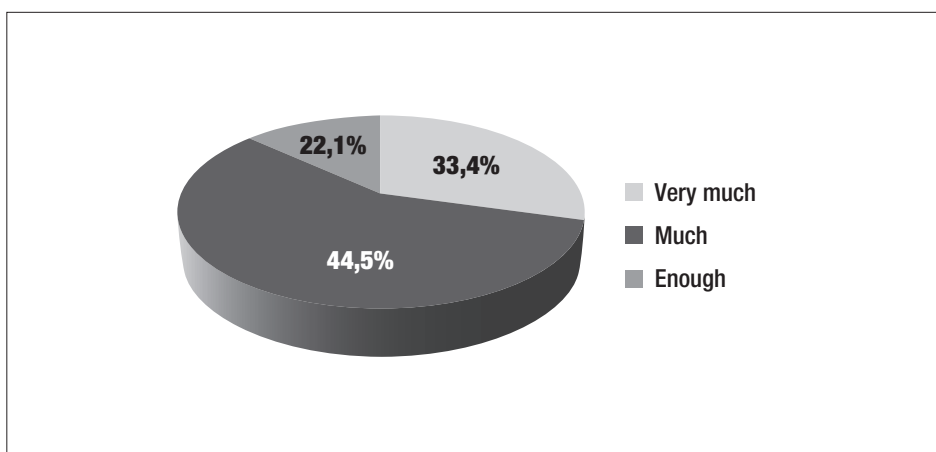
Graphic 3 – Percentage distribution of students' responses regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the narrative stimuli proposed
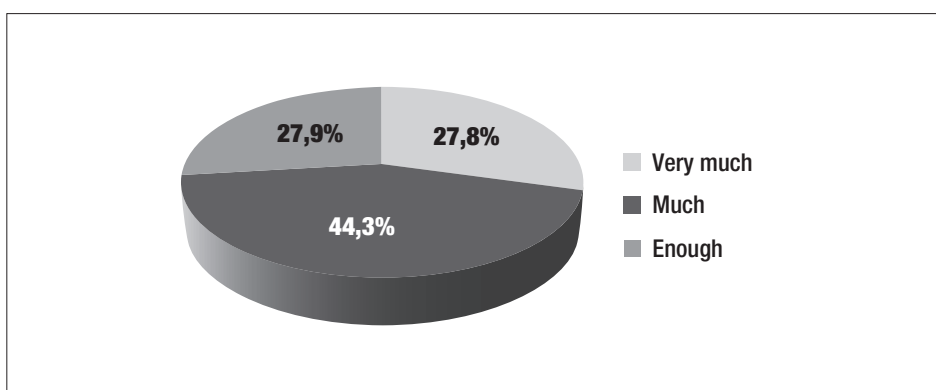
Graphic 4 – Percentage distribution of students' responses regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of brainstorming
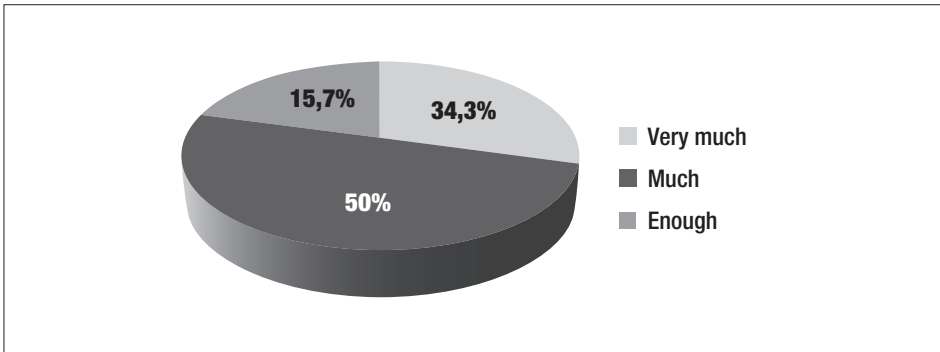
Graphic 5 – Percentage distribution of students' responses regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the use of metaphor
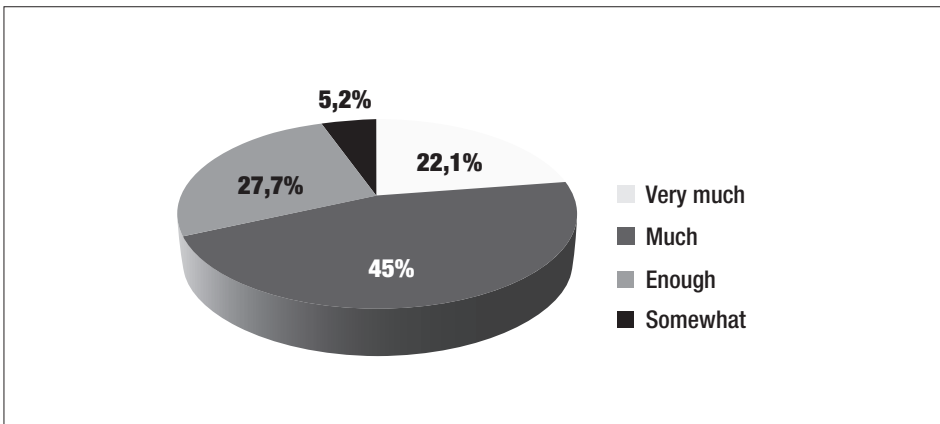
Graphic 6 – Percentage distribution of students' responses regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the group discussion
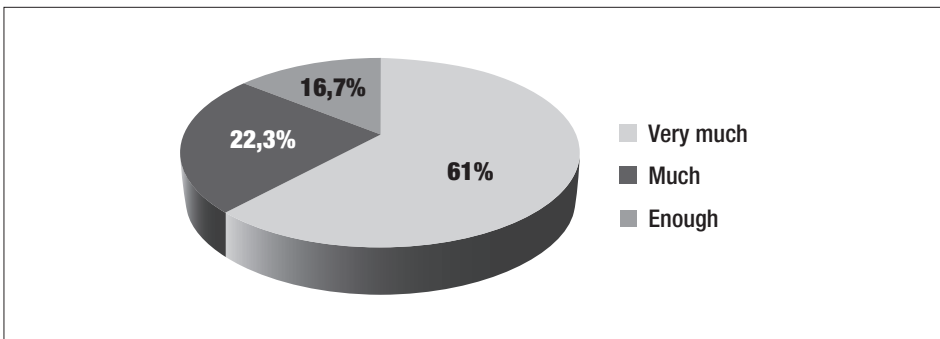
Turning, instead, to the **general evaluation of the course** in which the students participated, there was a clear sense of well-being and of the usefulness of the educational experience: in fact, all the students said that they "felt good", considered participation in the project useful and would recommend it to other students. When the students were asked to explain the reasons behind their evaluation of the course as something useful for themselves, they made reference to dimensions such as:

- self-knowledge ("*it allows to evaluating aspects of oneself to which little importance is given*"; "*it encourages discovering your identity*"; "*so I can know myself better*");
- comparison with others ("*you can listen to the experiences of others*"; "*you compare yourself with other people's stories*");
- reflexivity as systematic reflection ("*it helps to reflect on oneself*"; "*there is a need to reflect on oneself*"; "*it is useful to find new ideas to think about*");
- planning ("*it helps you make choices about your educational path*"; "*useful for understanding the goals you want to achieve*"; "*useful for clarifying your ideas*");
- change ("*useful for understanding where to start to promote positive change*").

The reasons why the students would recommend that others participate in projects of this type follow the same lines. The categories that emerge in this regard highlight the possibility of:

- understanding the value of guidance ("*makes you understand the utility of guidance, which is often under-valued*"; "*I would recommend it to confused university students because it helps you to think about yourself and understand*");
- in-depth self-analysis ("*we do not always have the possibility of analyzing ourselves deeply*"; "*useful for personal reflection*");
- comparing oneself with others ("*good experiences for sharing opinions and reflections*"; "*a way to get to know other people*"; "*helps you to understand the lives of others*");
- a stimulating experience ("*it was an interesting and fun experience*"; "*I had fun*"; "*very useful and stimulating*").

The students' description of their experience was summarized in the following categories:

- path of awareness ("*a positive experience that leads to greater awareness of yourself and your choices*"; "*it helps us dig deeply into ourselves*");
- development path of persons and their potential ("*it helps you improve yourself and understanding how to do it*"; "*addressing important issues for the development of persons and their potential*");

– active participation course ("*a course in which you analyze issues to find solutions to university and guidance problems*"; "*a good way to feel active in the university*"; "*discussion of some concepts for understanding university guidance and making it more effective*");
– a reflexive course ("*it helps you pause a moment to think about yourself*"; "*it is a very reflexive course*").

At the end of the sessions the students were asked if they had suggestions for improving the guidance path they had followed together, but only 39% proposed improvements, which can be categorized as follows:

– organisational proposals (avoid meetings during exams; plan meetings at the beginning and end of the academic year; plan more meetings);
– methodological proposals (list the topics before the meeting and give students time for pre-reflection; explain the goals better; discuss more issues).

In regard to the involvement of the students during the focus groups, the responses reveal that about 66% say they felt "*very much*" involved and about 34% "*very*" involved; while to the question "*Did something change in you?*" 65% of the students said yes and, for example, justified their answers in this way:

"Before, the question "Who am I?" was obvious and superficial. Now it has a deeper meaning and, for this reason, I no longer know how to respond"
"I am more convinced about myself as a person and student because I have understood more"
"I felt useful in raising the awareness of the institutions to address the problem proactively"
"The importance of guidance"
"I feel more aware of past choices and author of future ones"
"From now on I will no longer make too hasty choices"
"I have a clearer picture for orienting myself in the future and new insights".

Conclusions

In summary, some thoughts that certainly cannot be a conclusion of the research path illustrated but rather a starting point that requires further and deeper investigation.

The path realized has highlighted several elements of development that appear useful for defining an educational protocol for guidance to be tested, validated and improved on subsequent occasions within further contexts with similar general characteristics, in order to formalize an effective strategy implementable as an institutional process of "guidance in planning life and education".

These elements are:

– the recognition of the particular effectiveness of educational work carried out in *group discussion* as a privileged place for the expression of a narrative-dialogue system; group narration was, in this sense, a fundamental support for the development of awareness, reflection, education and self-learning;
– the emergence of a change perceived by the students between a *before* and an *after,* which would seem to provide an opportunity to plan guidance courses of an educational and critical-reflexive nature that are repeated at specific milestones during the academic year, as forms of accompaniment systematically structured in the context of instruction and learning paths;
– the fact that, despite the focus groups being conducted in different universities, contexts and regions (which also determines differences on the level of objective opportunities), there was a strong overlap of the aspects that characterize the experiences of the students on the issues of choice and the future in general, as well as with respect to the guidance needs generally expressed.

The theme of *competence to choose* as a central category of guidance appeared transversely, in the light of the results, deeply linked to a constant interrogation of oneself and reality. The option of directing guidance practices towards the concreteness and density of the subjective and inter-subjective dimensions of *creating meaning* rather than towards the mere delivery of information and knowledge or the measurement of skills and attitudes, seems demonstrate itself, in that sense, to be effective with respect to the goal of highlighting the link with personal experience as a subjective experience of reprocessing meaning that serves as *theory guiding action*. The dialogical-relational dimension, equally, has proved to be a structured and effective reflexive space (regulated by models, methods and tools) for the construction of meaning and, thus, "directions".

All of which, therefore, reinforces the idea of the adequacy of a pedagogical approach of guidance and points towards a further commitment to concrete

testing of educational-reflexive practices and tools consistent with them, that make them operational in real, heterogeneous and plural contexts, with the aim of promoting a shared and systematic vision.

The paths that open can then regard two development aspects: the design of *educational guidance* devices, i.e., of an inherently educational character; the construction and deployment of such devices within the institutions that comprise the Italian educational system as an integrated system of coherent and interconnected actions.

The first aspect primarily engages the world of educational research and sector operators and is expressed through the need to *make operational* and *organised* the set of knowledge, disciplines and research involved in guidance within specific educational planning. This planning must involve the concrete implementation of methods and tools to be used and verified in the various contexts, in order to provide real answers to the educational needs of these contexts and the persons that they comprise. This implies the effort and challenge of putting into play scientific and experiential knowledge, even risking compromising it, in real situations, characterized by variability, differences, diversity and plurality, as educational contexts are, in fact, characterized.

The second aspect involves the scope of the institutional educational planning and, therefore, policy makers, and calls for the maturation of a clear awareness of the need to make a sustained and systematic comparison of these both with the scientific knowledge that defines the desirable cultural background within which to place issues and plans, projects, and with regional realities, formal and informal educational contexts and with the figures and professions that operate in them, for the realization of a system planning that is founded, coherent and above all effective, starting from the involvement and integration of knowledge and historical, social and cultural facts. In other words, it has to do with broadening the understanding of the socio-cultural reality, which in the Italian system seems basically limited when examining the implemented system policies.

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Fostering Learner-Centered Teaching in Higher Education

Monica Fedeli, Daniela Frison, Valentina Grion*

Introduction

"To what extent have learning and teaching moved up as institutional priorities? How extensive has the shift been to student-centered learning across Europe and is this shift supported by national and institutional policies and other measures?" (Sursock, 2015, p. 10). The publication *Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities* by the EUA – European Universities Association, is dedicated to the modernisation of teaching in higher education and its take-over by policy-makers and national and international universities. It is precisely within this framework that the research conducted by the University of Padua, as part of the *Employability and Competences* project, aimed to investigate the opinions of students about their educational experience in higher education. From the point of view of the student population, to what extent is university teaching, in the partner universities of the project, *learner-centered*? To what extent do instructors actively engage students in the choice of content, methods, teaching techniques and assessment criteria? To what extent do they promote the connections between subject content and the professional world?

Teaching has been at the heart of the European debate on university instruction for several years. In 2011, in particular, the document *Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems* (European Commission, 2011) emphasized the need to enhance the quality and centrality of higher education through the involvement of the business world and its institutions in the *design and supply of new and diversified study opportunities* (part-time, distance and continuing education for adults that return to the university after having already experienced and tested the professional world, etc.). In addition, the Commission encouraged academic institutions in "making the knowledge triangle work: linking higher education, research and business for excellence and regional development" stimulating "the development of entrepreneurial, creative and innovation skills in all disciplines and in all three cycles" (2011, p. 7).

The preparation of more interactive learning environments and partnerships with the professional world are central to the process of modernizing and innovating teaching, as also demonstrated by the many European documents dedicated to the so-called *university-business dialogue* (Commission of the European Communities, 2006, 2008, 2009) as well as the many projects supported by EU funds, which refer to *knowledge alliances* between universities and organisations, mobility of instructors and students and *strategic partnerships* to support the sharing and development of innovative practices in education (European Commission, 2016).

In this scenario, the *Report on improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions* (European Commission, 2013) proposed and examined different ways of promoting the quality of higher education, starting with the mapping of experiences and practices in place at European universities. From this analysis, sixteen recommendations emerged that take off from a vision of innovating education as the primary mission of universities and colleges. In addition, academic institutions are invited to *encourage, welcome and take charge of student feedback*, creating "environments and feedback mechanisms and systems to allow students' views, learning experience, and their performance to be taken into account" (European Commission, 2013, p. 28).

Another key recommendation of the report is related to the *involvement of students in curriculum design*. It highlights the central importance of participatory planning, which involves instructors, students, graduates and labour market players in order to ensure the recognition and centrality, not only of theoretical content, but also of the development of soft skills that promote the employability of new graduates. In fact, the Commission's report invites institutions of higher education to implement *counseling, guidance and mentoring to support students*, not only during their university studies, but also afterwards, towards the degree and beyond (European Commission, 2013). This accompaniment system includes *education for an entrepreneurial approach* that, in the view of the group of expert authors of the report, becomes a "way of thinking, as a mode of learning through creating synergistic relationships across academic disciplines and involving universities and the public and private sectors" (European Commission, 2013, p. 46).

The analysis of innovative experiences and teaching practices continued, in 2014, with a subsequent European Union document that mapped out a series of case studies related to the construct of a *higher education innovation system* (European Union, 2014). Once again, the analysis was translated into a set of recommendations that policy-makers, universities and instructors were invited to accept from the perspective of "changing landscape of teaching and learning in higher education" (European Union, 2014, p. 6).

The *promotion of a culture of innovation* that values creativity and overcomes

resistance to change was the focus of these recommendations, which once again highlight the central role played by the active participation of students in the process of modernizing teaching, along with that exercised by instructors, who were invited to enhance their teaching skills and their openness to collaboration with the non-academic world. The climate of change tracked in teaching, and at the same time, urged by the European documents, was also confirmed by the European Universities Association (EUA), which highlighted how the introduction of new teaching methods is important for 57% of the universities involved in the investigation presented above, representing approximately 10 million students, i.e. more than half of the 17 million attending EUA associated universities. In addition, just over half of these universities took into consideration the research results and the views of the organisations and the professional world in the revision of curricula (Sursock, 2015). Therefore, the above-mentioned European documents outline the reference landscape of the project *Employability and Competences* (*Emp&Co.*), which developed and investigated precisely those nodes that the mentioned reports emphasized so strongly and that regard, particularly, the development of *teaching and learning methods in higher education and their connection with the professional world.*

3.1 A Multiple Theoretical Framework: Learner-Centered Teaching, Personalized Learning, Student Voice and Work-Related Learning

As part of the *Emp&Co.* project, as it is more informally called, the announced focus on teaching in higher education and its connection with the professional world was developed starting from a multiple theoretical framework that refers to four specific frames: *Learner-Centered Teaching, Personalized Learning, Student Voice* and *Work-Related Learning.*

3.1.1 *Learner-Centered Teaching*

Learner-Centered Teaching is a theoretical frame that brings together and creates a dialogue between various approaches that promote learning through the use of participatory teaching to the extent that instructors and students find themselves in a collaborative dimension and in an authentic relationship (Cranton, 2006).

The key ingredients of this approach, according to Weimer (2013), are:

– *the role of the teacher* as facilitator and guide who plans in detail, negotiates, promotes peer learning activities and uses assessments for learning;

– *the balancing of power* that also allows students to control the learning process by involving them in decisions that affect course content and assessment;
– *the function of content* that is often negotiated and undergoes changes with respect to instructive type educational programs based on the imperative of the "coverage" of the program itself. One seeks, on the contrary, to apply the lessons learned, in real or simulated situations, to make learning more effective and use content in communities of practice and work situations, to develop distinctive skills of the discipline and the contexts in which they apply, but above all learning generated by experience;
– *the responsibility for learning* that students assume in a climate of greater autonomy and mutual respect, regulated by authentic relationships in which actions develop responsibility;
– finally, *the purpose and processes of the assessment*, in which the teacher, through assessment and co-assessment, works, together with the students, for a significant goal of the assessment: that of promoting learning, by using formative feedback strategies that encourage reflection promoted and supported by self-, co-, and hetero-assessment processes (Hattie, 2012; Nicol, 2013; Weimer, 2013).

Weimer (2013) affirms that "learner-centered is not an easier way to teach" (p. 71). The role of teacher/facilitator requires a significant commitment to change and cooperation with students in order to promote learning. This approach focuses on the prior knowledge of students and on the facilitation of reflection to create learning environments that allow understanding the concepts and applying them in a variety of situations. However, many scholars think of themselves more as experts in a branch of learning, promoting teaching oriented to the content and not to the student (Kember, 2009). There are few national and international studies that provide evidence, through empirical research, of the benefits of a *learner-centered*, rather than a *content-centered* approach. Lammers and Murphy (2002), through a study conducted in 58 US universities, say that lecturing continues to be the absolutely most used method and that men use it more than women. With this, we certainly do not wish to say that lecturing is not an effective method, but we would also like to promote other methods that can involve students in a more participatory way within *student-faculty partnerships* where mutual engagement and accountability are encouraged (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten, 2014).

Developing learning that involves students through forms of partnership with faculty produces benefits for both actors involved in the process and also for the organisation, which grows along with them. As regards instructors and their experience, student involvement transforms teaching practices, providing both the opportunity to experience a high level of thinking and critical

reflection (Kreber, 2012; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). In light of these emerging pedagogical theories, changes and innovation should be promoted in order to redefine the role of the teacher as a person capable of moving from a *content-oriented* to a *learner-oriented* approach. The theoretical framework presented emerges as one of the founding paradigms of teaching and adult learning in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. However, much of the literature that we consulted in this area is descriptive and there are few empirical studies, especially in Italy, where university teaching is still not the focus of many scholars' research interests.

3.1.2 *Personalized Learning*

The second theoretical framework explored, as well as the least known by scholars of adult education, is that of *Personalized Learning*, which is also central to the development of the research we are presenting (e.g., Hartley, 2003, 2007; Shaikh & Khoja, 2012; Waldeck, 2007) about the innovation of education in Italian Universities. It is seen conceptually as tightening the "connections between students and their learning environments (instructors, other adults, student peers, curriculum and overall school culture)" (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010, p. 1). The roots of personalized education in part emerged from the public sector as a product of enhancing customer service and providing services to citizens with the aim to respect their needs, gather feedback in the development of services (Campbell et al., 2007). These policies and economic discourse view personalized learning "as the model of the public sector reform" (Peters, 2009, p. 615). Despite many discussions on personalized learning, there are very few empirical studies, particularly in post-secondary education that define the concept and highlight operational factors that characterize related strategies. The elements most often associated with a personalized learning environment include: a more collegial culture in part based on smaller class size; encouraging deep and supportive relationships between students and instructors; an analysis of student learning preferences; and malleable assignments and class scheduling (Jenkins & Keefe, 2000).

Empirically, the most relevant study is offered by Waldeck (2007) who attempted "to learn what college instructors say and do to create student perceptions of *personalized education* and to identify any meaningful factor or structure underlying these categories of personalized education characteristics" (p. 409). Through a multi-phase study involving over 800 students, Waldeck (2007) developed a typology that characterizes a personalized educational experience from the students' perspective. The findings to a great degree are consistent with the conceptual literature previously discussed. The characteristics include: a) sharing time outside the classroom with students (accessibility during personal and professional time); b) providing counseling

to students; c) demonstrating high interpersonal skills; d) promoting friendly relations with students; e) encouraging participatory decision-making with course projects and f) offering special treatment to students (Waldeck, 2007).

The general trend of the literature has been creating lists of competencies and characteristics of personalized learning environments, without much discussion on how these lists are implemented, related challenges, and performance outcomes of their application. More specifically, major questions are given little attention, such as the process of negotiating power, managing the demand between content of the course and interests and needs of the students, and how assessment and evaluation are managed in an environment constrained by institutional traditions and policies.

3.1.3 *Student Voice*

At the international academic level and particularly in English-speaking countries, the teaching/learning and assessment processes have been the object of profound changes with the aim of testing or implementing several recent developments in educational research. These developments are based, in particular, on *the centrality of the learner* and, even more, on the *student leadership* in educational contexts, and on the *Student Voice* movement (Cook-Sather, 2002; Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Fielding, 2004, 2012; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). In fact, for more than two decades, this perspective has aimed at enhancing and promoting the role of students in school and university settings. The idea underlying *Student Voice* and shared by researchers who identify with it, regards the fact that children, teenagers, students, i.e. the main protagonists of school/university life, are able to reflect on, and offer valuable information about, educational practices, thus representing *voices* to which instructors and policy-makers should pay more attention in relation to their actions (Cook-Sather, 2009).

The definition of this perspective in an educational research context can be traced back to an article – which today can be considered its manifesto – published in 2002 by the American Cook-Sather, who, following the research paths undertaken in Great Britain by important colleagues, such as Jane Rudduck, Donald McIntyre and Michael Fielding, calls educational researchers to joint action with the aim of promoting situations in which students can be seen as "experts" on educational facts and considered among those to be given a voice in debates on education (Cook-Sather, 2002).

Analyzing different pedagogical, sociological and psychological approaches, constructivism, critical pedagogy, post-modern and post-structuralist feminism, the author calls attention to the fact that, although already at that time there were some initiatives aimed at broadening the array of voices considered authoritative in the context of reflections and decision-making processes in an educational framework, it is necessary to go beyond what has been done, working so that

even students are finally recognized as partners with competence and, thus, authority to discuss and collaborate in making decisions about their education. By launching this appeal, Cook-Sather wanted to draw attention to the fact that:

> there is something fundamentally amiss about building and rebuilding an entire system without consulting at any point those it is ostensibly designed to serve. The inefficacy of this approach becomes increasingly apparent as we move into the 21st century. […]. It is time that we count students among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and in the reform of education (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3).

With this, the author did not intend to argue that the students' ideas should be considered "the only truth" and preferred to those of other educational stakeholders, but rather that they should be a central element – so far hardly considered – in discussions about educational research and policy, and therefore become an integral part of the dialogue with the educators, researchers, politicians and parents of the educational community (Cook-Sather, 2002). For a fuller understanding of the aims of the movement, it should be noted that the term *voice* implies not only listening to the students' perspectives, but extends to a much broader meaning. Recalling Robinson and Taylor (2007) and Czerniawski et al. (2009), it should be clarified that "*voice* encompasses much more than the speech of the speaker. Voice then is used as 'strategic shorthand' by academics and practitioners who recognize its limitations, and recognize that meaning is a composite notion" (Czerniawski et al., 2009, p. 6).

Seale (2009) explains the plurality of meanings that the term *Student Voice* conveys. In fact, the author believes that it implies a series of actions such as:

> listening to and valuing the views that students express regarding their learning experiences; communicating student views to people who are in a position to influence change; and treating students as equal partners in the evaluation of teaching and learning, thus empowering them to take a more active role in shaping or changing their education (2009, p. 995).

Focusing attention, in particular, on higher education, several authors point out the importance of changing the role of students in such contexts, since, when engaged and made co-responsible for the educational processes, they are more successful in their academic path (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015).

In light of these considerations, the academic relationship between teaching staff and students would require to abandoning the *customer-service relationship* model, in which the university and its faculty are those that provide a service to users, the students, completely unrelated to the processes of construction and management of the service itself. Rather, it should be based on the

principles of reciprocity and responsibility, and implemented as a *student-faculty partnership* (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014), resulting in a joint responsibility of students in management and educational processes. It would, therefore, require establishing "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014, pp. 6-7).

3.1.4 *Work-Related Learning*

In addition to the *Learner-Centered Teaching* (Cranton, 2006; Weimer, 2013), *Personalized Learning* (Hartley, 2003, 2007; Jenkins & Keefe, 2000; Shaikh & Khoja, 2012; Waldeck, 2007) and *Student Voice* (Cook-Sather, 2002; Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Fielding, 2004, 2012; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004) approaches, the focus on teaching developed as part of the *Employability and Competences* project takes into consideration a fourth approach, defined by the American literature in terms of *Work-Related Learning* (WRL) (Dirkx, 2011) and in the Australian literature in terms of *Work-Integrated Learning* (WIL) (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Gardner & Barktus, 2014).

Under this dual definition, there are various pedagogical models of the connection between theory and practice, between learning and experience, which guide work-related methods, techniques and experiences. Several American, Australian and English authors (Dirkx, 2011; Cooper, Orrell & Bowden, 2010; Huddleston & Stanley, 2012) highlight how work-related activities involve students in an *experiential* (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 1999), *situated, and contextualized learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) dimension, that sees the active student as a protagonist and experimenter of tasks and problems designed to connect educational and professional environments.

An exploration of the international literature allows developing a first definition of this approach. Coll, Eames, Paku and Lay (2008) define *Work-Integrated Learning* as an educational strategy that has students involved in a training course spending some time in a workplace with study and career objectives. As highlighted in a wider review of the literature (Frison, Fedeli & Taylor, 2015; Frison, 2016), the focus of *Work-Related* (or *Integrated*) *Learning* refers, on the one hand, to spending a longer or shorter period with partially different purposes and objectives – study, development of generic or specialized technical expertise – in a "real" environment outside of the formal academic setting, but integrated with it. On the other hand, taking up again the broader definition offered by Dirkx (2011), WRL refers to activities that take place within the curriculum, not in a workplace, thanks to a work-related

teaching aimed at promoting in students the connection between theory and practice (Litchfield, Frawley & Nettleton, 2010). In this regard, at the end of the 1980s, Levy et al. (1989) highlighted the centrality of activities aimed at *linking learning to the work role*, including in the sense of *Work Based Learning*: "1. structuring learning in the workplace; 2. providing appropriate on-job training/learning opportunities; 3. identifying and providing relevant off-job learning opportunities" (Levy et al., 1989, p. 4). In line with this threefold definition, in the mid-1990s, Seagraves et al. (1996) distinguished between methods and experiences designed to encourage *learning for work*, *learning at work* or *learning through work,* also focusing on all those initiatives that favor the direct connection between higher education and professional context by offering students the opportunity to explore it (Little & Brennan, 1996). It is precisely from this focus on *learning for work* (Seagraves et al., 1996) and on *understanding about work* (Moreland, 2005) that the *Employability and Competences* project oriented the study of WRL and identified an area, presented below, referring to so-called *work-related teaching and learning methods*.

First, according to the mapped international contributions, work-related learning should emerge exclusively from a knowledge-based perspective, focusing on disciplinary specializations, to also cover the promotion of soft skills (Frison, Tino, Tyner & Fedeli, 2016) and those generic skills identified by Freudenberg et al. (2011): interpersonal skills, self-management, learning and adaptability, problem-solving, conceptualization and analysis skills, ability to work in teams, oral communication, ability to find information, written communication, and the ability to identify and define their own career goals. In fact, equally central in the WRL experiences, is knowledge of professional and career opportunities. Work-related activities allow students to define active job-search strategies starting from the knowledge they offer of professional contexts similar to the course of study (Subramaniam & Freudenberg, 2007), thus promoting an enhancement of professional knowledge and skills (Hughes & Moore, 1999) as well as a more targeted identification of the relevance of the theoretical content discussed in the classroom, once transferred to the professional context (Freudenberg, Brimble, & Cameron, 2011). Studies and research on WRL also testify to a substantial personal development of students (Day, Kelly, Parker, & Parr, 1982) favoring what Moreland (2005) defines *learning about yourself,* referring to self-reflection in terms of personal skills and attitudes to put into play and exploit on the workplace. It is evident that the central elements of work-related education highlighted here are strongly associated with the recommendations in the European documents that invite universities to forge partnerships with the region and its organisations, *developing university-business cooperation through Work-Integrated Learning* (Rampersad, 2015).

3.2 From Theory to Practice: the Research

In the context of the *multiple theoretical framework* introduced above, we developed our research design, which aims to innovate, transform and modernize university teaching by promoting practices, experiments and tools to learn more about the state of education in our universities and, at the same time, to interact with many colleagues who have expressed the need and the will to improve their teaching and learning practices, investing time and energy, and animated by passion and a desire to get involved. The research focuses on teaching and learning in higher education and its main goal is the study of the issues regarding teaching and learning methods in the academic context. After reviewing the literature on recent university teaching and learning method trends, we analyzed national and international tools for assessing these areas. The aim of the study is first to create a new questionnaire in order to obtain a clear-cut image of student perspectives regarding teaching and learning methods. The second goal is to identify essential ways to improve and modernize university didactics, to try to overcome the dichotomy between the study – and work-context, and to develop and reinforce the skills of university students to enter the labour market, promoting connection and dialogue between the two settings. In our efforts to identify a clear-cut image of the present situation in teaching and learning methods at Italian universities, we posed the following questions: "How is it possible to explore the present state of art of the use and expertise of teaching and learning methods by the instructors in our university context?" and "How do students perceive the use and expertise of teaching and learning methods utilized by their instructors"?

We analyzed questionnaires in use at Italian and at international universities, then, in connection with the international scholarly discussions on teaching and learning methods and university-business cooperation, we decided to focus our attention on the following four approaches related to teaching and learning methods and particularly on: *Learner-Centered Teaching* and *Personalized Learning*, *Student Voice* and *Work-Related Methods*.

3.2.1 The Survey Tool

The development of the survey tool began with the mapping and analysis of questionnaires that are used by universities at a national and international level to collect the views of students on teaching. In Italy, it is ANVUR (Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research Systems) that evaluates teaching by providing national universities a model *Form for collecting the opinions of students, undergraduates, graduates and instructors on teaching* within the Self-Assessment System, Periodic Evaluation and Accreditation system (AVA). The ANVUR questionnaire is in use in all the

partner universities – Padua, Florence, Parthenope University of Naples and Siena – and in those involved in the try-out stage of the tool – Molise and La Sapienza University of Rome. In these universities, the assessment questionnaires essentially focus on the same areas proposed by ANVUR: instruction – study load, course materials, examinations – teaching, student interest in the content covered, course of studies, classrooms and equipment and, finally, support services. The same applies to the questionnaires adopted at the Universities of Verona and Brescia, which are also considered in the analysis phase.

In addition to the questionnaires adopted by the above-mentioned Italian universities, we analyzed the questionnaire proposed by the Almalaurea Interuniversity Consortium to survey the opinions of graduates about their study experience. We also explored many other assessment tools, proposed by European and non-European universities. In particular, we analyzed the questionnaire administered as part of the *UK National Student Survey* and the tools adopted by the Universities of Würzburg, Duisburg Essen and Mainz in Germany, Penn State-Harrisburg and Texas State University in the US, the Université du Quebec Outaouais in Canada and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in Nigeria. The questionnaire from Penn State University-Harrisburg, which measures the *Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness,* was particularly stimulating with an interesting focus on teaching effectiveness – strictly linked to the opportunities of personalized learning – as well as the *Student Feedback Form* proposed by Texas State University, which devotes an area to Interaction with *Students/Personal Qualities of the Instructor*.

Taking a cue from the survey tools adopted at an international level, the focus of the questionnaire prepared as part of the *Emp&Co.* project was directed to survey areas and items not considered by the national questionnaires mapped, so as to allow integration and expansion of the data and the snapshot of teaching that the universities already have.

The following survey areas were considered:

– Course organisation;
– Creation of a participatory environment;
– Methods and resources for teaching and learning;
– Feedback and Assessment;
– Work-Related Learning and University-Business Dialogue.

The first part of the survey tool explored the respondents' profiles (course of study, exams taken, attendance, etc.). The five survey areas announced above – for a total of 35 items – gathered students' opinions about the classroom behavior of instructors encountered during their studies. They were asked how many instructors had proposed certain teaching strategies: less than 25%, between 25 and 50%, between 51 and 75%, more than 75%, percentages followed by the option "I don't know".

After a try-out at La Sapienza University of Rome and Siena University in December and January 2015, the questionnaire was administered to a sample of students enrolled during the 2014-2015 academic year in bachelor's degree, master's degree, single 5-year and 6-year cycle, and old regulation primary education programs,[1] attending the last year of the legal term of the course, plus those attending the third year of all single cycle courses. The research involved 3760 students (2453 females equal to 65.2% and 1307 males equal to 34.8%) starting from a total of about 50,000 students meeting the criteria described above, who were sent an invitation to complete the questionnaire through the Moodle platform of the *Emp&Co.* project. The highest percentage of respondents had taken 11 to 20 exams. The criteria for identifying the collective, explained above, were, in fact, identified for the purpose of addressing the survey to students who had taken a certain number of exams and who, therefore, had the possibility of comparing a certain number of teaching methods. For this reason, we involved students enrolled in the final year of their course of study.

Table 1 – Distribution of respondents by university and degree program

UNIVERSITY	Single Cycle	Teaching Degree	Three-Year Degree	Total
UNIFI	169	312	518	999
UNINA	13	23	103	139
UNIPD	224	817	1035	2076
UNISI	84	195	267	546
Total	**490**	**1347**	**1923**	**3760**

The categories of the respondents' degree programs were grouped into five macro-areas, which are defined according to criteria established at the national level by the Ministry for Education, Universities and Research for the allocation of the Ordinary Financing Fund.[2] This allocation has allowed the comparison between the various universities participating in the administration.

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[1] The old-regulation degree could be achieved after a single cycle of studies lasting four, five or six years depending on the discipline studied. For more information: Ministry of Education, Universities and Research http://www.istruzione.it/

[2] The Ordinary Financing Fund is public funding that constitutes one of the main sources of income for Italian universities.

Table 2 – Distribution of respondents by university and number of exams taken

UNIVERSITY	0 or NR	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	Total
UNIFI	1	195	465	202	136	999
UNINA	42	63	19	8	7	139
UNIPD	70	613	757	386	250	2076
UNISI	70	67	236	99	74	546
Total	**183**	**938**	**1477**	**695**	**467**	**3760**

The degree categories were aggregated in Humanities, Science, Sociological-Legal, Medical and multi-category programs so as to explore any differences in the opinions of students belonging to different areas. Below, we briefly describe several of the main findings that emerged from the survey, linking them to the multiple theoretical framework previously introduced.

3.3 Fostering Participatory Teaching and Learning Methods

The broader theoretical framework of *Learner-Centered Teaching* was enriched with lesser-known theoretical approaches. First, *Personalized Learning* (Hartley, 2003, 2007; Shaikh & Khoja, 2012, Waldeck, 2007), which, in particular, studies personal characteristics that influence the learning process, attempting to respond appropriately to them and promoting the use of adequate and diversified methods, techniques and tools.

Second, *Student Voice*, which encourages relationships and partnerships between students and instructors (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015; Fedeli, Felisatti, & Giampaolo, 2013, 2014; Grion & Cook-Sather, 2013; Seale, 2009). This approach aims to create a participatory environment in which students and instructors become partners in the design and implementation of teaching practices. Finally, *Work-Related Learning* (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Dirkx, 2011; Gardner & Barktus, 2014) and the reference to *university-business dialogue* (Commission of the European Communities, 2009) to investigate the connections between theory and practice, subject content and the professional context of reference of the various study programs. Starting from this theoretical basis, we explored the dimensions that characterize a participatory approach in teaching. Sauvé (1987) defines participatory education as:

> a learning and teaching process wherein all participants are involved in and
> committed to defining their own learning needs and wants, working out an
> approach to addressing them, and evaluating that process they live out of
> and into it, all within a context of making life better for themselves and those
> around them (p. 19).

With respect to the first three parts of the questionnaire, referring to *course organisation*, the *creation of a participatory environment* and *learning methodologies and resources*, but also with reference to the last two relating to *feedback and assessment* and *teaching and dialogue with the professional world*, we find ourselves having to invest in the promotion of *significant transformations* (Mezirow, 2000) of our beliefs, frameworks of reference and values with respect to university teaching, characterized predominantly by lecturing.

Most of the results of our research indicate that many instructors, based on the students' opinions, should actively share programs and teaching proposals with them, encouraging discussion on experiences and personal knowledge and taking into account the requests and interests of the students themselves.

The first area surveyed – related to *course organisation* – refers to the presentation and sharing of teaching content and goals (α = .801). In this context, we wanted to study certain aspects by asking students how their instructors presented teaching, if they made reference to the order in which they explained the contents of the program, to connections with other content, justifying the choice of the texts adopted. We then pushed as far as asking the students if some of their instructors had taken their requests into consideration during the presentation of the course and modified parts of the program taking into account their needs and clearly explaining the learning outputs.

In this first area (Figure 1) we wanted to explore some principles of *Learner-Centered Teaching* and in particular the function of content (Spalding, 2014; Weimar, 2013), the creation of a collaborative climate for learning and the building of trustful relationships between teacher and student (Brockett, 2015; Dirkx, 2006; Spalding, 2014; Taylor, 2007).

The data collected allows us to highlight the percentage of students who, in reference to each item, indicated that more than 50% of instructors they met adopted a certain behavior. The data reveals that only just over 20% of respondents reported that their instructors (more than 50% as anticipated) discussed possible additions to the program, and here it is interesting to highlight that, from the comparison between degree categories, it is the scientific area that offers limited discussion opportunities (the students of humanistic, sociological-legal and medical areas are around 24-25%, while those of the scientific area do not exceed 20%). Only just over 10% of students refer to modifications of the program, by instructors, based on needs expressed by students, a percentage that is common, with negligible differences, to all degree categories. From this perspective, we are far from the creation of a participatory teaching and *learner-centered* environment.

Figure 1 – Course organisation
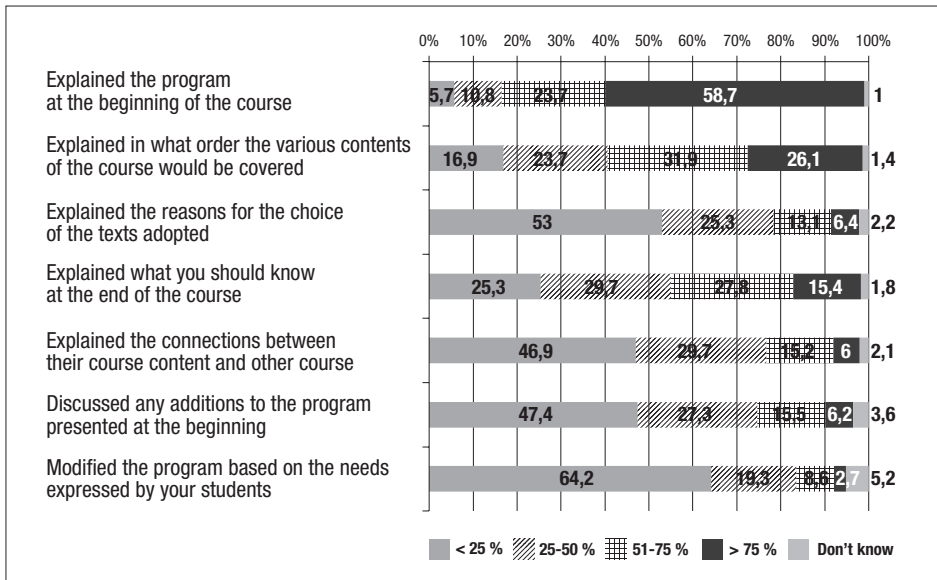
The second area (Figure 2) is related to the *creation of a participatory environment* (α = .799), achievable through interaction and sharing, by encouraging students to ask questions, discuss and reflect on their experiences and prior knowledge about the subjects discussed. This dimension could emerge if students and instructors invest in those relationships that Cranton (2006) defines *authentic*: "to be authentic and develop authentic relationships, it is important that instructors not contradict their values or their philosophy to teach in this respect" (p. 9) and Taylor (2007): "through trustful relationships that allow individuals to have questioning discussions, share information openly and achieve mutual and consensual understanding" (p. 179). Many instructors know how important it is to pay attention to context and everything that can affect learning, considering pedagogical, psychological and social factors. One of the most important moments is surely the first contact, usually the first meeting (Brockett, 2015), our business card that lays the foundation for the building of authentic relationships and collaboration. Trust, empathy, enthusiasm, passion, respect and humility are just some of the features that instructors should demonstrate that they have in teaching. Dirkx (2008) argues that in all learning contexts in which adults are involved, from the classroom to online, from formal to informal, from internships to placement, teaching is strongly rooted in complex and diverse relationships between teacher and student.

Figure 2 – Creation of a participatory environment
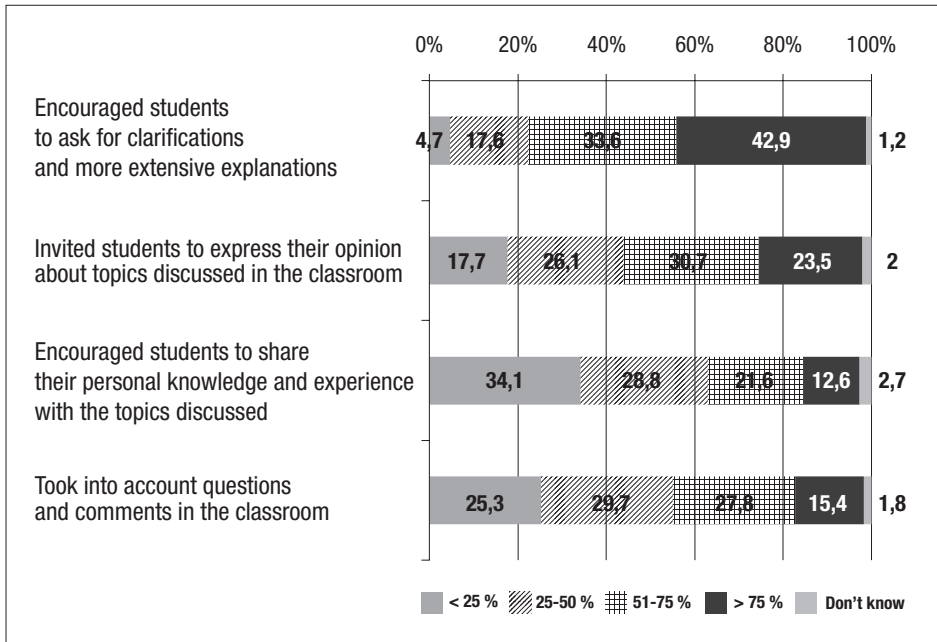
In this area we asked students how many of their instructors had encouraged them to ask questions for clarification and analysis, invited them to express their views, taking into account the personal experiences of the students themselves; and lastly, we also wanted to investigate whether the instructors had taken into account the questions and comments resulting from their teaching. Again with reference to more than 50% of instructors encountered by the respondents, about 40% of the students say that their instructors took into account questions and comments in the classroom and about 35% say that they encouraged them to share personal knowledge and experience related to the subjects discussed. In this regard, it is interesting to highlight a difference between the sociological-legal area, humanities and multi-category degrees on the one hand, where the percentage is around 37%, with a 42% for the humanities, and scientific and medical areas on the other hand, where the percentage of students is below 30%.

In this case as well, we can say that the partnership between students and instructors, from the perspective of students, is still weak. There emerges a strong image of rigid *content-centered* teaching (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001; Weimer, 2013) with programs and content defined in advance by the teacher. Content and not people seem to be at the center of the teaching process.

The third area (Figure 3) of the questionnaire relates to teaching methods and we called it *methods and resources for teaching and learning* (α =.756), considering that "if we restrict the semantic area of the methodological discourse to its most specific reference, we must say that the methodology is essentially reflection on methods" (Di Nubila, 2005, p. 17). Teaching methodology is configured as a set of resources: the methods, techniques and strategies, which instructors use in their teaching. In this case, we asked the students how many of their instructors proposed group or individual activities during and outside of classes, what kind of resources they used in the classroom to teach the subjects discussed – slides, articles, manuals – explaining and justifying their use. We also asked how many instructors have proposed that students give lessons and in what way they adapted the course content to the skills of the class, in the direction of personalized teaching. The data shows little inclination on the part of instructors to propose group or individual activities in the form of exercises in or out of class and only 20% of the students made reference to it. They are clearly anchored in lecturing, which is the main teaching mode for the majority of teaching hours. However, we note how, starting from the comparison between degree categories, lessons are integrated with examples taken from the instructors' research experiences. This applies in particular to the medical area, where 70% of the students made reference to this, compared to a percentage between 30% and 40% for the humanities, sociological-legal and scientific areas.

Figure 3 – Methods and resources for teaching and learning
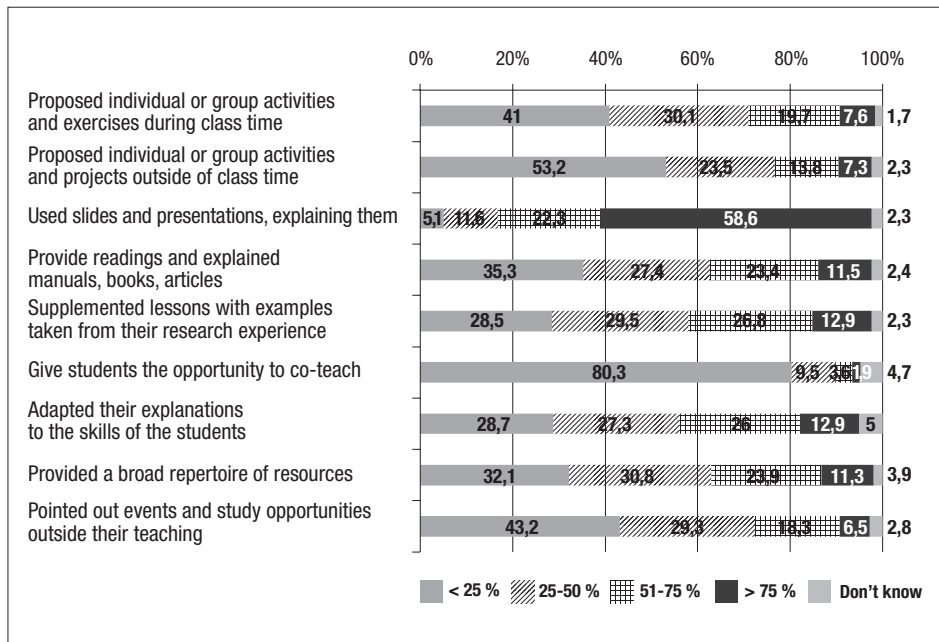
Furthermore, we asked students if some instructors gave them the opportunity to co-teach; we found that less than 6% of students responded positively, with reference to more than 50% of instructors. Finally, when we asked if instructors personalized their teaching based on the students' skills, the positive feedback from the students was around 40%, with a slight advantage of the medical and scientific degree categories over the others.

The methodological dimension may seem obvious, given that many of us have been doing this job for a lifetime. As Brockett (2015) says: "Sounds simple right? And it can be simple… except that you have to understand how and why to select certain techniques for different purposes" (p. 69). Selecting, deciding, proposing, developing, creating, designing and implementing are all activities that require a methodological and critical reflection on the content and teaching strategies. In this context, Coryell (2016) says:

> activities that help individuals to conceptualize and assimilate new information in their previous knowledge schema are particularly connected with the needs of analytic learners. These activities help students to identify new ideas, concepts, theories, vocabulary, and data while expanding understandings about this new knowledge. Learning activities that provide opportunities to experiment and practice new knowledge are particularly useful to our common sense of learning (pp. 151-152).

The discussion becomes difficult, then, if training for instructors is not promoted, with the aim of growing and developing skills in this scientific field. A study that we conducted (Fedeli, Serbati, & Taylor, 2016; Fedeli & Taylor, 2016) finds that, in Italy, *faculty development* initiatives are very few, autonomous and not formalized, so one is confronted with sporadic initiatives, scattered throughout the country that do not interact with each other and are often promoted thanks to the enthusiasm and good will of instructors who have an interest in methodological innovation. Some attempts have been made, also thanks to the data collected by the questionnaire of the *Employability and Competences* project and, in this direction, innovative teaching, approaches, methods, and paths may be explored to promote faculty development strategies in Italy.

3.4 Fostering Feedback and Assessment for Learning

With reference to the fourth area of the questionnaire, dedicated to *Feedback and assessment*, it is essential to highlight how, for several decades, international educational research has stressed the importance of assessment as a determining variable for the improvement of educational processes (Boud, 1988; Brookhart, 1997; Gibbs, 1999; Miller & Parlett, 1974; Snyder, 1971). Even at the European political level, it is affirmed that "learning and teaching in HE can be significantly enhanced through transforming assessment policy and practice" (The Higher Education Academy, 2015, p. 2). On the other hand, the Bologna Process called attention to the need, within the European academic training, in parallel with a restructuring of strategies and teaching/ learning methods, for a review of *assessment*, in order to ensure students a more participatory role. While the issue of assessment is considered, from an international perspective, "an issue of real urgency" (Brown, 2013, p. ix) in relation to the modernisation of the university system, in Italy assessment generally continues to be tied solely to the end of course examination, managed entirely by the teacher and often implemented as a due and traditional "rite of closure" of the course itself, with characteristics that hark back to a function mainly or exclusively of measurement and certification.

Unlike in Italy, at the international academic level and, in particular, in English-speaking countries, in recent decades the assessment process, in line with teaching and learning processes, has undergone profound changes, aimed at experimenting or implementing several recent educational research developments. In particular, these processes have enshrined that "centrality of the learner" that is a key focus of the *Student Voice* pedagogical movement (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2012). Consistent with this perspective, many authors stress the need for assessment, aligned to, and integrated with the teaching/learning process, to take approaches more focused on the students (Pereira, Flores, & Niklassone, 2015), suitable to ensure them a more active and participatory placement, right from the planning stages of assessment activities. Actually, as reported by Falchikov (2005), since the 1950s and increasingly since the 1990s, research has highlighted the many and varied benefits of the active involvement of students in assessment processes. Various studies have revealed a deeper collaboration between students and instructors, improvements in cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, personal and intellectual development and increased social and emotional skills. Moreover, *learner-centered* assessment would contribute to forming useful skills in contexts of *real life* and in future personal and professional life (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999; Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin, 2014).

Figure 4 – Feedback and assessment
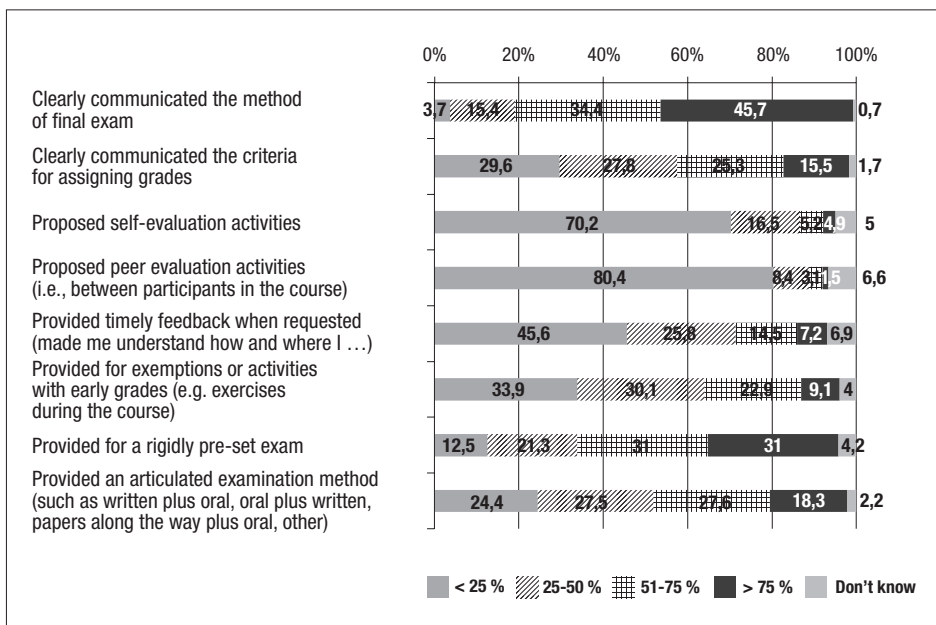
In this context, in English-speaking countries, the *Assessment for Learning* (AFL) perspective (Gipps, 1994; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003) has been promoted by several authors and specifically implemented in higher education contexts (Sambell, McDowell, & Montgomery, 2013); a perspective that aims precisely to emphasize the active and co-responsible role of university students, fully involving them in assessment processes aimed at supporting learning (Sambell & McDowell, 1998; McDowell, Sambell, Bazin, Penlington, & Wakelin, 2005). The principles of the AFL framework emphasize several key elements and imply the use of specific educational tools and strategies. A first key element is the *active positioning* of students during teaching/learning and assessment activities; a second element is the *development of autonomy* and the consequent ability to choose in the educational and assessment path; a third element is *testing personal responsibility in the use of assessment practices and tools* by students. Among the most effective tools and strategies for promoting assessment processes from an AFL point of view are: a) *feedback* promoted both formally and informally, as a stream of information that is triggered in open contexts of criticism and dialogue and b) activities of *self* – and *peer-review* and *assessment*.

Using this theoretical framework to analyze the data obtained from *Emp&Co.* research and focusing precisely on the fourth area dedicated to

feedback and assessment (α = .678), and in particular to questions related to assessment processes, it is evident how such an area represents a particularly critical space of university training (Figure 4). The data confirms an Italian situation in which assessment is still a practice managed almost entirely by the teacher and carried out according to a "traditional" model, as opposed to an "alternative" or "participatory" one (Brew, Riley, & Walta, 2009). Again with reference to the behavior of over 50% of instructors encountered by the respondents, it first emerges that, in fact, more than 60% of students stated that the examination method is determined by the teacher and rigidly fixed, and more than 30% of respondents found flexibility in assessment methods – exemptions from the end of course exam or early grading activities.

It should also be noted that, although the communication of *examination methods* and *assessment criteria* were considered "good practices" – respectively more than 80% and over 40% of the respondents reported that instructors clearly state examination methods and assessment criteria – and even encouraged by the policies of many Italian universities, at the same time the methods with which these practices are implemented leave little decision space to the students who, in most cases, are little involved in the processes of negotiation and co-construction of these aspects that constitute the assessment.

Finally, focusing on the tools and strategies presented above as more effective for promoting assessment processes from an AFL point of view – feedback, self – and peer-assessment – the research reveals a particularly critical framework. Just over 20% of the respondents said that instructors provide timely feedback (even) when requested. Moreover, among the learning assessment methods implemented in Italian universities, self – and peer-assessment are almost totally absent. The aggregation by degree categories reveals how this criticality is common to all of them, from medical to sociological-legal and from scientific to humanities, in equal measure.

3.5 Fostering Work-Related Teaching and Learning Methods

The fifth and final area of the questionnaire (Figure 5), dedicated to teaching and dialogue with the professional world in agreement with the theoretical framework of *work-related learning* and *university-business dialogue* (α = .837), seems to show, based on the opinions of the students, a university far from the professional world and organisations. Again with reference to the behavior of more than 50% of instructors encountered during their studies, just under 30% of the students reported that their instructors explained the connections between the subject matter and the professions connected to the

Figure 5 – Work-Related Learning and University-Business Dialogue
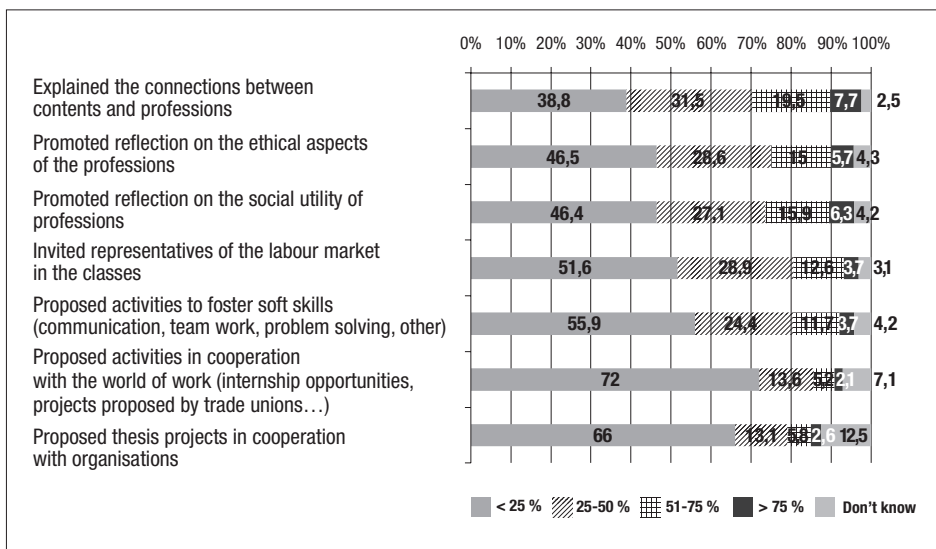
course of study. In response to the item related to reflection on the ethical aspects of the profession and its social utility, this percentage was around 20%. Consistent with the literature explored and related to international studies and experiences on WRL, the direct connections between universities and organisations were surveyed.

A significant objective of the work-related activities is the strengthening of students' soft skills, the same expressly required by organisations seeking competent communicators, able to work in teams, think critically and take the initiative in solving problems (Harvey, Moon, & Geall, 1997; Subramaniam & Freudenberg, 2007). According to the experience of the students, how many instructors offer activities for the development of soft skills? Only 16% report involvement in activities for this purpose. The percentage indicated by the students falls further in relation to the items most directly related to *university-business dialogue* (Frison, 2015). As emphasized in the Commission document *A new partnership for the modernisation of universities: the EU Forum for University-Business Dialogue*, "universities should involve entrepreneurs and business men in entrepreneurship education, for example through participation of important figures of the business world in teaching activities as invited professors" (Commission of the European Communities, 2009 p. 5). The items based on an analysis of the European documents in support of a *cross-fertilization* between universities and organisations (European Commission, 2006) refer precisely to the invitation of company speakers during school

hours, to the offer of activities in direct cooperation with the professional world or to the proposal of thesis projects once again in collaboration with the organisations. If the percentage of students that refers to over 50% of instructors who received representatives of the professional world in the classroom is around 16%, it drops dramatically to around 7% if referring to direct cooperation between universities and organisations.

It is interesting to note that the descriptive analysis reveals a widespread homogeneity between the different disciplinary macro-areas, confirming the perception, by students belonging to all degree categories, of a university disconnected from the professional world. The aggregation by degree categories seems to contradict the data that the literature highlights with regard to greater closeness to the organisational world by the scientific-technological area, indicated as more accustomed, compared to the humanities, to form relationships with business (Gillet & Tremblay, 2011). The data analysis shows that the promotion of soft skills is the only element for which there is a difference between the sociological-legal, humanities and science areas compared to medical, which is the least represented. The scientific, medical and multi-category areas are rather more represented than the humanities and sociological-legal as regards the explanation of the connections between the content of the courses and the professions related to the course of study.

3.6 Towards a Change of Teaching and Learning Methods in Higher Education

The open question for educators and trainers remains the following: how to innovate their teaching? What methods to use to involve and generate learning? How to acquire teaching skills? In Italy and internationally, many instructors start teaching without any experience. Very often we find university professors with a strong grounding in their field of study, but not in teaching. Some of the skills they have acquired are based on experience accumulated over the years and with different groups of students. We also remember the first time we entered the classroom with a trembling voice and that feeling of failure that accompanied us for a certain period at the beginning of our career.

Even methods and techniques are innovated, so it can't be said that someone who taught well twenty years ago still does. Teaching, as a science, has evolved and continues to evolve and requires continuous updating and a search for new resources for teaching in the classroom, outside the classroom and online.

Contexts have changed and with them the methods and techniques that are

our tools of the trade for organizing and delivering content. Selecting the right technique for organizing a subject area and pursuing the proposed objective is a complex operation that requires taking certain factors into account such as: the setting, the number of participants, the instrumentation and the time available, the learning objective, the result to be achieved as a learning-outcome and so much more with respect to the entire teaching plan that can influence the organisation of teaching (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

To respond to the need to innovate, modernize and keep up with the times, in this paper proposes, supported by solid research findings, approaches such as *Personalized Learning* (e.g., Hartley, 2003, 2007; Shaikh & Khoja, 2012; Waldeck, 2007) and the participatory approach (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001), to encourage a change of perspective in teaching, which focuses on the learner and not the content to be learned (Weimer, 2013). This new paradigm marks the entry into an era of rapid changes, precise requirements in terms of training, the necessity of involvement, needs to increase motivation and ever more complex demands from the professional world.

At this point, how can one propose participatory methods and techniques? By seeking to *educate* and *self-educate*, first of all on those aspects that relate to the areas described above and *experimenting* with students, making them more and more protagonists both of the choices made and the learning process, from "*Sage on the Stage*" to "*Guide on the Side*" (Morrison, 2014), bringing into the classroom authentic research materials and real problems to which our content can provide answers or offer paths for finding them, stimulating critical thinking and creative solutions, physical movements, even in classroom spaces or virtual ones, using materials to attract attention that are visually attractive, constructed together and presented with simulations that reproduce real life and work contexts. And as regards work-related learning, what are the best ways to promote it? What methodological guidance can be offered to the teaching staff to welcome it into their classrooms?

At the opening of the chapter, we showed how work-related learning is recognized in the literature as *experiential* (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999) *situated* and *contextualized* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), starting from its emphasis on active students, protagonist of their own process as learner, experimenter and manipulator of situations as anchored as possible to real problems and contexts. So, how is it possible to encourage this connection between theoretical content and "real" contexts in everyday life? Between theory and practical problems related to the professional world? Starting from the proposed literature and stimuli that the data collected provide us, we try to articulate several "methodological principles" to support work-related educational strategies.

First of all, the proposal of homework characterized by a dimension of concreteness and "reality"; developed, for example, by an organisation that

defines it starting from its real problems and that can be authentically interested in taking a look at the students' work (Frison, Tino, Tyner, & Fedeli, 2016). "Homework" thus becomes an opportunity to connect with the professional context, encouraging the direct involvement of organisations that can get new inputs from the students' activities.

This first strategy focuses attention on a second crucial element for work-related education: partnership. It is fundamental to create partnerships with organisations, partnerships that are often informal and exclusively related to personal relationships with individual instructors (Frison, 2015; Gillet & Tremblay, 2011). Formalizing partnerships requires particular attention to the learning objectives and learning outcomes that the teacher and organisation expect to pursue together, each from their own perspective. For the organisation, this means having a clear idea of its role as well as the learning objectives to be supported; at the same time, for the instructors this means enhance their role of facilitator and guide, in support of both students and the organisation, in order to encourage active participation and real involvement. Without a clear "contract" which defines tasks and responsibilities of the three implicated subjects – university/instructors, students, and organisations – the WR activities risk to fail without achieving formative objectives, neither for the academic side, nor for the organisation (Frison, Fedeli, & Taylor, 2015).

At this point, a third, equally important element concerns the student. Interacting with a real customer amplifies the engagement of students in work-related activities. In this regard, a crucial aspect of work-related strategies is reflection, but also support. Students have to be supported and encouraged by both parties involved, the university and organisation. Therefore, every work-related activity must offer time and space of support, a sort of "help" service which welcomes administrative and organisational problems, offering a "learning guide" to the students to deal with critical situations. Reflective spaces and tools, monitoring meeting, and peer-tutoring meetings have this aim (Frison, Fedeli, & Taylor, 2015). In the end, assessment and integration are two crucial aspects of WR strategies, and they must be considered within the curricula. These dimensions open to new questions: how can I assess WR experiences? Who assesses them? The university or the organisation? Both? Actually, WRL asked the university for new assessment strategies more oriented to assess skills and competencies rather than knowledge (Frison, Fedeli, & Taylor, 2015).

Our field experience as instructors and as researchers in this scientific field allowed us to look at the problem in a comprehensive way and especially through an international comparison, stimulated by new ideas that we could summarize in several passages that relate to the university teacher, guide and facilitator, called to share, with colleagues or experts, the doubts, critical issues and problems that arise during teaching, trying to *de-privatize* (Adams & Mix,

2014) their didactic offering, sharing many of the critical issues and looking for solutions together. These elements trace the reference points for future actions on a path that still deserves to be supported and tested for identifying an "Italian way" of educational innovation rooted in our contexts, and in our institutions.

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Supporting Situated Learning in Higher Education Internships

Claudio Melacarne, Barbara Barbieri, Stefano Bonometti,
Giordana Szpunar*

4.1 Situated Learning and Employability

In recent years, university teaching has been called upon to respond to numerous invitations: the new targets involved in higher education, the invitation to internationalize study courses, the call to work on the acquisition by students of soft skills and, not least in terms of importance, the need to adopt teaching strategies that can increase dialogue and cooperation between formal knowledge and professional knowledge, in person and online. University education is thus urged, with increasing force, to configure itself as an "expanded" place capable of integrating teaching methods and techniques that support students' learning process beyond the classroom and the physical spaces of the university.

For example, many studies suggest that it is no longer enough to train students by transmitting organised knowledge. The importance of socializing new generations to established cultural or scientific knowledge is not in discussion. Timeless, general and universal knowledge is accompanied by the need to also examine knowledge generated in particular local situations linked to temporal events.

Several studies have highlighted four general types of discontinuity between academic learning and the nature of cognitive activity outside universities, schools and formal educational contexts in general. These contributions can help identify some aspects of the concept of knowledge that universities still share, for example, also with good part of the school system (Bertagna, 2006).

Universities focus on individual performance, while outside mental work is often shared socially. Universities aim to encourage thinking without support, while mental work in everyday life usually includes cognitive tools. University

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* Claudio Melacarne drafted paragraphs 4.1., 4.2., 4.3., 4.3.1., 4.3.2., 4.4., 4.5. Barbara Barbieri drafted paragraphs 4.6.1., 4.6.4., 4.6.5. Stefano Bonometti drafted paragraphs 4.7., 4.7.1, 4.7.2., 4.7.3., 4.7.3., 4.7.4. Giordana Szpunar drafted paragraphs 4.6.2., 4.6.3.

courses often cultivate only symbolic thought, while daily mental activity is directly involved with objects and situations. Finally, there is a tendency, even in higher education, to teach skills and general knowledge, while outside specific skills for a particular situation dominate (Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991).

As the research presented in this book shows, in Italian universities the dominant form of learning is individual and students are judged for what they do for themselves. The main part of the activity is constructed on individual work: home study and individual interventions in the classroom. Many activities outside the university are, generally, shared socially; in the same way, work always takes place within social systems, and the ability of each person depends very much on what others are doing. At university, the greatest merit is directed at activities of "pure thought", what individuals are able to do without the external support of books and notes, calculators or other complex tools. Universities, like schools, tend to value independent thought, without the use of material and cognitive tools. In contrast, most outside mental activities are intimately connected with tools, and the emerging cognitive activity is formed and dependent on the type of tools available. In the professional world, thinking is connected to the material world. University learning is essentially based on symbols with the risk that connections with events and objects may be lost. Finally, the university is mainly anchored to the objective of teaching skills and general, widely usable, theoretical principles. Generality and transferability are the added values of a higher education and, to be competent in the professional world, people must develop appropriate forms of knowledge adequate to the situation.

Therefore, a broad range of data leads one to think that what people do at the university is difficult to transfer to external practical contexts and suggests that both the structure of knowledge and the social conditions of practical activity may differ more from what is achieved through formal education than previously thought (Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991, p. 69).

What do these differences suggest about the relationship between universities and competence in work and daily life? At least two considerations: on one hand, the need to discuss possible strategies for containing and reducing what many studies define as "the encapsulation of scholastic learning," i.e., the problem of forming "academically" excellent students that, however, are unable to transfer what they have learned at the university into daily practice. On the other, the opportunity to appreciate practice as a combination of knowledge and actions and to pose the problem of learning the knowledge contained in actions. In the first case we are faced with a problem of transforming university teaching. In the second, that of supporting and designing curricula or settings in which students can "learn from experience" or "learn by doing".

4.2 Supporting Situated Learning in Internship Experiences

Regardless of the theoretical options in play, the university has to answer several questions. How does one learn a profession in the current cultural and social climate? What knowledge does a professional called to interact with existing work scenarios need? How to form a professional who will have to change jobs many times? How does to re-design learning paths that allow the acquisition of skills useful for insertion into multiple and uncertain professional worlds? The link between universities and professional world, in addition to calling into question the relationship of meeting/exchange between these two universes, also requires consideration of the relationship of the university itself with work.

The problem that has raised and fueled the survey set out below arises from the realization that training professionals capable of living in new work scenarios is a commitment that challenges us as university teachers and decision makers within university governance systems. Managing and organizing effective internship experiences can be a first effective response to the new needs of businesses and students, who are often involved in potentially promising activities with a little attention to the monitoring and support processes implemented by universities.

This paper addresses several critical issues relating to the organisation of internships in university education, dealing in particular with "curricular" internships, i.e., those apprenticeship experiences inserted as mandatory in university study paths. Not surprisingly, the increasingly widespread instances of innovation in university teaching testify to the crisis of a teaching model centered mainly on lessons and on the idea that meaningful knowledge must be conveyed by the teacher. In other words, teaching based only on the symbolic mediators, where one speaks and the others listen, that lacks the active participation of students in knowledge construction processes, where research is not a widespread educational tool. Today more than ever, professionals are required, above all, to be problem solvers, to produce that situated knowledge useful for acting in certain contexts.

Within this new framework, internships increasingly are:

– An educational opportunity, thanks to the possibilities offered to everyone to study and interact with work practices and attempt to situate the knowledge gained in university studies.
– An opportunity to learn practical knowledge. Through internships, knowledge and learning should be situated in a context of real experience.

– An opportunity for socialization and participatory knowledge of the working realities.
– An active orientation tool, as they allow direct knowledge and experience in a work context and thus help students make future career choices.

Today, it is an integral part of various courses of study to be carried out with the support and accompaniment of a tutor. Beyond a general appreciation for internships, we are coming to terms with an experience that, over time, has revealed structural problems.

4.3 How to Learn in Internships?

Internships play a key role in helping students enter current professional scenarios (Taylor & Ellis, 2012) and supporting the acquisition of real skills. Much of the knowledge that is useful for students in practicing a profession and entering the "swamp of professional practice" is, in fact, only partially obtainable in formal educational settings, in the classroom or through participation in workshops and seminars. Despite the significant renewal of university teaching through the adoption of more participatory and active approaches (Fedeli, Giampaolo, & Coryell, 2013), for example by promoting the acquisition by students of soft skills or instrumental learning, practical knowledge remains embodied in the professional community and only through special training devices can become a resource for people and communities (Wenger, 1998; Fabbri, 2007).

It is from this perspective that internships included in university curricula have been considered the most promising placement tools for meeting the supply and demand of work, for supporting the development of professional identity and acquire tools useful for solving business problems (Billett et al., 2008).

How to give students the ability to confront and solve problems similar to those they will encounter in life and the workplace? How to accompany students entering professional communities that are not "naturally" configured as learning contexts?

From an analysis of national and international literature, there are two paradigms that have laid the first foundations for envisaging an updated interpretation of how students learn during the internship experience. The first has its roots in studies of learning as a social phenomenon. The second comes from research fields more careful to emphasize the critical-emancipatory dimensions of learning processes.

4.3.1 Situated Learning. The Internship as Legitimate and Peripheral Experience af Participation

In empirical research conducted in collaboration with E. Wenger, Lave (1991) describes some practices of everyday life of several groups and individuals with the intent of highlighting how learning is not only a process of participation, but also calls into question social aspects and restrictions imposed by the community. For example, he describes how young Maya girls often have a "midwife" parent who introduces her to the expert practice necessary for performing this task. Some women become midwives by participating in the practices of "experts", mothers or grandmothers, observing and implicitly learning what to do during childbirth, the remedies and cures to provide in case of illness, the expectations of the new born's parents, the social scripts that legitimize this practice, the nursing practices for new borns that are the responsibility of the community or caregivers. In this sense, we are using the term "situated learning" to go beyond the definition of "learning by doing", of natural learning. Lave uses this construct to reveal that the ways of thinking about and solving problems and the use of complex forms of abstraction are linked to the specific environment in which individuals live and are connected to the particular context conditions in which they occur and are realized. It is not possible to become midwives in the Mayan communities analyzed by Lave without legitimization by the community and without the support of an expert. Learning is synonymous with participation in practices in which it is possible to learn by observing how more expert persons perform a task, in contexts that ensure both a relationship and the possibility of gradually participating in the experience. In this perspective, learning a business, acquiring a skill, developing abilities, involve a process of participation, of becoming a member of a community. This means that learning is situated in the area of social interaction, in life contexts. The use of the situated learning construct thus does not seem to be able to be extended to all experiences, as it implies a gradual insertion into a practice characterizing a community that, in turn, depends on the availability of the community itself to facilitate access through legitimization. The most important contribution of this focus has been to have highlighted how learning is a process connected to social conditions of accessibility to knowledge embodied in practice.

More recently, the construct of "situated learning" has also been associated with the term "apprenticeship", used as a metaphor for describing learning processes that do not necessarily take place in work contexts, but in different social contexts, from the family to the peer group and from schools to non-profit organisations (Pontecorvo, Ajello, & Zucchermaglio, 1995).

The apprenticeship is an important emerging construct, because it has

emphasized that it is not enough "to participate in an experience to learn". Social and environmental factors come into play that can hinder or support the entry and participation of a novice into a community. For example, Wenger and Lave identify at least three success factors for participation to generate learning in an organisational context:

– A member of the community must legitimate the novice to take part in "non-trivial" practices.
– A member of the community must take responsibility for supporting (explaining, illustrating, describing) the practices in which the novice is participating.
– The learning trajectory must be organised starting from simple tasks to increasingly complex engagements.

Apprenticeship can be described as a particular form of participation in the life of a community that can also be configured as an opportunity for learning a) if the novice can legitimately take part in those significant work practices that are central to, and characterizing of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1990; Wenger, 1998); b) if the novice is supervised by an expert (Rogoff, 1990); c) and if the novice is put in the condition of gradually entering into the complexity of the experience and, above all, can find training spaces to reflect on the work practice (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Fabbri, 2007). Apprenticeship is that particular form of participation through which a novice learns a profession by observing and taking part in an activity managed by one or more experts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These studies suggest that we look at internship not so much as an application experience.

Internship as an experience that takes place in a work context, is not necessarily an experience for professional growth. The problem is not only that of not making our students experience insignificant forms of participation (making photocopies, dealing with administrative matters, handling routines with low innovative value), but providing tools for studying work practices, for becoming increasingly central in organisational routines, for intercepting the most promising paths within the organisations that host them.

Inside the apprenticeship metaphor, internship becomes an experience organised by someone (the university) to allow students to experience a situation that ensures legitimate and peripheral participation. Internship is an opportunity for students to pass from the status of novice to that of a semi-expert, through involvement in increasingly complex work practices and a educational tutorship (Bellingreri, 2015). However, no student can be left alone in the organisation of this experience of entry, residence and exit to and from organisations, and certainly not if this experience is part of an educational offering of a university course.

4.3.2 Reflective Learning. The Internship as an Opportunity to Validate Thinking

The reflective approach, albeit starting from different theoretical and empirical studies, shares some basic assumptions with the participatory approach: learning is a form of participation, is a social phenomenon and is formed by routines or patterns/perspectives of meaning. However, the adoption of a reflective approach to the study of work practices, educational practices or training intervention methodologies introduces a further distinction. It is not only participating in a legitimate and peripheral way that makes an experience a learning opportunity, but it is the opportunity for the person to reflect on the experience afterwards that makes the experience a potential learning opportunity. The reflective approach, especially in its critical-emancipatory declination, shifts the focus from "experiencing" to "reflecting on it afterwards".

It is by reflecting afterwards that it is possible to become aware and learn to understand how we acted, why and with respect to which of our convictions (Mezirow, 1991). The literature provides many suggestions and indications useful for promoting reflective learning. Three seem particularly interesting:

– Constructing settings capable of ensuring a positive dialectic.
– Adjusting the commitment required from people to the limits of the context, the organisation or the professional community.
– Allowing wider reflection on the experience, which includes the emotional reprocessing of the experience (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

In the light of these considerations, internships become an experience organised by someone (the university) on which to design afterwards reflective activities useful for students to validate their epistemic, socio-linguistic and psychological perspectives: What did I think on that particular occasion? Why did I express that opinion? With respect to which personal convictions did I act? How did I feel? What sources did I use to form that idea?

Studies dealing with reflective practices suggest paying particular attention to both support aimed at facilitating the gradual participation of students in internship experiences and educational supervision aimed at the acquisition, by students, of perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, personal, open and emotionally available to change and reflection (Mezirow, 1991). Also, and especially in this case, no university student can autonomously succeed in passing from pre-critical to critical forms of learning solely through the internship experience. There is a need to design settings in which the experience can materialize in awareness, reflection and validated forms of thought.

4.4 The Research

One of the challenging points emerging from the literature on university internships regards how to make this experience actually useful and productive in developing one's professional identity or learning skills for managing work practices. The basic choice of the research team that conducted this survey was to start from a common theoretical background and then empirically investigate three different aspects of internship practice: the impact that this experience has in students' meaning systems and the most promising conditions for learning from this experience, the role played by "modeling" processes in the construction of one's professional identity, potential and critical issues of the adoption of online forms of tutoring as a form of support for experiential learning. In this way, the research was able to provide food for thought on the basis of empirical analysis oriented to respond to several questions emerging within the national and international debate: how are university internship experiences organised? What do students learn during these experiences? What is the influence of the learned role models in constructing students' professional identity? Is it possible to test effective forms of scaffolding using online media?

4.5 Impact and Conditions for Learning from Internships

An underlying question regarding a first phase of the research was that of producing data about the methods of managing curricular internships in four Italian universities: the universities of Padua, Florence, Siena and Naples Parthenope. The universities were chosen following the criteria of: geographical location (north, center, south); number of students; regional economic productivity; coexistence in the university of both science and humanities departments.

The questionnaire was constructed through a first analysis of the questionnaires used in the four universities selected and at La Sapienza University of Rome. We also consulted institutional documents and surveys conducted at the national and international level on the subject of assessing experiential, transformative and informal learning. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 50 items, 13 questions organised into four main areas:

1. The choice
2. Impact perceived by students

2.1 *Reflective thinking*
2.2 *Soft skills*
3. Learning paths
    3.1 *Incidental learning*
    3.2 *Organic learning*
    3.3 *Social learning*
4. Overall assessment of the experience

It was administered through the online platform, which collected 1,925 questionnaires from students of the four universities involved. The students reached by the questionnaire had done a curricular internship and had to be enrolled in the 2nd and 3rd year of any three-year undergraduate degree program and in the 2nd or last year of any teaching or single-cycle degree program.

The majority of students (about 60%) who responded say they did a curricular internship lasting from 100 to 400 hours (Table 1).

Table 1 – Range of the Internship

		Frequency	**Valid Percentage**
	From 0 to 100	351	18,2
	From 100 to 200	426	22,1
	From 200 to 300	456	23,7
	From 300 to 400	253	13,1
	From 400 to 500	87	4,5
Valid	From 500 to 600	51	2,6
	From 600 to 700	33	1,7
	From 700 to 800	45	2,3
	From 800 to 900	36	1,9
	Over 900	187	9,7
	Total	1925	100,0

Of the total respondents 74.3% were female and 25.7% male. The following are some of the survey data that emerged, anticipating that the analysis revealed, first, that final grade, degree category of the student and gender are not variables that affect the mode of response.

A first consideration concerns the ways in which students choose the place to do the internship. 84.5% of the students said that the university provided a list of possible organisations available and the students acted on that.

Table 2 – How students choose

	How did you choose the organisation where you did, or are doing, your internship? (Only one answer)	
		Valid Percent
Valid	I found the company by consulting a list that the university gave me	84.5
	I found a company without first consulting any list provided by the University	7.1
	I was placed in the company by the University	8.3
	Total	100

We then asked what influenced this choice. The responses indicate that about 60% of the students say that they were influenced by "proximity to home" rather than by "A preliminary visit to the company before you chose it". About 30% to 40% said they were influenced by other students, by a conversation with a teacher or information provided by the university.

Internships are often interpreted and constructed as one of the first experiences in which students can orient themselves, understand how the work they are thinking of doing at the end of their studies is organised and have an induced form of vocational guidance. We asked if "the internship was an experience that helped the students to understand their professional attitudes, the type of work they intend to do and what are the professional figures coming out of their course of study". About 80% of the students responded that the internship was a rather formative and orientative experience in these three dimensions. A low, but still significant percentage of the students said they did not perceive a substantial change in their understanding of the professional figures or the possible future work and especially they had an experience with low impact on understanding their own professional attitudes (Tables 3, 4, 5).

Table 3 – Internship impact

The internship was an experience that helped me understand:

My professional attitudes

Not at all	Little	Enough	Very
4,2	11,1	38,5	44,6
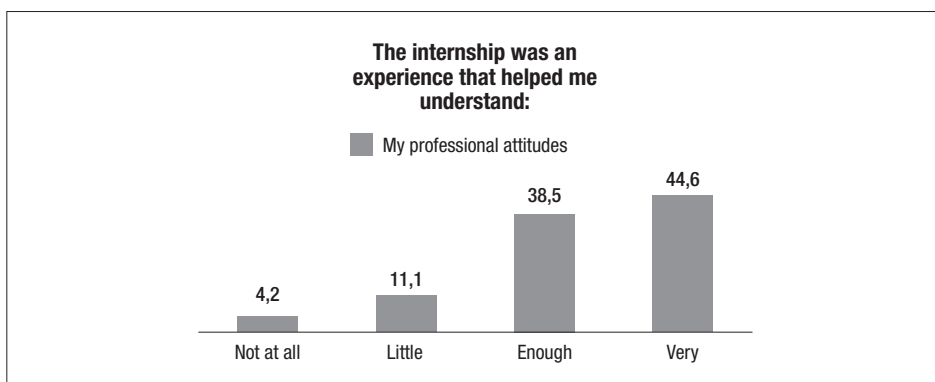
Table 4 – Internship impact

The internship was an experience that helped me understand:

■ The type of work I want to do

Not at all	Little	Enough	Very
	11,9	35,5	46,5
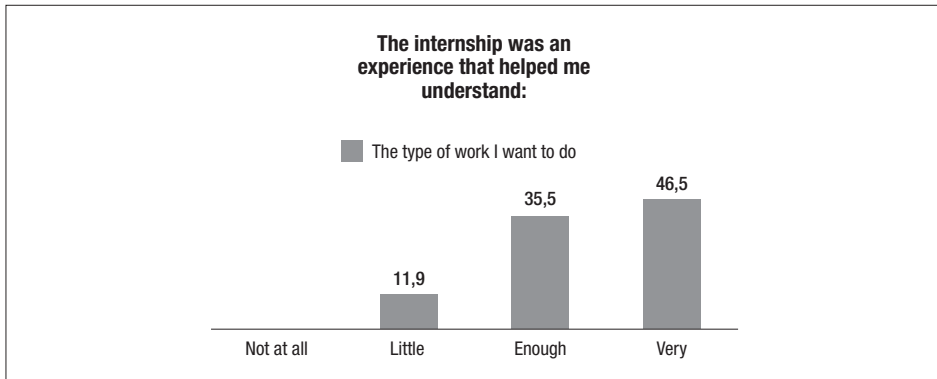
Table 5 – Internship impact

The internship was an experience that helped me understand:

■ What are the professional figures coming out of my course of study

Not at all	Little	Enough	Very
9,6	20,9	35,3	32,3
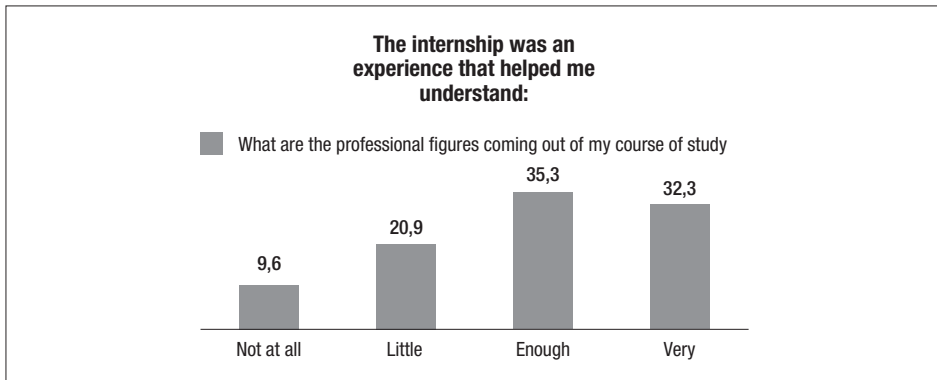
Table 6 – Internship impact

The internship was an experience that:

- Made me understand my potential
- Made me understand my limits
- Changed my way of thinking
- Changed my way of communicating
- Changed my way of of being

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45

■ Don't know   ■ Very   ■ Enough   ■ Little   ■ Not at all
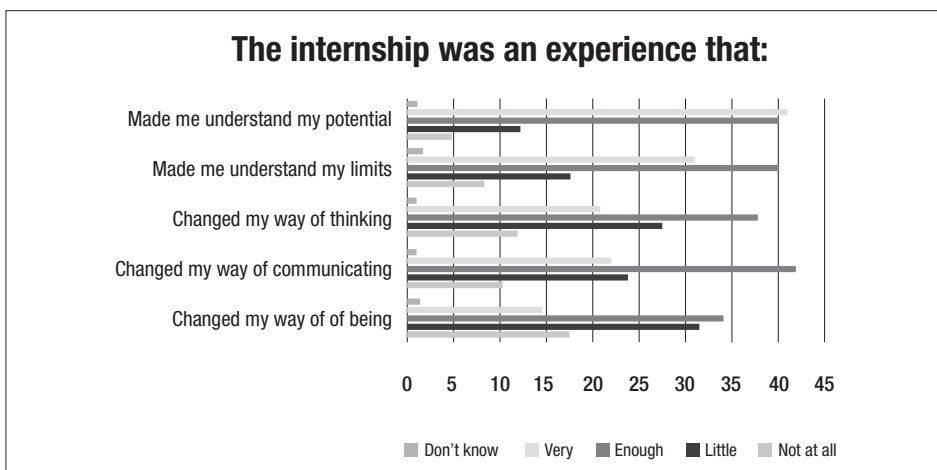
Across all courses of study, it appears that the internship experience is considered particularly important in terms of development of certain skills deemed useful for entry into the professional world. Question 18 asked if the internship was an experience that could change the system of personal meanings related to being able to understand one's limitations and potentials as well as one's ways of thinking, communicating and being.

Altogether, the responses reveal a good ability to impact these areas of competence. About 90% of students responded that the internship was an experience that made them understand their limitations and potentials (Table 6).

Question 19 was, instead, intended to determine if internships contribute to the development of some of the soft skills indicated as strategic in many European and Italian documents. The following skills were identified: teamwork, problem solving, public speaking, writing work documents (reports, summaries, assessments, etc.), independent decision-making, emotional self-control, leadership. On average, 60% to 75% of the students believe that they improved these skills through the internship experience. Only the ability to exercise leadership appears to have received an unsatisfactory change. 65% believe that, during the internship, they did not implement, or only partially implemented, this skill.

How was the internship done, which paths did the students follow during the internship?

79% of the respondents said they did the internship by initially participating in simple activities, then more and more difficult ones. However, about one-third of the students said they did not have significant support during the internship experience and that there are no standardized, clearly communicated documents or procedures on how this experience should be carried out (Table 7).

Table 7 – Internship experience

How many times did you find yourself in this situation during the internship?				
	I learned to do something by watching others do it	I was given a written procedure that explained what I should do	An expert colleague accompanied me in doing something	I was given a task and I tried to do it without any help
Never/sometimes	38.9%	83.9%	40.2%	64%
Almost always/ always	59.1%	13.3%	57.2%	32.9%

Question 19 asked if the internship helped the student grow professionally. Two experiences had a significant impact: final reflection on internship and, to

some extent, also supervision by the company tutor. The contribution from the university tutor was considered more marginal (Table 8).

Table 8 – Internship tutoring
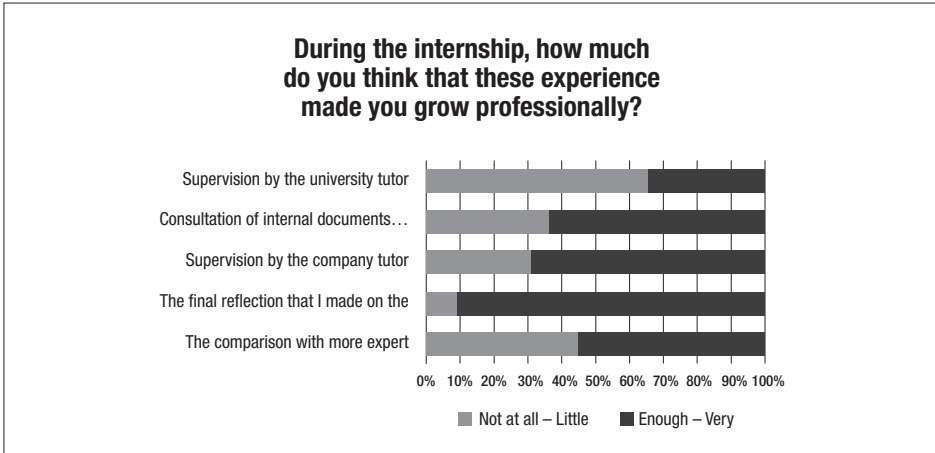
Table 9 – Internship Vs tutoring

Question 23 asked how the students behaved and what strategies they used when confronted by something totally new. 89% responded that they always or almost always used "common sense", while 40% responded that they always used or almost always thought about what they had studied in class.

Similar percentages were found when asked if they were adequately followed by the university or host company. Although the students feel that they were

followed more by the work organisations than the university, 79% would redo the internship. However, with respect to this last data, it is interesting to note that 20% of dissatisfied students is not marginal. This means that, for various reasons, about one in five students missed an important opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills (Table 9).

4.6 Forming Flexible Professionals: Role Modeling

4.6.1 Context

By now, all are assumed to agree that the significant changes characterizing social and work organisations in recent decades have led to a growing demand for professionals with great cognitive flexibility, able to continually realign their skills and update their knowledge (Bauman, 1999; Beck, 2000; Forti & Varchetta, 2001; Rullani & Vicari, 1999; Weick, 1995).

Post-modernity, characterized by the dematerialization of production processes, places individuals at the center of a *society of care* (Balbo, 1999; Demetrio, 1999) and responsibilizes them to live the organisational experience not only as a practice in itself, connected to an increase of competence, but as comprehension of the meaning of what happens to them and that they are living (Jedlowsky, 1999).

In this context, the professional is called, therefore, especially to develop a professional identity understood as "artistry" (Schön, 1987), which allows managing the indeterminacy of broad areas of professional practice.

This situation puts education in general, and the education of professions in particular, in a position of questioning its meaning and nature and radically rethinking itself. In fact, professional education, no longer has the simple goal of making the practical skill professional, by laying the foundation for the instrumental resolution of problems on systematic and scientific knowledge. Professionals must be able to reflect and act in fluid and unpredictable contexts, using their knowledge and skills in a flexible and effective way.

The current economic and social context is strongly characterized by changes related to the global crisis, the obsolescence of organisational models based on functional specialization, the precariousness of employment and market instability. These are phenomena that open the perspective on issues such as job uncertainty, change and professional and personal flexibility as new imperatives and survival conditions (Barbieri & Scaratti, 2005). There is thus an urgency to reflect on the opportunity to form professionals who are no longer exclusively provided with technical and professional skills, related to

the *know-how* of the specific profession, but above all transversal skills, linked to more situational and relational forms of knowledge (*know what*, *know where, know who*).

From a more purely educational-cultural perspective, there seems to be a need for an analysis of educational-teaching models more appropriate for the development of perspectives and schema of reference, methods and tools that can be considered more suitable in forming "reflective professionals" that can develop that "artistry" which is increasingly required for managing "fluid" workplaces.

This context led to reflection on education to share the idea that *practitioners* should benefit from situated training (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Alastra, Kaneklin & Scaratti, 2012) participating personally in the activities of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and having direct experience with the fluidity and unpredictability of work situations in a simplified and controlled professional context through a preliminary design and close supervision (Schön, 1987). This would allow acquiring the ability to transfer the knowledge learned in practice into new professional situations in a transformative (Mezirow, 1991) and reflective (Schön, 1987) perspective.

The construction of professionalism is, therefore, a very complicated operation. It involves identifying effective teaching strategies, no longer based only on a traditional model of content delivery. As we have seen, most professional behavior is learned in practical experience (Kenny, Mann, & MacLeod, 2003). Professionals construct their professional experience *on the job*, by observing and communicating with more experienced colleagues, and living out their daily work experience. Day by day, through successes and mistakes, one learns the universe of "how" (Bourdieu, 1980; Vino, 2001). And this process of role modeling begins already in the academic educational path, in teaching experiences and internships, through observation of the practices in use in that specific educational/working context and the behaviors of the experienced professionals that implement them. Yet in reflection on academic education, which even provides spaces dedicated to such encounters (e.g., internships and tutoring and mentoring services), the study and the importance of *role modeling* as a process that profoundly influences the construction of a professional identity by means of observation and reflective imitation is scant, if not actually absent.

4.6.2 Construct

The role model construct, taken up, with some adjustments, by the social cognitive theory of Bandura (1989), has been discussed and used mainly in the context of reflection on health care and medical education (Althouse, Stritter & Steiner, 1999; Benbassat, 2014; Côté & Leclère, 2000; Cruess, Cruess &

Steinert, 2008; Kenny, Mann, & MacLeod, 2003; Skeff & Mutha, 1998). Research and publications on role models that appeared in international medical education journals, numerous and recurring at least since the mid-1990s (Jochemsen-van der Leeuw et al., 2013), show that almost all students in the phase of higher education identify a role model among the people engaged in their education (professors, tutors, staff in general) (Wright, Wong, & Newill, 1997). Role models have a decisive formative impact on students because, on the one hand, they make a determining contribution to the construction of their professional attitudes and, on the other, strongly influence their career choices (Ambrozy et al., 1997; Cruess, Cruess & Steinert, 2008; Elzubeir & Rizk, 2001; Henderson et al., 1996; Paice, Heard, & Moss, 2002; Mutha, Takayama, & O'Neil, 1997; Paice, Joubert et al., 2006; Wright, 1996).

Therefore, role models, in a socio-cultural perspective (McInerney, Roche, McInerney, & Marsh, 1997) have the function of transmitting and teaching, by example, the various ways "of being" of a profession in the specific educational and work situations, thus affecting the construction of a distinct professional identity. In particular, role models are embodied by those individuals appreciated for their ways of being and acting as professionals and that teach through exemplary behavior for the most part unintentionally (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2008).

In this framework, *role modeling* can undoubtedly be considered a powerful and important educational strategy, although so far very underused (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2008; Kenny, Mann, & MacLeod, 2003).

The role modeling process (Figure 1) is configured as a real reflective dialogue with the knowledge that is used in practice. It is a critical social process of content assessment and co-construction, which invites students to interpret experience and give it meaning and significance. Reflection on observed behavior modifies (processes, creates, denies, confirms and problematizes) the schemas of meaning in use linked to the role model incorporated and, through the generalisation of conclusions, transforms the perspectives of meaning and behaviors (Mezirow, 1991).

Figure 1 – The process of role modeling from Cruess, Cruess & Steinert, 2008
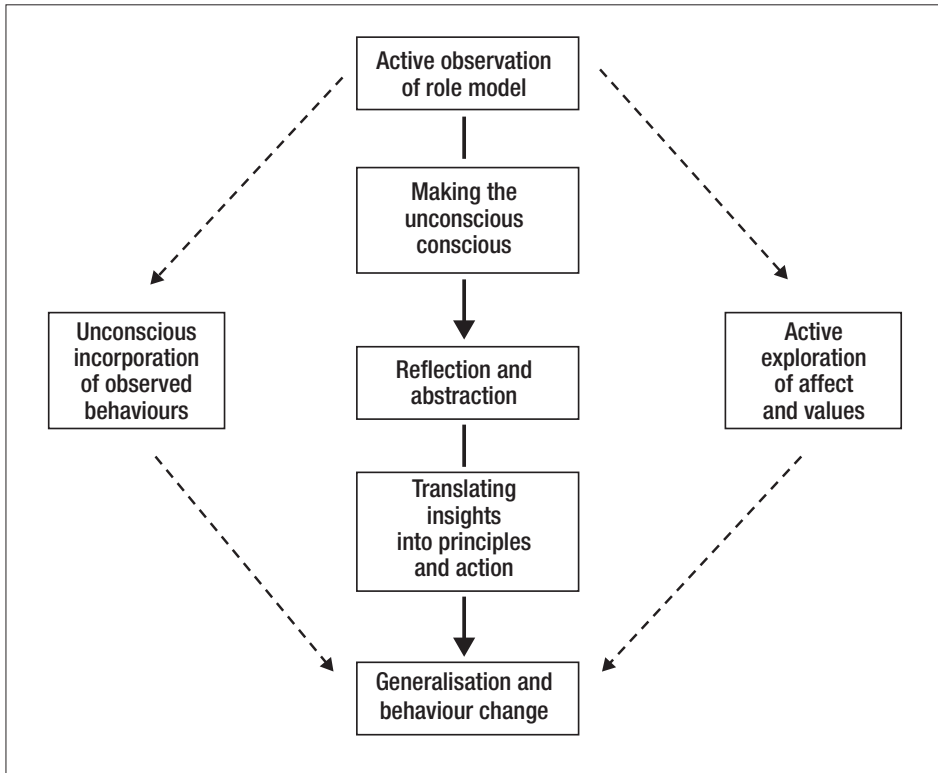
In a similar learning framework, the figure of reference for the student, whether a company or academic tutor, formal or informal, or a teacher, become a key element at least at two levels: on the one hand, it is the role model that students take as the model in the process of socialization in the professional role; on the other, it activates and guides the process of reflection and acquisition of awareness of the experience, allowing the emergence of the incorporation of the behaviors observed from the unconscious to the conscious level and facilitating the translation of insights into the principles and actions.

The ability to gain awareness of observed behaviors and reflect on them is essential for the role modeling to be effective. In fact, reflecting *in action*, *on action* and *for action* (Schön, 1987) allows future professionals to make explicit what would otherwise remain implicit (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2008) and to reinterpret and redefine their own personal, social and professional world (Brookfield, 1986). The phase of reflection on the experience lived and on observed behaviors is also a crucial moment for transforming observations into concepts through a process of generalisation (Kolb, 1984).

Learning through role models, therefore, moves around the complex

tangle of conscious and unconscious actions, by engaging in observation and reflection. It is precisely active reflection on the process that allows learners to translate unconscious assumptions into conscious thought and generalize this into principles and actions (Benbassat, 2014; Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2008).

Naturally, the influence of the model is also evident in the case of characteristics perceived as negative. In this case one speaks of negative role models that push the student to "close the doors" to some fields (Joubert et al., 2006; Mutha, Takayama, & O'Neil, 1997).

In this scenario, the function of tutorship increasingly becomes a support tool not only for the emergence and development of an attitude towards dialogue with knowledge related to action, facilitating learning processes that involve the space and openness to reflect on real practices of working life, but also to reinterpret unconscious processes of construction of one's professional identities influenced by role models encountered in the course of education.

In an academic educational context, there are at least three levels of education within which role models are able to work on professional identity. A first, more formal, explicit and intentional level regards the objectives of the particular profession and thus the educational and formative objectives of the course of study and related teachings. At this level, the modeling process performs an important function and the conduct of teachers can have a decisive effect on the professional behavior of students. This is the dimension most clearly and explicitly linked to the sphere of specific technical knowledge, within which there is an important transfer of concepts and theories that define the profession and delineate the skill profile that must be acquired for the effective practice of the profession.

A second, more informal and less intentional level is linked to the methods, unplanned and highly interpersonal, of teaching and learning. It is precisely at this level, more connected to the very essence of the profession and aspects of "knowing how to be" in situations that reveal the fundamental ethics of the profession, that the influence of role models is very powerful (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2008). At this level, all role models identified, incorporated and implemented, either by peers (fellow university students) or experienced educators (university professors, corporate and academic tutors), transmit important attitudes and values. And it is especially at this stage that one experiences many of the corrosive effects of negative role modeling.

The third, less visible level, is represented by the organisational culture and structure of the institution, the physical and symbolic place in which the formative process occurs. It is here that it is possible to promote or inhibit the modeling of an effective role. To facilitate and support the positive modeling processes, the institution must have an organisational culture oriented to the development of reflective practices, the design of spaces and times dedicated to the elaboration, by students, of the educational, didactic and experiential

activity as relevant moments in the construction of their professional and personal biographies (Salerni, Sposetti, & Szpunar, 2013; Zucc[h]ermaglio, 2007) and the "care" of interpersonal relationships (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2008). In other words, being a multidimensional instrument used in the encounter between theory and practice, the educational and formative potential of role modeling could be fostered and developed by the activation of some pedagogical models and constructs that have significant features in common with it, such as cognitive apprenticeship, situated learning and reflective practice (Kenny, Mann, & MacLeod, 2003).

For role modeling to be used as an effective teaching strategy, simultaneously reducing the risk of the influence of negative models, it is also necessary to identify figures that possess certain characteristics (Jochemsen vander-Leeuw et al., 2013; Wright, 1996). For this reason, much of the literature on role models has moved in the direction of investigating what are the key characteristics that students recognize in the models they identify in the course of their formation.

There are three categories of characteristics of the positive models recognized by students: technical and professional skills, teaching skills, personal qualities (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2008; Elzubeir & Rizk, 2001; Fromme et al., 2010; Jochemsen vander-Leeuw et al., 2013; Wright, 1996; Wright et al., 1998; Wright & Carrese 2002; Wright, Wong, & Newill, 1997).

– *Technical and professional skills*: positive models are competent specialists who have up-to-date knowledge, high diagnostic and therapeutic skills and clinical reasoning; they are compassionate, humanitarian and empathetic with patients and able to build a personal relationships and communicate effectively with them; they have respectful and positive relationships with colleagues; they assume responsibility in critical situations and are able to cope with adversity; they have a high degree of professionalism; they show enthusiasm and satisfaction with their work and their specialization.
– *Teaching skills*: positive models establish relationships with students, adapt their teaching to students' needs and allow them the autonomy to make independent decisions, creating a safe learning environment; they adopt a positive attitude towards students, are available and display enthusiasm for teaching; they stimulate critical thinking and make learning stimulating and motivating; they are aware of their role and act as active role models by encouraging students to adopt similar behaviors.
– *Personal qualities*: positive models are patient, confident and have self-esteem; they demonstrate honesty, integrity and humility; they are cooperative, easy to work with and have leadership skills.

Academic position, national and international reputation and scientific productivity are generally considered unimportant characteristics.

Some of the qualifying attributes of models recognized by students appear to be consistent with what the models themselves believe is important to model. As we have seen, role modeling is an educational strategy that is used mostly at an implicit level, however, professionals who are considered models by students seem well aware of the power of their actions. In fact, if role models are asked to assess themselves in terms of the characteristics identified by their students, enthusiasm and the ability to stimulate the interest of their students are considered to be the qualities that best describe them and that, even if unintentionally, decisively influence their students' professional choices. At the same time, role models themselves consider excellent clinical reasoning capacity as the most important feature to model for students, albeit not assessing themselves as optimal in this dimension (Ambrozy et al., 1997).

4.6.3 Role Modeling in the Formation of Socio-Cultural Educators: a Qualitative Research

In the scenario described, educational professions, and particularly the figure of the socio-cultural educator, already considered to be among the so-called "weak professions", even more than other professions, given that its structural configuration is constantly being defined, have the characteristics of vagueness, uncertainty, flexibility and fluidity outlined just above. In fact, changes in the labour market, family organisation and the socio-cultural context in recent decades have created new educational needs and thus new objectives, a multiplication of areas of intervention and subjects on which to intervene and a more complex articulation of professional networks within which to operate, making the educational mandate increasingly less structured and defined and making the need for "multidimensional" methods and interventions increasingly pressing (Barbieri & Szpunar, 2014). In this framework, it becomes more important than ever to think of an education that, on the one hand, continues to offer mastery of the "state of the art" of the discipline and the various disciplines involved in the educational process and on the other, aims to facilitate, in the future professional, processes of internalization of the professional role to know how to act, speak and think in the context (Szpunar & Renda, 2015). In this context, role modeling appears to be a particularly effective educational and formative strategy (Barbieri & Szpunar, 2014).

The research presented below was conducted in 2014 on the three-year and teaching degree programs of Educational and Training Science of La Sapienza University of Rome, with the aim of investigating whether future educators identify role models in their educational path and what characteristics they attribute to them.

4.6.4 Methodology

The sample consisted of 34 students from La Sapienza University of Rome. Of these, 12 were in the second and third year of the three-year degree course of Educational and Training Science, 16 were students of a teaching degree in Pedagogy and Educational Science and Training and 6 were three-year and teaching program graduates working in education.

The students were involved in five focus groups of 6 to 8 participants each. The focus groups were conducted by two psychologists and lasted about 3 hours. The themes explored with the students in the focus groups were:

– Description of the characteristics that define a good teacher.
– Description of the characteristics of the figures of reference of their educational path and/or internship experience.

The use of focus groups allows understanding the unconscious aspects of motivation and behavior regarding a specific theme (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1998); the flexibility of the tool and its interactive and dialogical modes is also useful in leading individuals to express ideas and emotions that would emerge less easily in an interview (Stagi, 2000).

The focus groups were characterized as an opportunity to tell one's own "training histories". Stories are the privileged form of self-expression that we all use (Gherardi, 2000) to share meanings within a group; without narration, without stories, there is no group and no individuality, they build a bridge, a horizon of interpretation between the reality of the present and the symbolic dimensions of the past, future and the present itself in a constant recursive relationship.

The research used focus groups, on the one hand, to reconstruct the image that university students have of the characteristics that define a good teacher and, on the other, to explore if, in their educational path and/or internship experience, there were figures that could be defined "of reference" for them, models in the construction of their professional identity, and which characteristics made them a role model.

The material emerging from the focus groups was transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to a classical approach to the analysis of paper and pencil content, within a constructionist perspective, in which the reality observed is placed neither in the world "out there", nor inside the mind of the observer; the facts owe their existence to the social process through which meanings are established, and reality is processed by individuals according to these meanings. What we consider "knowledge" thus corresponds to what is encoded and transmitted linguistically and is therefore subject to the peculiar characteristics of the various existing idioms, i.e., it acquires its meaning "in situ". Obviously,

the knowledge derived from these negotiational processes can never reflect reality as it is, however, it will have an appearance of similarity, since consensus and social convention will converge on it.

Below, particular attention is given to several core themes emerging from analysis of the focus groups in relation to the professional characteristics that educators should have and to the recognized and significant role models encountered during education and internship.

4.6.5 Representations of Educator's Professional Identity: Fragments of a Tortuous Path

The first core theme emerging from the analysis of the focus group data regards the complexity of the role of socio-cultural educator and, in fact, there are several factors that make recognition of the specificities of this professional figure complex: the expansion of the totality of intervention contexts of the educational professions; the multiplicity of reference contexts (extremely varied environments and users); the greater complexity in interpersonal relations that the educators structure in the professional context (organisation, customer, team, users); this professional figure is not easy to categorize, to the extent that it can be said that this profession is defined, on the one hand, by the type of work object (for example the type of user: children, the disabled, the elderly, etc.) and, the other, by the contexts where to apply one's skills, which seem to be true cognitive resources made available to persons, who use them to make their practical experience effective.

There are, therefore, different contexts that emerge from the focus groups where the figure of the professional educator is placed, of which the most frequent are: *services for early childhood, nursery and primary school, hospital, prisons, clinics and social cooperatives with various types of users.*

Although the general change in educator's work and greater uncertainty about the role itself, as already highlighted in the literature, has moved into the type of work object and related target user the process of constructing their professional identities, the students, as well as the young professionals, interviewed in the focus groups, attribute to the professional figure of the educator essential dimensions of meaning and sense construction throughout their training and professional path, which, for convenience, we provide in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Particular dimensions of the educator
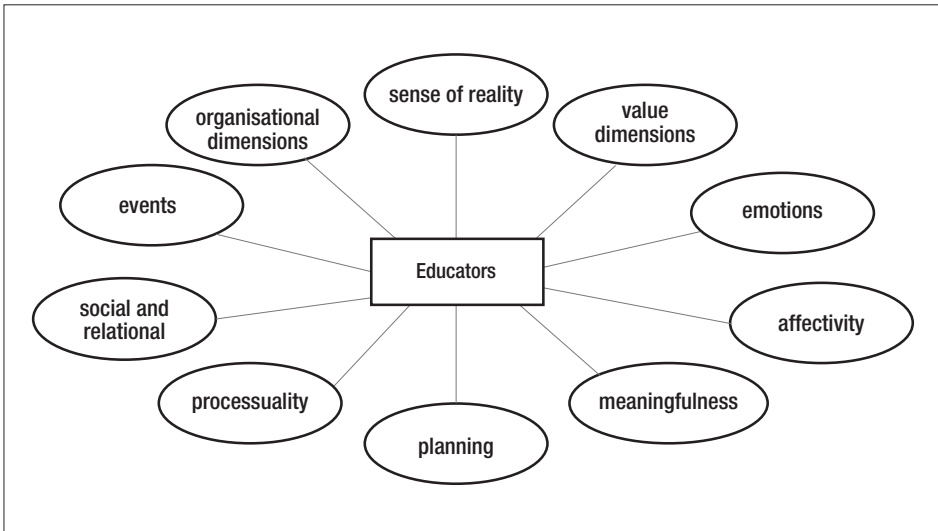
What emerges from the participants' narratives sheds light on the complexity of this professional figure. In fact, all the emerging dimensions are identified as essential for being a "good" teacher. All are dimensions that refer to the classic skills of *knowing, knowing how to do, knowing how to be* and *knowing how to manage.* In the narratives, there was less visibility of the meaning of work that accompanies the good educator's necessary capacity to continuously rearrange work processes.

In light of the foregoing, it is therefore possible to consider how much a "role model" can be effective in constructing a complex professional figure, especially in consideration of the amount of stresses involved (individual, relational, professional and organisational).

Through the stimulating questions of the focus groups, the participants were then asked to tell if, in their educational path, they had met figures that were a model for them in some way and to describe their salient characteristics. The following was the delivery and questions asked in the focus groups:
Think back to your college experience and internship. Try to remember the people who left their mark on your path of personal and professional growth.

– who are they?
– why them?
– what role did they have?
– how did they contribute to your growth path?
– what personal characteristics did they have?
– what professional skills did they have?

– what was the most significant thing you learned in these relationships?
– which skills did you recognize in them that you would like to be part of your future profession?
– how much, and in which way did the context where this exchange occurred influence your professional growth path?
– what were the recurring behaviors that you observed in the reference figure you chose?
– what kind of behaviors did the person implement to solve the arising problems?
– what was this persons attitude towards you?
– what did this person do to help you understand situations and contexts?

All the participants identified at least one reference figure encountered in their academic training or internship. The narratives essentially confirm the literature on students' assessments of the characteristics that positive models embody (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2008; Fromme et al., 2010; Jochemsen vander-Leeuw et al., 2013; Wright, 1996).

The first dimension is inherent to the *technical knowledge of the profession* (Theoretical knowledge; Value dimension; Meaning dimension; Socio-relational dimension).

What emerges is the figure of a prepared professional in terms of knowledge and high problem solving and decision-making skills and flexibility in using one's skills in different contexts. But it is above all on guidance ability that the focus group linger on. Positive role models are basically capable of guiding, supporting and stimulating reflection on practices.

… The RM is a guide, who transmits, identifies your talent, your resources …
… he directs you on your path and then leaves you plenty of room to get experience …
… He explained how to do certain things … and thus overcome my fear … of approaching others.

The second dimension of role models that the literature highlights (Cruess, Crues & Steinert, 2008; Elzubeir & Rizk, 2001; Fromme et al., 2010; Jochemsen vander-Leeuw et al., 2013; Wright, 1996; Wright et al., 1998; Wright & Carrese, 2002; Wright, Wong, & Newill, 1997) relates to the aspects of knowing how to be of the profession (Value dimension; Meaning dimension; Socio-relational dimension; Affection; Design intentionality).

What emerged from the focus groups may well be summarized by the narration of one of the participants, which contains most of the features highlighted by all, perhaps with different words, but with the same meaning:

(the RM) is authoritative, empathetic, passionate, there must be a bit of love …

The third dimension of role modeling calls into question the physical and symbolic places in which the training process occurs (Organisational dimension; Procedural dimension; Events; Elements of reality; Value dimension).

Place is the privileged context in which the RM invites reflection *in the action*, *on the action* and *for the action* allowing the future professionals a significant reinterpretation of their lived experience, thus facilitating the transformation of the lived experience into acquired professional competence. Places are the privileged contexts in which one experiences the size of the organisation, process management, teamwork, the management of complexity and the uncertainty of this profession.

4.7 Internship as Expanded Experience

Over the last decade the system of higher education (secondary school and university) in Italy has gradually acknowledged, at least in legislative documents (Law 196/1997; Ministerial Decree 142/1998; Law 53/2003; Law 240/2010; Law 107/2015), the importance of opening schools and universities to the professional world. The formative experience carried out in the workplace has, over time, assumed increasing importance in the learning processes of future generations. In particular, when looking at the number of pedagogical-didactic publications on internship, a significant increase can be noted in comparison with the past. This valorization of a novitiate experience of the professional world stands as the second pillar that completes the arch of the theoretical learning that is happening in classrooms (Fabbri & Rossi, 2008).

The following paper aims to overcome the dichotomy between classroom and place of internship through a review of the educational framework thanks to the use of ICT in education.

4.7.1 The Conceptual Background

The rethinking of the internship proposals in educational contexts arises from two reasons emerging in daily practice. The first is due to a no longer sustainable distance between study curricula and the professionalism actually required in the workplace. Professionalism, understood as practical knowledge required in work contexts, is systematically more complex than what is learned during the education at universities. The second reason stems from the observation that the way of learning in the workplace is different than the teaching methods implemented in university classrooms and the result is mental models of learning that are disjointed and not integrated, leaving the individual student searching for a cultural and professional mediation. Hence

the need for a path that promotes a capacity for continuous and strategic learning that can valorize experience through a reflective capacity leading to transforming and increasing knowledge. The study method must articulate different ways of learning (from memorization to problemization) that are integrated into a strategic competence of learning to learn (Fedeli, Grion, & Frison, 2016). The rate of change of the employment system, which is also characterized by transition periods, results in discontinuous professional experience that requires lifelong learning and an ability to gradually change one's skill set on pain of being marginalized and, sometimes, excluded from the professional world. This means bringing future workers, but also current ones, not only in a position to resiliently resist pressures coming from the labour market, but to assume a proactive stance (Simeone, 2010). The educational system is called not only to give young people degree, but to consolidate strategic and transversal skills that reinforce the sense of self-efficacy, increasing self-empowerment processes needed to navigate the stormy sea of the professional world in a planned way.

Experiential Learning

It requires the educational system and, in particular universities, a transition towards new educational assumptions, such as, for example: the importance of situated knowledge, the centrality of the social dimension of learning, the reworking of models starting from experience, the interdisciplinarity required in practical action and triggering learning through problem management.

These observations initially suggest at least two basic considerations to define possible paths of reflection for teaching based on experiential learning:

– the working context (technical and relational) is a key and proactive factor for planning study curricula and internship projects;
– learning during internships takes place through forms of confrontation, experimentation and reflection on the experience that also follow cross-media modes and not only in replication of knowledge already learned.

These two statements, albeit their simplicity, allow teaching to free itself from an image characterized by a congenital imbalance between the expert who knows and teaches and the novice who passively assimilates and repeats. A new perspective is opened in which the horizontal plane of the relationship and its generative power are valorized.

Teaching, in particular in the context of internships, reaffirms the centrality of educational action (Rivoltella & Rossi, 2012) as a scientific object and strongly emphasizes the systemic dimension of the educational/training event and the indissoluble circularity between theory and practice. In this regard, in defining teaching, highlights two epistemological foundations of this

theoretical/practical science: the system in which teaching takes shape and must be interpreted and the close connection between theory and practice, which constitutes its backbone.

In the light of these considerations, internships can be initially defined as protected practical experience that arises in the educational context, carried out mainly, but not exclusively, within a workplace. An image that recalls an activity of training, apprenticeship and mentoring characterized by a practical, operational dimension, immersed in doing. In the common definition, through internship students transfer in the workplace the knowledge previously acquired in the classroom in theoretical form.

However, if we limit ourselves to this perspective, we would risk a reductive vision of the question and producing high levels of frustration, because the simple transfer of knowledge is difficult to realize. It becomes more appropriate to consider internships from another perspective that valorizes three important aspects:

– practical experience, as a moment of "making aware", sheds light on authentic tasks and issues of working life, and stimulating persons to find solutions for unexpected contradictions. During the experience, new knowledge, skills and action models are developed "contaminating" and evolving theoretical models and meaning patterns previously acquired (Jørgensen, 2004);
– the transformation of knowledge from theory to practice, which is not automatic, but requires specific mediation skills that allow students to decode the theoretical model and reassemble it in terms of skills associated to the multiplicity of contexts they face; so, learning for transformation (Mezirow, 1991) that reshapes, adapts and evolves the map of theoretical knowledge (Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström, 2003) in the light of work experience;
– a personal and professional life plan is the result of a plurality of systems which on many occasions risk being closed in self-referential logics, losing sight of the central purpose of the personal education. This is avoidable implementing a convergence of intentions, modulating together the various moments of training/learning, and promoting the construction of new shared artifacts.

One way among the innumerable possibilities for remaining faithful to these principles during internships is the use of teaching tools that match the criteria of immersion in the experience and emersion through reflexivity. Among these, the new technologies are a toolbox with great potential that can transform the foundations of teaching.

Online Learning

The design intent underlying this design perspective refers to an eLearning approach defined in terms of "Web based Learning", i.e., an educational strategy in which the Web becomes an integral part of the teaching model for learning. This integration of the Web into apprenticeship training paths is the consequence of a "total connectivity" that allows easy access to multiple resources that are always available (Jenkins, 2010).

In eLearning, teaching can make use of a plurality of multimedia tools (Rivoltella, 2006) available in an LMS (Learning Management System), with an internet connection and devices (computer, tablet, smartphone) increasingly employed as meta-media, with which the entire "learning system" is managed. So, the Web is not only a data transmission tool, but above all a "place" integrated with the classroom where a learning process can be activated characterized by a high level of interactivity, authorship and collaboration.

This perspective requires from the design and teaching staff a complex skill system, in the following three areas:

– Preparation of dedicated teaching materials, as a result of educational planning coherent with the cross-media system of the learning environment.
– Preparation of collaborative and reflective activities that mainly concerned the area of group management, from cooperative learning to the establishment of forums, blogs and wikis.
– Management of communication understood as relational area more than computer science, for the management of exchanges both synchronous (chat) and asynchronous (bulletin board), according to the discussion of the themes and issues that were the subject of the educational activity.

In this perspective, e-learning frees itself from the prevailing idea of "distance learning" in which experts send educational materials to trainees. In a more current perspective, online activities is presented as a learning proposal characterized by a new communication paradigm, centered on an idea of sociality that uses digital media, sharing knowledge in a participatory and reflective logic, on a flexible and constructive teaching set-up.

4.7.2 The Testing Phase

Preliminary data from a study that aimed to understand the key factors of learning processes activated during internships as part of the degree course in Primary Education Science at the University of Molise, supports and confirms

this intervention perspective. The research observed the experience on three levels: the first through a questionnaire with closed answers using the Likert scale administered to a sample of 80 students representative of the four years of internships (2nd to 5th course years) consisting of approximately 350 students. At a second level, a focus group was conducted with a small group of students (9), also representative of the four years, to analyze the experience in more qualitative terms. At the third level, we analyzed the platform (Suite For Primary – based on Moodle) with which online education was organised, to understand the students' modes of tutoring and participation.

Based on reflections emerging from the various research levels, it is possible to highlight some key factors that promote the educational effectiveness of online activities in the internship experience.

In particular, the research in question shed light on the students' online activities starting from their experience in the workplace and classroom activities during internal internship meetings. Based on reflections emerging from the research, it is possible to highlight some salient factors that promote the educational effectiveness of online activities in the internship experience.

A first processing focus is at the design level and highlights a learning environment that emerges from the intersection of two progressive variables: from classroom teaching to on-the-job teaching and from online to off-line teaching (see Figure 3).

As regards classroom/off-line activities, the experience analyzed involved the production of teaching materials centered on lessons with slide presentations and exercises in subgroups, the support of film sequences and discussion groups; in the online version in the classroom, the Moodle platform was used with active repository and forum sections in sub-groups on specific thematic areas. Where possible, this type of teaching was supported by interactive multimedia whiteboards.

In terms of the working/off-line context, the students did an internship centered on tasks to perform and problem solving in the workplace. At the same time, using various devices (smartphones, tablets and netbooks), they reprocessed the actual experience using online tools such as blogs and forums. Access to the Moodle platform occurred mainly during on the job phases through the Moodle app downloaded on smartphones and tablets.

A second processing focus reconfirms that it is possible to facilitate learning processes in the most diverse contexts so long as they meet certain educational conditions. Specific experiences in the workplace, residential education, classroom activities and alternating school/work activities, such as online activities in the Web environment, are different modes that education can offer. What is at the basis of learning processes can be described in three statements: a) addressing and solving practical problems (teaching for authentic tasks), b) promoting changes in behavior that involve new assumptions of responsibility

Figure 3 – Teaching matrix (taken from Bonometti, 2014)
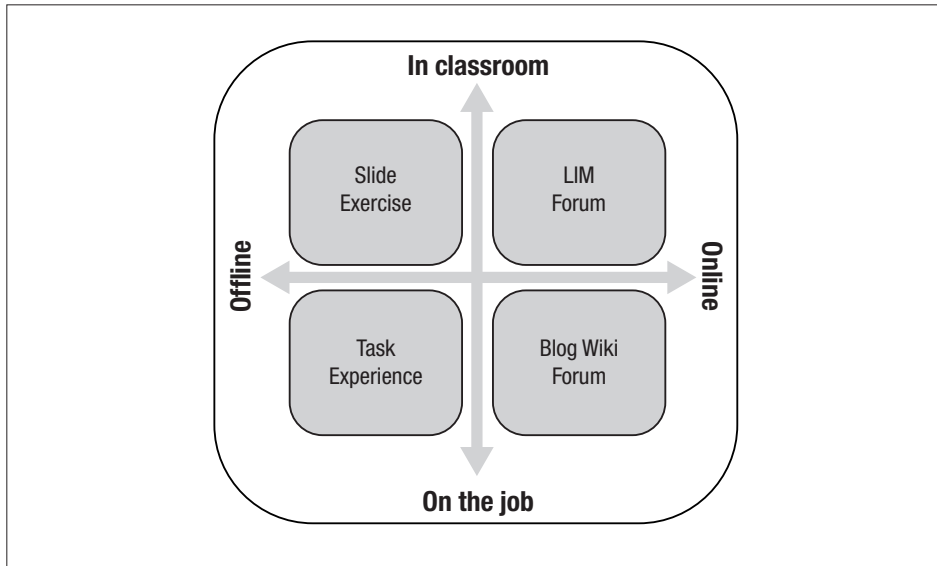
(reflectivity), c) enabling environments that valorize each level of cross-media communication (multi-channel).

The research and intervention path mentioned above observed these aspects in order to consolidate cross-media teaching applied to the construction of professionalism.

In our project, students were immersed in interactive environments in which the characteristics of the work context, the network of relationships between professional roles and interactions in the online context were considered key factors in promoting change and learning processes.

In particular, the internship project involved setting up three educational mediation channels: classroom, online and the working environment. A blended teaching formula is delineated in which the in-person part consists of time in the classroom and in the workplace.

Specifically, the in-person part was organised into group meetings through methods related to case studies, practical exercises, simulations and briefing and debriefing regarding the professional experience. Each year of internship provided for the involvement of tutors who guided both the educational experience in the classroom and online activities on the platform. The contents of the course were designed with a time span of four years in order to construct a balanced and coherent process. As regards the online part, the experience proposed was developed in the Moodle platform, in which numerous activities

modules were prepared. Using bulletin boards and messaging, the tutor launched the work units indicating objectives, procedures and timing. On many occasions, support materials were provided in document files (repository), which became the basis for realizing individual and group tasks. The duration of the task is proportional to the difficulty of execution defined by the tutor and not by actual presence on the Web. Encounters between both tutors and students and between the students themselves were mainly through forums that offered the opportunity to write and upload text files, multimedia files and Web links.

At the end of the experience, feedback was collected through an online questionnaire and through an in-person session (focus group).

4.7.3 Considerations on the Experience

In the light of the internship experience, monitored in particular in the last two years, and with the comparison of data collected through a specific questionnaire, it is possible to present some considerations defined in the research context without claim to generalisation.

A first important finding emerged from the students' appreciation for the online experience conducted on the platform: a majority of students (70%) believes that the online activity is positive (very + enough) and only 7% felt the experience was not at all satisfactory. The positivity of the data also arises from the closeness of the technologies in the daily life of the younger generation, as they present themselves more as a fact than a novelty. A first interesting point of observation emerges in the positive correlation between overall satisfaction and appreciation for the tutor. In the years in which tutoring was most appreciated, there was greater general satisfaction. For example, in the fifth year, overall appreciation reached 92% (very + enough) and satisfaction with regard to the dedicated tutors was 100% (very + enough). Based on this, a first consideration about the role of the tutor: immersive learning on the platform is fully effective if it is well supported by the tutor of reference. As has already emerged in previous research centered on university internships (Melacarne & Bonometti, 2014), the tutors' role becomes essential, as ferrymen between different worlds, those who translate languages, stimulate the use of different perspectives, foster self-esteem and provide useful feedback to rework experience. Specifically, the greater the availability of tutors in forming educational relationships based on mutual trust, on a recognition of skills and aptitudes, on an education agreement, the greater the effectiveness of the internship as a whole. It is therefore essential to invest in the relationship, which extends through different channels but which basically connects active persons and "not abstract entities". They are the people who, with their communication, build relationships even through different channels.

A second important finding is the expected coherence and balance between the content learned during the online experience and the experience carried out in the classroom or in the workplace. Activities performed on the platform during the course sought to intertwine experiences in the field with the themes explored in the classroom. The experience carried out strengthens the design idea of a knotworking (Engeström, 2008) that through a multiplicity of voices and perspectives analyzes and elaborates a specific thematic issue. The greater the differentiation of educational technology tools brought into play, the greater the wealth that is generated in the encounter between the participants.

A third finding is associated with the age and maturity of the students: students in the first course year mainly require materials and tools and appreciate online repository spaces, while students in the fifth year would like to see more space for encounters and reflection through discussion of collaborative work forums. Based on this observation, there emerges, at a first level of analysis, the possibility of promoting, on the platform, very different activities and spaces that can customize the educational offering, which would be more difficult in person. At a second level of analysis, there emerges, in the early stages of university education, the need to take a realistic look at the profession students imagine that they are working in; both online and in person, this requires documents and operational tools, a toolbox that allows direct contact with the working reality. At the end of the path, in the fifth year, students have already experienced many activities in the workplace and they have acquired the basic skills for governing the work process. What they ask for are encounters to understand the different aspects related to the way forward, overcoming either/or visions, and acquiring increasing awareness of the complexity of reality. For them, expanding the forum and messaging space becomes a priority.

4.7.4 Expanded Technological Experiences

In line with the literature, the analysis of the focus groups demonstrates that positive role models and dedicated learning spaces are essential along the entire educational process, influencing the professional development of future professionals. Students pick and choose the characteristics of the various models presented from time to time, internalizing an amalgam of values, attitudes and skills that, for them, are congruent with the chosen role model.

The narratives of the focus group participants demonstrate how role models provide an important support function, not only for the emergence and development of an attitude towards dialogue with knowledge related to action, facilitating learning processes that involve the space and openness to reflect on actual practices of professional life, but also to reinterpret unconscious processes of construction of their professional identities.

The technological dimension in teaching becomes more effective the more it is perceived not as a context in itself, but as an educational action fully integrated with all the teaching of the educational path. We hope that the in person/online dichotomy as separate worlds will be overcome. The relationship established with students and between students remains the protagonist of the educational process, articulated in a plurality of communication and education channels that differ greatly. The design of internships may provide the articulation of a cross-media environment (Bonometti, 2014) through which to reach goals and achieve different types of learning. The potential of technology 2.0 allows extending opportunities to trigger the learning process, even (at times especially) through moments of informal, occasional, non-budgeted exchange, for example, in the private space of a message or in an unexpected encounter in a forum.

Through this plurality of educational opportunities, internships are effective as a process for constructing a professional identity through a training experience that integrates, in a shared concept, activities in the field, online and in-person in the classroom. The space for reflection that arises from experience in the workplace becomes an opportunity for students for understanding their attitudes and propensities, testing their skills, learning new ones, launching a process of awareness to understand if they are able to deal with the profession, supporting their motivation and continuously renewing their competence.

Finally, the online platform provides a shared mirroring function through which we continuously re-recognize ourselves in a shared story-telling written by many hands, which gives meaning to one's actions and reformulates, and at the same time consolidates, one's professional identity.

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Employability Processes and Transition Strategies in Higher Education: an Evidence-Based Research Study

Vanna Boffo, Gaia Gioli, Giovanna Del Gobbo and Francesca Torlone*

5.1 The Embedded Employability Process

5.1.1 Introduction: The Research Context

The context in which this research is inserted is of particular relevance today in Italy, but not only. We are talking about the path/process to work that graduates must confront to fully enter the professional world. In dealing with this research object, we also intercept what, well before graduation, is the crux of the meeting of supply and demand. In fact, job placement is closely connected to the educational paths that constitute and innervate university preparation as it is also closely related to the relationship between education and the demands of a professional world in constant, continuous and ceaseless change (AlmaLaurea, 2015; ISFOL, 2014, 2016).

In a European labour market where the variability of job placement percentages in a year is so high, from 75 % in regions such as the Netherlands to 38 % in countries such as Greece (Eurostat, 2015a, 2015b), understanding the subjective dynamics, even of large groups, is a specific and meaningful direction for attempting to define, through the lens of a pedagogical-educational perspective, a number of scenarios/problems for the future of higher education.

The first results of this research provide ample opportunities to reflect on the development of learning policies in higher education and contextual perspectives as: 1) Understanding the attitudes of young people towards work; 2) Understanding the cultural flows of labour markets; 3) Interpreting life prospects; 4) Mapping implicit transition strategies; 5) Monitoring young people's opportunities for choice; 6) Acquiring elements for improving university teaching; 7) Measuring the presence of employability in Italian

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university culture. We can say that, overall, there may be effective elements for understanding the direction to take to reform a mass university that is no longer in step with the professional world, as Eurostat and AlmaLaurea data suggest (AlmaLaurea, 2016; Eurostat, 2016). The study of transitions must be supported by the ability to understand their deepest implications in order to better direct the choice of measures to be taken in places of higher education and university curricula, at the level of both learning and learning methods. This has a crucial impact not only on placement policies but also on educational policies that directly affect the determination of quality indicators for schools, vocational courses, university courses and the training offers of higher education. However, it is not only a matter of addressing the issue of higher education policies because, at the base of the considerations we are making, and of which we are giving an account, there are reflections on the way in which universities are shaping the future of a country, in this case Italy.

In Italy, we do not have a specific pedagogical literature on the issue of transitions from education to work and it appears that the debate, which in the English-speaking and European world is very animated, has been left out of educational, sociological and economic research. Above all, we have no research of an educational-training nature on the theme that underlies the problem of transitions, namely that of employability, which is translated into Italian as *occupabilità*, a word that does not fully reflect the sense of the English term. In fact, the principal studies on employability were conducted between the mid-1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century (Harvey, 2000, 2001, 2003; Yorke & Knight, 2002, 2003, 2006).

Therefore, the issue of transition is explained, interpreted and discussed using the term employability. We can say that the transition to work in higher education is an *embedded employability process*. What does this mean?

We believe that employability is a central category, starting from which it is necessary to rethink the university educational process and through which it is important to decline the curricula of the various courses of study. In fact, entry into the professional world must be prepared and supported. Transition is a process whose roots were put down long before the time at which it occurs and that cannot be left to chance; conversely, we cannot leave young graduates with the total responsibility for entering the professional world. So, the category of *employability* can help address the selected path, the guidance process, study activities, the didactic-pedagogic declination and, ultimately, after graduation, entry into the professions.

The novelty of the consideration of employability related to one's personal educational process, as well as linked to the curriculum, concerns the centrality of a category that can be considered pedagogically dense and fully usable for reflecting on the architecture of a study curriculum and the significance and role of higher education for the future of a country that is part of a Europe

moving at different speeds and in different directions. We could say that it is precisely the history of Europe that requires us to take a serious and careful look at the university educational process, aware that learning, training, continuing education, for young adults and all adults in general, are the means for achieving social, environmental, economic and political well-being.

5.1.2 The Category of Employability

Currently the category of employability can be considered from a historical point of view because it has steadily evolved over the last 30 years and its role in higher education can be demonstrated.

The concept of employability was defined by the Robbins report (Robbins, 1963) as one of the main axes of higher education. The difficulty of defining the concept led many authors to conduct research that have given rise to a substantial number of studies, particularly in English, as already mentioned.

One of the first definitions was developed by Hillage and Pollard in 1998 through several case studies (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 3). At that time, the concept was already widely used in the literature and the two researchers provided a definition centered on personal and work skills: "In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g., personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 3). This first definition referred to the ability to look for, find and keep a position, a job, and referred to the centrality of skills for organising a career. Later, an interesting study was conducted by Harvey (2002, 2003 and 2006) and, simultaneously, by Yorke and Knight (2002, 2004, 2006). The perspectives of both Harvey and Yorke and Knight make a connection between the concept of employability and higher education and pose the problem of the use and presence of ability "to live" with the aim of building adequate and solid bridges with the professional world. In a social context that is demanding increasingly greater and more focused skills from a larger number of graduates for better productive growth, reflecting deeply on the category of employability becomes a key to understand in which direction to make efforts to improve university teaching, create internships and apprenticeships and construct specific links with companies, associations and public and private industrial sectors.

The definitions of Harvey, on the one hand, and Yorke and Knight, on the other, introduce educational-pedagogical elements and extend the concept until it becomes the foundation of an innovative way of considering higher

education. In 1999, Harvey provided this definition in an even more critical way: "Employability of a *graduate* is the propensity of the graduate to exhibit *attributes* that employers anticipate will be *necessary* for the *future* effective functioning of their organisation" (Harvey, 1999, p. 4). In fact, the apparent problem could be represented by the attributes/competencies that a graduate should have and that should be the very ones that businesses require. Harvey emphasizes, however, that the fundamental issue is the consideration that 'employability is a process' and that gives rise, ultimately, to a very real problem: "employability raises fundamental questions about the purpose and structure of higher education. Employability is not about training or providing add-on skills to gain employment. On the contrary, employability is about how higher education develops critical, reflective, empowered learners" (Harvey, 1999, p. 13).

Similarly, the much more widespread and decisive definition by Yorke and Knight leads us to reflect: "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (Yorke, 2006, p. 3). The work of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) coordinated by Mantze Yorke, at the beginning of the twenty-first century was a unique landmark in the understanding of the transition of employability from a vague economic concept to a category with a clear connection to learning, i.e., the pedagogical and didactic fields of higher education. It is precisely by starting from a series of articles, studies and books with an evidence-based research methodology that one begins to make progress towards the possibility of reflecting on educational paths, teaching practices and on the pedagogical content of the category. What underlies the work of the Higher Education Academy research group is the consideration of a strict link between education for employability and good results in terms of learning, teaching and teaching evaluation (Yorke & Knight, 2005, p. 4), not so much defined generically as addressed to the objective of the more conscious growth of each student and of their abilities.

5.1.3 The Research Subjects

The main question addressed by the survey relates to the problem of understanding the transition process of young graduates from their degree to searching for a job and entering the workplace. How do graduates look for a job, how do they prepare for the transition and, above all, how does one construct employability during the years of university study? This section provides an account of the interviews of the first session of graduates of the course of Educational and Training Science, at the University of Florence,

in June 2014, who were followed for two years until June 2016. The initial question, then, is related to understanding the profound dynamics that underlie the initial transition to work of young adults (age 23 to 29) as they exit from higher education courses. In this article, we describe the background of the job search and an analysis of the first group of graduates. At the end of the study, we will have about a hundred interviews collected over more than two years of longitudinal research.

The survey method is qualitative with a particular orientation to collecting the phenomenon to be studied according to a map that is not predetermined, but constantly adjusted, as happens when the job outlook is inserted in a pedagogical-educational research context, but also with socio-anthropological characteristics.

The research strategy is that of the case study, in this way providing precise information on the procedures to follow for conducting the survey process (Mortari, 2007). The case study turns on the survey axis that deepens the analysis on the sample of young adults, the graduates. The survey technique, i.e., the device for collecting the data, is the focus group, in a first moment, and an in-depth interview at a later time. Both the focus group and the Interview have a longitudinal character. The grid for the focus group provides some fixed fields for a mutual understanding of the research subjects. The semi-structured interview is conducted on a second grid. The protocol is rigorously developed at each step. The expected results regard four fields of speculation that can lead us to reflect on the process of employability active in the university curricula studied: 1) Volitions; 2) Skills; 3) Channels; 4) Expectations. The subjects of the survey were about 29 graduates. The data, which was collected from June 2014 to July 2016, regards about 8 focus groups, 97 in-depth interviews of graduates of the Course of Educational and Training Science.

With regard to the fields of reflection, volitions have to do with the desire of the graduates to go in a working direction and probe the possibility of having constructed skills inherent to the interpretation of the context of reference and guidance in their home territory. Skills relate to investigating a possible self-perception towards the acquisition of communication, self-guidance and transverse skills. The channels will be questions related to methods, services and tools used for the job search. Expectations regard the vision of the future that candidates have for their lives. These results can be used to understand a perception of self as future professional, but also allow understanding which skills/abilities have been used to construct such a perception of the self-reflective professional. In fact, the research refers to what the labour market is asking of education graduates in the area of Education Sciences. There can be innumerable interpretative keys and matrices but what interests the research is primarily the ability to interpret the method, desire and ability of young people to become serious, qualified professionals as well as responsible citizens of the future.

5.2 The Transitions of Young Graduated People

5.2.1 Transition, Reflexivity and Agency

Over recent decades the transitions made by young people exiting from higher education to the professional world have profoundly changed. If they were once viewed as linear and predictable routes, today they are often described as bumpy trips, characterized by interruptions, stops and the intersection of working statuses that until a few years ago tended to remain distinct (Chisholm, 1995; Wyn & White, 1997; European Group for Integrated Social Research [EGRIS], 2001). Consequently, even the concept of transition has changed over time in an attempt to reflect the level of complexity that characterizes the educational process constituted by all the transitions that can occur in the life of the subjects and the implications that these may have. In fact, in the past, the changes that could take place in the life of a subject were seen by researchers as peculiarities characterizing a specific transitional route, not comparable with that of other individuals. In this sense, for example, Roberts (1997) considered the modern man's transitions as individualized paths that allowed only a few individuals to identify with others with whom they shared an identical path in life. Others associated transitions to "choice biographies" (DuBois Reymond, 1995; Furlong, Cartmel, & Biggart, 2006), or to new forms of vulnerability and uncertainty (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

In any case, the research perspective adopted here, in fact sees transitions as a characteristic inherent in human life. It thus abandons the notion of "stages" of Erikson's model (1959) or Levinson's five-year "transitional stages" to adopt the logic of a cycle of life characterized by a constant evolutive dynamism and recursive crises. In this view, therefore, studying transitions is equivalent to investigating the life plan (Cambi, 2007, p. 42) that characterizes the human subject, where an essential element is the intentionality and the idea of pushing to achieve a personal goal. In fact, focusing on the structure and agentivity of the subject, researchers developed two models that have become very popular in the UK: that of "structured individualization" (Evans, 2002; Ruud & Evans, 1998) and that of "rationalized individualization" (Furlong, Cartmel, Biggart, Sweeting, & West, 2003), which are distinguished by structure and agentivity.

5.2.2 The Importance of Education for the Transitional Tendencies of Young Adults

The perspective of the study about transitions conducted as part of the PRIN *Emp&Co. (Employability and Competences)* project of the

Florence Research Unit is based on human life as a continuous transition (Ecclestone, 2007) linked to the life cycle and "de-linearized" nature of life course. In fact, the purpose of the research considers the paths taken in the transition between higher education and professional world by young people who are now living fragmented and temporally larger transitions than their parents, as stated by Furlong and Cartmel (2007), that involve risks for the whole of civil society, such as the occurrence of phenomena of protracted adolescence and postponed adulthood (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). In addition, in the study of the employment trends of young graduates, it should also be considered that, compared to the past, the number of graduates seeking employment has increased. However, economic conditions have deteriorated in terms of salary for graduates and this has led, on the one hand, to an increase in the number of employed graduates who are under-classified with respect to their educational level and, and the other, lower rates of career advancement than in the past.

What emerges is a reflection on the tools that can help young people in transitions. Undoubtedly, a set of adequate skills (Yorke, 2006), or more properly capabilities (Nussbaum, 2010) can help young adults in navigating difficult waters (Cedefop, 2014). Consider, for example, that there is no longer a right to a job but to work in the broad sense; as a consequence of this, it is reasonable to assume that young people approaching the labour market today will have many transitions, corresponding to several jobs in various places during their lives, will know many learning contexts and may experience periods of idleness. In this condition, continuous adaptation and updating of skills becomes essential (Alheit & Dausien, 2002).

In fact, employed adults who do not regularly take training run the risk of remaining anchored to outdated modes of operation that can take them to become obsolete and therefore vulnerable, especially if the circumstances around them change (Institute for the Future, 2011). The same is true for new graduates who are looking for their first real job: in the medium to long term, if they cannot deal with or upgrade their skills, they may fall into the group of the low skilled (Maselli, 2012).

With respect to the skills considered relevant by the labour market, the interviews conducted by the Florence Research Unit demonstrated that the experience gained by young graduates at the end of the academic program must be in line with that required by employers, i.e., employability skills.

The literature (CBI, 2011) helps us understand what these skills to be developed are in the context of higher education. Namely:

– "Self-management – your readiness to accept responsibility, flexibility,

resilience, self-starting, appropriate assertiveness, time management, readiness to improve your own performance based on feedback and reflective learning.
– Team working – respecting others, co-operating, negotiating, persuading, contributing to discussions, your awareness of interdependence with others.
– Business and customer awareness – your basic understanding of the key drivers for business success and the importance of providing customer satisfaction and building customer loyalty.
– Problem solving – analyzing facts and circumstances to determine the cause of a problem and identifying and selecting appropriate solutions.
– Communication – your application of literacy, ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy, including listening and questioning skills.
– Application of numeracy – manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts (e.g., estimating, applying formulae and spotting likely rogue figures).
– Application of information technology – basic IT skills, including familiarity with commonly used programs".

In addition, according to the REFLEX 2006 survey, additional skills related to the entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial spirit of graduates, which are still not developed in higher education, turn out to be of fundamental importance. These are mainly gaps related to behavior in the workplace, such as the efficient use of time, performance under pressure, social skills, such as the ability to negotiate, assertiveness, coordination of activities with others and an entrepreneurialism mindset, such as the ability to create new ideas and attention to possible new opportunities.

5.3 An Evidence-Based Approach in the Educational Context

5.3.1 From the Research Object to the Method: A Question of Epistemological Order

As noted in the first section, studying employability from a pedagogical point of view allows, consistent with the epistemological rules of the discipline, shifting attention from the object (work or employability) to the subject (students, graduates) with a focus on the learning process and on the congruent educational and curricular dimension. In the pedagogical approach

to employability, the links between learning, teaching and evaluation already mentioned in reference to the models find meaning. A focus on the subject in learning allows, also, identifying the various possible 'objects' of investigation, among which highlighting:

– The process of employability as it unfolds.
– The patterns of career development.
– The transitions.
– The educational needs of the subjects.
– The educational-didactic actions.
– The implicit curriculum.
– The work experience (in terms of educational experience).
– The demands of the professional world.

It is, therefore, in a definitely complex conceptual framework, still poorly developed in pedagogy, that research was oriented to addressing the question of defining the object/objects and the coherence between object or objects of investigation and research methodology, between the survey component and the educational/training components of the research itself.

If the employability process assumed central importance, in an integrated manner with the study of career patterns and transitions, as documented in section 4, it is through a kind of reticular system, that the research is exploring and collecting evidence on the different areas mentioned above, thanks to positive and complementary synergies with other research.

As already indicated in the first paragraph, pedagogical research on such a complex object cannot be defined as a process of verifying and validating a preconceived hypothesis, but was, of necessity, articulated as a critical-hermeneutical interaction with the complex issues that characterize the phenomenology of the employability process while these are realized, in order to progressively arrive at a construction of meaning, or meanings, valid for all those involved: for both the researcher and, with different methods and forms, for the graduates involved in the research. In fact, recent research on employability defines graduates, as one of four main types of stakeholders (in addition to university staff, businesses and students) from which to start to understand the phenomenon (Kinash, Crane, Knight, Dowling, Mitchell, McLean, & Schulz, 2014) of a learning process that is functional to the development of potential personal employability.

The research, as explained above, thus chose to investigate employability in the post-graduate phase. It is a meaningful phase for the management of the process, usually not adequately accompanied or investigated. It is expected that the graduate knows how to transform personal qualities, individual skills, ability to learn, life and work experiences and knowledge and skills related to

the course into employability. All these factors and components of the learning process are fundamental to the employability processes but they are rarely intentionally sustained during the course of study, let alone being subject to evaluation and reflection in an integrated and systematic way[1].

Figure 1 – Object components of the research
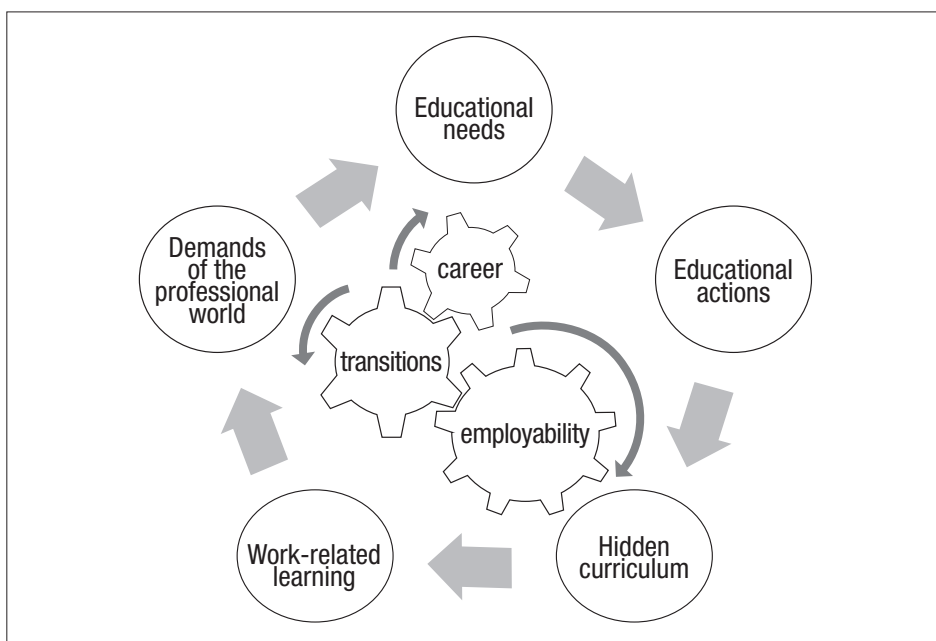
While considering employability necessarily related to the university curriculum, the centrality of the learning dimension also refers to the informal component of learning, implicit in the university path, but that, at the end and outside of this path, can be determining for making subjects assume the active and proactive posture considered a guarantee of their own employability. In effect, the postgraduate phase is often the first time that graduates subject to external verification the potential they have and are often not fully aware of. It is also a phase that 'tests' the functional ability to manage 'inactivity', the job search placement in the workplace, until it is, itself, transformed into an educational experience such as to favor the development of learning useful and functional to

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[1] The application of the Dublin Descriptors for the declination of the training objectives, if appropriately correlated to the development of final verification tests, may allow evaluation and control by the student of the knowledge, skills and levels of understanding of the content of the courses. But, recalling the employability models presented at the beginning of this chapter, all this represents only one of the components, for example, of the USEM model (i.e., Skills and Understanding) or the EDGE model (i.e., Degree subject). The remaining determinants usually remain unverified and unintentionally supported.

ensure and enrich, over time, one's possibilities of being employable (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007). Investigating employability independently of obtaining an employment status properly emphasizes the process dimensions correlated to life and not only work experiences, and allows focusing better on transitions, also represented by important moments of personal life.

In this sense, the study of employability in the post-graduate phase certainly offers an interesting contribution for understanding 'what happens', what are the resources or the potential (also in terms of social capital and social networks) that subjects can activate for the management of their paths, and, above all, which are the factors related to university education that can support subjects in this phase. The post-graduate phase itself is a transition and limiting the field of investigation to this specific phase has, therefore, a large value in terms of research since this allows producing evidence with respect to:

– The perception of the impact of the curriculum on the development of employability skills.
– Types of transition(s).
– Informal functional learning paths (hidden curriculum).
– The specific educational needs of graduates.

The analysis, enriched by a longitudinal perspective consistent with the object of investigation, has allowed an analysis capable of:

– Highlighting the factors that most influence the employability process in its development, after the phase of university education.
– Measuring and analyzing transitions over time, understood as key moments for redefining the employability process and understanding the close relationship between the three key concepts of employability, career and transitions.
– Measuring the effectiveness of the university curriculum (globally understood, as mentioned above) perceived by the graduate, for the development of autonomous abilities to manage the employability process, both immediately and after a few months.
– Measuring, through the experience of graduates, the correspondence of the university curriculum (specifically that of LM 57&85) with respect to the needs of the professional world.

These are levels that relate to different and complementary research fields, consistent with the goals of a pedagogical research that investigates a phenomenon to track elements that can help improve educational practice. Although only the first two points represent the specific object of the research, the third and fourth represent the scope of potential impact of the research

itself, since directly linked to the dimension of higher education strategies and policies[2].

Like the identification of the measurement context, the post-graduate phase and the longitudinal approach of the research, even the methods and tools have been defined in line with the particular object of investigation. The transition from a theoretical dimension to a methodological dimension congruent with the research, was mediated by those theories of the construction of knowledge that allow considering and interpreting the value of practices and contexts in the research, but that also emphasize the importance of the subjects' active involvement in the research results for a co-construction of meanings and interpretations.

Methods, measurement techniques and tools have been defined against the background of a theoretical framework with a constructivist matrix aimed at considering the spatial-temporal and social and cultural contexts relevant for the purposes of learning and cognitive processes (Baltes & Staudinger, 1996).

In line with the constructivist approach, the graduates are in fact 'co-constructors' of knowledge on employability as they are the first to act on it. Moreover, in an 'upward oriented' perspective, focused on the study of the phenomenology of the subject in situation through the exploration of social-contextual, cognitive and affective forces that orient their cognitions and actions, even the research context becomes an experience able to induce change and influence the process by expressing its educational function.

In fact, after considering the pedagogical system of the research, the methods and investigative tools were designed not only as relevant and appropriate to the collection of data and interpretations of phenomena, but already set in an intervention perspective. In this sense, both the focus groups and the qualitative semi-structured interviews were evaluated as appropriate lines of investigation, capable of ensuring the direct involvement of the graduates in the exploration phase of the problem under investigation (research) and at the same time considered as a potential device for accompaniment and vocational guidance (intervention).

5.3.2 Meta-Cognition, Reflection, Evaluation: Research and Educational Intervention in an Evidence-Based Framework

In the course of its implementation, the research assumed a physiognomy that increasingly allows placing it in line with the conceptual triad reflection/

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[2] One should not underestimate the potential impact of research with respect to the evidence that it can provide for reconfiguring several assessment indicators of the effectiveness of university choices in support of the placement and employability of their graduates. In the current AVA-ANVUR system (Italian evaluation system), although currently in the process of redefinition and simplification, the work/occupation dimension is very present and represents a central node for evaluating the performance of Italian universities, through its declination in accreditation requirements, thanks to the presence of specific indicators.

evaluation/meta-cognition that in fact provides, within the employability models described in the first paragraph, indications of a methodological or meta-methodological order. It is through a process of reflection and assessment that the set of substantial points that support the models allows the subjects to acquire employability.

If the focus group is designed to raise awareness, to induce the need for reflection and give meaning to participation in the research, fostering motivation, the interview is a meta-cognition experience, able to enhance the essential and constitutive role of the subjects as 'epistemic agents', thanks to a 'revaluation' of their own learning as a path shared and socially constructed through encounter, subjective interaction and the confrontation of multiple perspectives and points of view, different cognitive modes and methods.

It should also be considered that the interview, as conducted in the research (Del Gobbo & Torlone, 2014) has the advantage of starting from an emic perspective, which is followed by a subsequent meta-reflexive and meta-cognitive path to critically deal with the analysis of what happened, reading it from various points of view, definitely endogenous, but that in opening to external comparison are reconfigured and acquire form, validity and significance for both the graduate and the researcher.

The interview is also configured as a moment of educational evaluation of the employability process.

It is an evaluation that places the emphasis on observation, self-observation and interpretation of the process itself. In this direction the research is consistent with the dimension of self-management of the employability process. It is not an evaluation of the product, either in terms of results achieved, or the measurement of learning outcomes, but it is an evaluation of the manner in which the result can be achieved, of one's 'efforts' and the methods used.

Evaluation is, moreover, recognized as a specific component of the knowledge process, in terms of controlling one's thoughts and the solutions that are elaborated, a form of meta-level, cognitive this time, which is exercised in the course of the knowledge process and not just at the end. This constant evaluation process is in line with the investigative process, in which the graduate is involved and which demonstrates that it can support the development of critical and reflective skills. The interview is proving to be a tool for developing learning abilities of a dynamic procedural type, based on processes of the organisation and use of knowledge. It is learning that highlights the active and constructive role of the subjects, aware protagonists of their knowledge process and responsible for their cognitive acts, capable of controlling the obstacles and evaluating their effects. There is a clear connection between the self-evaluation dimension and the self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence necessary for employability.

Box 1

> "After the focus group, I think I am an enterprising person who looks for job opportunities, not waiting for them to be offered, but at the same time aware that I have few skills to 'spend' in the field." (Participant no. 29)
>
> "The usefulness of the interview, and more generally of the project, consisted in granting the opportunity to develop self-reflection on the effectiveness of my work [...] Positive and reinforcing cues to maintain the orientation towards the goals I have set myself." (Participant no. 24)
>
> "I evaluate very positively the skills that I have developed in a reflective and self-aware environment because this project allowed me to orient my thoughts and choices. Talking [...] encouraged and motivated not only the search for other job opportunities but also the search for opportunities for discussion with other colleagues and other occupational and individual realities. I am aware of the positive changes." (Participant no. 26)
>
> "[I liked] the training about the experiential path to the profession through reflection, discussion, suggestions." (Participant no. 14)
>
> "The project increases the exercise of self-reflection. The dialogical exchange allows greater focus on personal skills." (Participant no. 29)
>
> "The interview allowed me to reflect a lot on aspects to which I either did not want or know how to respond. It helped me think a lot to about what I really want to do. Knowing how to listen to myself and also others." (Participant no. 19)
>
> "I think the interviews were an important time to stop and reflect. The interview helped me to understand that I was implementing different problem solving strategies, more than helping me identify new ones for addressing the problems I am experiencing. It was more achieving greater awareness." (Participant no. 22)
>
> "Reflection accompanied by a facilitator allows me to analyze my strengths and weaknesses, and ask myself important questions [...]. Reflecting on my skills was useful for me. [...]. This last year, I tried to strengthen my initiative and proactivity with reflexivity, trying to ask myself, more often, "why" such an experience can be useful to me." (Participant n. 1)

As described, the empirical dimension of research aims, on the one hand, to recover the irreducible originality of individual situations (cases) and, on the other, to trace patterns and interpretations related to the contexts of theoretical reflection considered. The epistemological option starts from a holistic conception of research in education that favors a qualitative approach,

and the validity of the research results is defined through comparison with disciplinary and rational knowledge standards, which make the results themselves shareable and transferable within a professional community. This also allows its placement within a critical constructivism, making it possible to recognize an objective basis (documented by the empirical evidence emerging during the process) for defining the results and the valid growth of knowledge with respect to the initial problem.

One can say that these indications allow fully placing the research in the context of an evidence-based approach [EBA]. The EBA tends to form a consistent relationship between research and educational action extended to all the crucial moments of the research itself, feeds the educational activity, and is fed by it (Federighi, 2011, p. 112). In addition, an evidence-based approach also allows providing the players, or 'interested parties' of the university system, the empirical evidence needed to guide choices on educational subjects, using the interpretative level of scientific research results produced by different disciplines, exploiting an articulated knowledge capital, to make it available by anchoring it to the evidence produced.

In fact, the research not only aims to measure elements 'to know' employability, but, above all, produce results that can have an impact for the development of learning policy in higher education, as specified in the first paragraph. Certainly, also in consideration of the innovative gradient of the research, which introduces a context still little explored both in terms of scientific research and educational intervention, the evidence produced does not allow either controlling that all is proceeding as planned, or controlling 'if' everything is proceeding as planned, by considering the differences and understanding their causes, since the research investigates the process of employability downstream of a system that did not 'work' with the intent to develop employability.

5.4 The Transitions of Young Adults to Define Individual Pathways of Professional Insertion

5.4.1 The Transitions from Higher Education to the Professional World: The Challenges of the *Emp&Co.* Research

The research question concerns the role that pedagogy can play in supporting transitions from the university to the professional world, due to its ability to design, plan and manage educational activities that accompany the search for a 'decent job' (ILO, 2012). The goal is to identify the role that different types of

educational activities can play in order to facilitate the transition through the different phases that involve young graduates. The challenge is thus twofold: on the one hand, to understand what are the crucial transitions and, on the other, how the young can be helped to confront them and progress – also to reduce the risks of late (re)entry into the labour market and extended NEET status[3]. So, rather than being suffered, transitions should be designed and managed from a pedagogical point of view for the educational importance they have in the life paths of each individual. They represent a critical issue of variable importance in which the planning element to construct and that of the changes to mature, implement and autonomously govern remain strong.

The approach adopted refers to two distinct fields of research and pedagogical action: one has traditionally concentrated on the study of transitions within study courses, even university, working to facilitate transitions within the structured pathways of formal education (pedagogy of transitions). The other field of pedagogical research studies the transitions of school-university-first job (pedagogy of work) (Alessandrini & Pignalberi, 2011; Boffo, 2012).

Both aim at establishing educational devices that:

– Support the young in adequately addressing the dynamics of transformation and change towards adulthood, autonomy and a decent job, motivating and responding to their aspirations and professional identity. Change and transformation take place only if the transition is well designed and managed.
– Help in constructing one's professional identity (training designer, nursery educator, expert in educational processes, teacher, etc.).
– Aim at making predictable and controllable the change generated by the successive transitions (stability of the change and the transitions) and at managing their own path (self-directed learning), in addition to triggering in the individual the ability to act and make decisions (agency).

The relevance of the educational actions is in terms of accompaniment towards meta-cognitive processes of self-reflection and self-development in relation to events and experiences, to achieve a new understanding of self, relationships, perspectives, reality, and fully achieve transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). This is Dewey's idea of reflexivity, combined with a critical-transformative approach underlying the expression of the educational needs of young adults in transition, who define, construct, verify and develop, with a high degree of autonomy, the professional self in various moments of their life, which is constantly evolving and changing. The pedagogical response to this need, also in relation to guidance, is in terms of defining actions and paths that

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[3] Not in Employment, Education or Training.

manage change and develop skills, even transversal[4], accompanying the adult in insertion (or re-insertion) in work and in the professionalisation required by the job positions of interest[5], within organisations that promote autonomy, decision-making and increased responsibility (at the individual and team level). Change, development and transformation are achieved to the extent that the young adult develops cognitive and behavioral resources and strengthens them in overcoming the various transitions by putting them into action, which is all the more important in the perspective of industry 4.0[6].

5.4.2 Mapping Pathways and Related Transitions

The transitions studied cover a period of 13 months[7] during which we found an alternation between conditions of idleness, professionalisation and work.

Educational actions in support of periods of inactivity propose to investigate the reasons for lack of work or mistakes made looking for it (e.g., poor customization of the résumé with respect to the organisations the young is applying to, inadequate preparation for job interviews, faulty analysis of documentary sources of the job search, etc.) to redefine and redesign more effective educational actions (e.g., through a controversial analysis of the skills developed and the methods for exploiting them during the job search).

Educational actions in professionalisation paths essentially support the expression of training needs and analyses of them in the light of the improvement goals of young graduates. This is followed by accompaniment in the choice of the intervention to make (course, master's degree, laboratory, etc.).

For young people inserted in organisational settings, our research found that they were workers with contractual relationships of various types (occasional collaboration contracts, no-call contracts, paid internships, etc.), of short duration (2 to 6 months) and occupations not always consistent with their training and their professional aspirations. In this case, pedagogical support concerns the definition of personal growth objectives in the organisational context of insertion; the activation of methods and tools for the acquisition and development of the knowledge, skills, abilities and aptitudes required by the role and by the assigned professional challenges; preparation of job transitions (job rotation, vertical mobility, realignment, etc.) and their management and

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[4] For example, knowing how to work in interdisciplinary and cross-functional teams, the development of critical thinking, communication skills and emotional and situational intelligence.

[5] The goal is to help reduce job mismatch: "there is a risk of vertical mismatch, meaning that there is no correspondence between the formal qualification demanded by a certain job and the qualification of the worker. […] The vertical mismatch can be of two types: over-qualification or unfilled demand" (Maselli, 2012, 26).

[6] It means acknowledging the radical transformation in production systems, business models and technological innovation phenomena that influence the organisation of work and competence demand.

[7] June 2014-July 2015.

evaluation. Empirical data collected through the administration of semi-structured interviews highlights the demand of organisations for flexibility, adaptability to change, spirit of initiative, teamwork skills and handling discontinuities and contingencies, in addition to technical expertise related to the position.

Career opportunities consist of:

– Public sector (schools, kindergartens, etc.).
– Private sector (consulting firms, training agencies).
– Social economy (non-profits and coops), voluntarism and associationism, areas of particular ferment even during the most acute economic crises (Boffo, Federighi, & Torlone, 2015).

From the transitions identified within the phases of professional life of the available sample, we found four types of differentiated paths that require a strong personalization of educational approaches. In consideration of the phases, we focused on the transitions and attempted to identify several paths based on the type of propensity for work, impeding or facilitating factors and the educational actions that characterize each path, according to the following scheme (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – The support of pedagogy in youth transitions
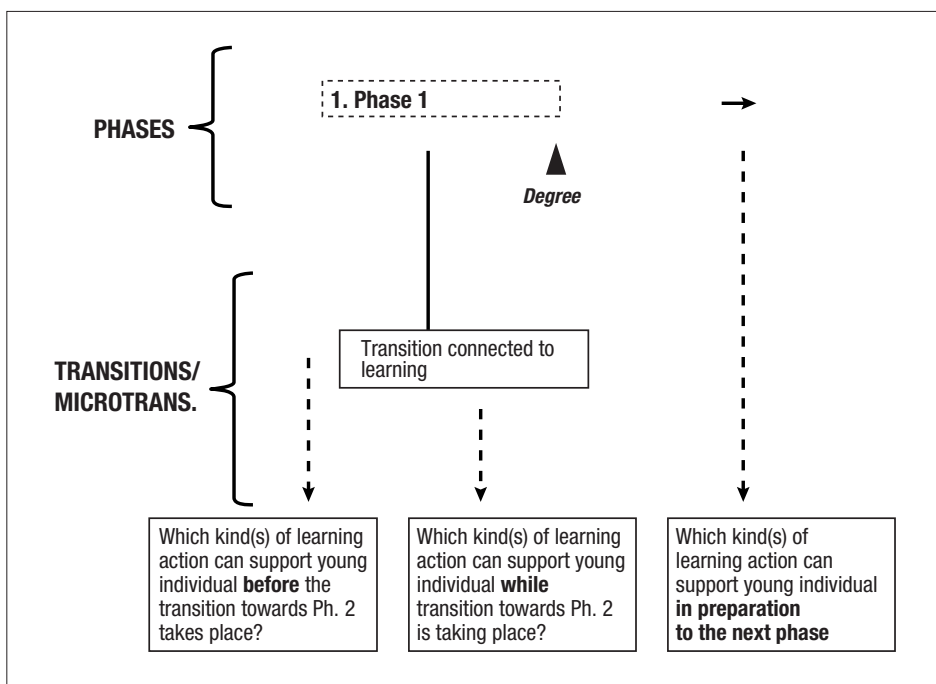
In general, in preparation for the first transition following the conclusion of the Educational Sciences degree course, pedagogical support consists of the guidance function, which is to say, accompanying and guiding individual decision-making processes for the autonomous management of professional life and development of skills.

The type of educational actions to take in successive transitions will differ depending on the paths (*see below*).

Below, we list the paths identified, highlighting for each the main characterizing elements.

5.4.2.1 Path for the Work Insertion of Young Entrepreneurs

'Young entrepreneurs' are those who immediately find work and tend to keep temporary jobs – one or more than one – that have variable time periods.

Depending on the educational potential of the workplace, technical and behavioral skills are developed, especially informally. The development of some of these in the phase preceding the discussion of the degree thesis (e.g., stress management, self-control, organisational and planning skills, emergency management and delegation) supports the ability to tackle challenging situations at work.

At the end of their university studies, they show interest in greater professionalisation towards clear and defined occupational areas, and strong motivations to experience mobility in the labour market (even abroad). In this regard, they keep active in various ways (postgraduate master's with or without internship, short courses, self-directed learning) while maintaining an active relationship with the labour market (with occupations more or less consistent with their own path).

Their plan of professional insertion includes experiences of self-employment, in some cases thanks to family connections, to be pursued over the medium or long term.

In managing transitions, the *self* factor predominates: individuals become familiar with several technical skills (e.g., E-learning, HR recruitment), practice them, experiment and acquire confidence in their ability to create, to conceive the idea that leads to a new business or a new service in a certain segment of the market. The risk of failure is known and considered challenging.

Transitions related to private life events (e.g., illness, marriage, motherhood, parenting) do not hinder or delay progression in transitions.

There are no periods of inactivity.

Figure 4 – Main transitions detected for young entrepreneurs

PHASES	MAIN TRANSITIONS
1. Univ. Studies and occasional jobs	**Learning event –** (Studies, Training experiences) **Temporary jobs –** (i.e. Private Association set up, tutor)
↓ Comp. dev.	
2. Univ. Degree/Job search	**Learning events –** (Training experiences). International learning activities and job search
↓ Degree	
3. First (coherent/decent) post-degreee job search and Professionalisation	**Learning events –** (i.e. HR Management Master, self-directed learning, guidance initiatives, CV application via Facebook, international campus at Disney in USA). **Temporary jobs –** (i.e. Civil Service, Caritas, employee in family business) **Personal events –** (Illness; marriage: personal life arrangements, parenthood, maternity)
↓ Post-degree Master attendance	
4. Competence development and Training experiences	**Learning events –** (Training experiences prolonged; end of the post-degree Master)
↓ Training placements	
5. First (coherent and decent) post-degree job	**Full-time permanent job –** (i.e. HR recruitment) **Temporary jobs –** (i.e. e-tutor, instructional designer,
↓ Permanent/ temporary jobs	
6. Second job search	**Temporary jobs and self marketing**
↓ 2nd job search	
7. Second job	**Temporary jobs –** (i.e. instructional designer, e-learning trainer)
↓ 2nd job	

Type of propensity for work: there is a high propensity for work and progression of professionalism and skills, shown from the very beginning of the research. In other writings (Del Gobbo & Torlone, 2014), we were able to characterize this cluster as 'innovative and proactive' in consideration of one's high proactivity, initiative and self-marketing ability, leadership shown during the various transitions in their constant and sudden succession, also in connection

with periods of employment. To the goal of job maintenance is added that of strengthening professional networks in sectors with high competitiveness.

Box 2

"My father teaches Italian. My mother was a company trainer, so I grew up in this environment here and I would love to go on and continue to work with them because they are interesting and dynamic persons and work a lot.
I also took a course on the use of psychodrama tools in adult education to make me known and propose to the organisers an experiment that I would run." (Participant no. 6)
"I would like to work in Clinical Pedagogy, which I am specializing in, and launch a private business I'm managing at the moment with my mother, who is speech therapist, to provide services to schools to combat social problems, and follow the couples in the adoption process." (Participant no. 10)

Types of transitions: Transitions are all aimed at constructing a defined professionalism and marked creative intelligence (for the design, e.g., of interactive e-learning platforms), exploiting the high training potential of the workplace and professional networks. Obstacles (e.g., impediments to growth in the workplace) are identified and removed by seeking alternatives consistent with one's development plan.

Box 3

"For many years I worked in a training agency. When I realized that there were no possibilities of doing other things, I started looking around and I left the agency as soon as I could." (Participant no. 5)
"In the work I'm doing, you have to have a bit of knowledge and I am learning very fast; in fact, they threw me into a job that I've never done […]. It has to do with designing and developing courses for FAD2 Formas: it is a platform for providing vocational training courses in the health field …" (Participant no. 6)
"I constructed my professionalism as an expert in personnel search and selection starting from the third-year internship, followed by a postgraduate master's and field experience, which I want to continue internationally at Disney, which I will do shortly. I have to improve myself in some technical areas (e.g., selection techniques) to compete effectively with colleagues from labour psychology that excel in the field." (Participant no. 12)

Factors impeding or facilitating the transition: individual satisfaction with the results gradually achieved, even in the university course, provides motivation to accelerate the progression of transitions and experiment with different opportunities in relation to the creation and development of one's professional identity. For the same purpose, failures or lack of satisfaction in working life are also considered.

Educational actions undertaken: pedagogical support is differentiated as follows.

Before the start of the transition, it is designed to support:

– In the preparation of the employment integration tools (e.g., sharing analyses of job offers with respect to the young graduate's growth expectations and objectives).
– In the self-assessment of skills (technical, organisational and managerial) possessed as a function of the job placement.
– In the identification of the work insertion channels available.
– In designing a preparation path for work insertion.

In *transitions underway (employment)* educational actions include:

– Support for the management of self-directed learning processes.
– Mentorship and coaching.
– Embedded learning on the job.
– Induction.
– Methods of handling challenging tasks and team meetings (between peers, external and internal, superiors, with customers/users of services and with suppliers).

In some cases, pedagogical support in the management of the ongoing transition consists in the design of training programs for succession planning within companies in which the candidate is already inserted, or, in the phase of 'moving out' of the transition, the candidate has the possibility of being inserted in the future (associations, family businesses, etc.).

In transitions *in preparation for the start of professionalizing actions,* the pedagogical support takes the form of:

– Individual training needs analysis with respect to the professional profile shared with the participant.
– Support in the choice of the most pertinent educational action with respect to the person's growth objectives.
– Shared evaluation of the intervention (learning outcomes and transferability into the labour context).

5.4.2.2 Path for the Work Insertion of Enterprising Young People

The young people participating in this path take actions aimed at continuous improvement and the development of technical and behavioral skills, consistent (or not) with the job they have and that they are planning to have in their professional future. The combination of contextual factors (situation: family of origin, nuclear family established, university teachers) and the desire for professional growth (self) – even in spite of solid trajectories already undertaken (e.g., civil engineering) and then abandoned for a career in the humanities (e.g., social sphere) – characterizes this path.

Employment opportunities, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are not always consistent with one's career aspirations and are still cultivated as an opportunity for growth as a function of one's professional identity (under construction as of the phase following graduation). The search is often not targeted, is dictated by the needs of economic independence and is aimed at understanding the local job market (e.g., searching in regions with the highest number of educational services). The goal of continuous improvement is also manifested in the continuous search for educational opportunities (postgraduate master's, research doctorates in Italy and abroad, other graduate degree programs, master classes, intensive courses and collaborations with academics in research).

The duration of periods of inactivity is short and always linked to the implementation of job searching strategies, which are increasingly targeted with respect to the geographical area, sectors of interest and the type of facilities to apply to. The alternation of periods of employment and inactivity is used to redesign job placement strategies (e.g., by creating a Facebook page on learning disorders), get to know the market better, especially local, and think about the definition of innovative services to propose, even with multimedia devices.

Figure 5 – Main transitions detected for enterprising young people

PHASES	MAIN TRANSITIONS
1. Job search (pre-degree)	**Preparation to the job market –** (CV delivery)
↓ Provisional job search	
2. Coherent/non coherent Job experiences	**Coherent and non coherent –** (i.e. Special needs teacher, babysitting)
↓ Provisional jobs	
3. Univ. Degree	**Learning events –** (Training experiences)
↓ Degree	
4. NEET	**Out of the education, training, labour market**
↓	
5. Post-degree/ Comp. develop.	**Learning events –** (Training experiences, Youth Guarantee, Giovani S, Post-degree Master, self-directed learning) **Personal events –** (i.e. movement to parents' place; new personal arrangements)
↓ 1st job search & comp. dev.	
6. First job/Comp. develop.	**1st job –** Private lessons/e-learning classroom, Civil Service (black labour market)
↓ 1st job & comp. dev.	
7. Second (coherent/decent) job search/Comp. develop.	**Learning events –** (i.e. Application for the Civil Service on Intergenerational activities. Studying for the application, self-directed learning)
↓ Comp. develop.	
8. Second (coherent/decent) job/Comp. develop./ Voluntary job	**2nd Job –** (i.e. Full-time Civil Service, temporary contract, social cooperative) **Personal events –** (need of an independent life) **Learning events –** (i.e. on-the-job, informal, non formal for hard&soft sills development, PhD application, self-directed learning, additional university courses)
↓ 2nd job & comp. dev.	
9. NEET	**Out of the education, training, labour market**
↓	
10. Third job search	**CV rewriting, new job search strategies and tools** (i.e. new services to be defined)
3rd job search	

Type of propensity for work: it is seen as a propensity oriented to *continuous improvement* of hard and soft skills (including language skills) and the expansion of opportunities also working on other members of the network belonged to.

Box 4

> "In the future I would like to enter the world of teaching. Meanwhile I'm trying to enrich myself […]. In July 2011, I had a month's experience as a childhood educator; in 2014, I had a support contract with a girl who had problems of leukemia and septicemia. She was behind on both a language and motor movement level. In a non-teaching environment, I've worked as a clerk, barmaid …" (Participant no. 3)
>
> "I want to learn as much as possible from the experience. There is the fact that, based on the subject, it becomes a bit more complicated. […] I was also asked for science and geography lessons and so I need little more time to prepare and explain them." (Participant no. 4)
>
> "After passing 20 exams in the School of Civil Engineering, I decided to follow my interest in the social sphere." (Participant no. 18)

Types of transitions: the transitions are all aimed at developing and acquiring new skills linked to the jobs that one has during the path. The phase of exiting from active circuit (work, education, training) coincides, for the most part, with the first entry, i.e., with the first confrontation with employment dynamics. Once learned, along with the channels available to employment, this phase is not normally repeated, but rather there are recurring periods of self-directed learning and competence development, also of an informal and non-formal character.

Factors impeding or facilitating the transition: an excessive gap between local labour market demand (i.e., outside Italy) and the professional profile appears to be an impediment to employment coherent with the course of study: education professionals are sought, even if not degreed, among those who have expert training qualifications.

The progression of transitions towards one's professional identity is facilitated by the ever increasing awareness of one's professional identity (e.g., kindergarten teacher, expert in specific learning disabilities, teacher of Italian as a foreign language) and how to spend it in the labour market. A part-time job can be accompanied by on-call employment.

Box 5

> "The various jobs, even if non consistent with my educational path, have helped me understand that I want to work in educational and social fields. For example, last year there was a father who was angry with a child because he threw ice cream on the ground. But he was a little too angry and I wanted to intervene. Then I went away because I told myself it was not appropriate since I was there as a waitress. " (Participant no. 3)
>
> "I left the point of view of the student […]; entering, although slowly, in the professional world, I realized what direction to follow, the opportunities on which to work, then, what happens, happens." (Participant no. 4)

Educational actions undertaken: in the *phase preceding the transition* pedagogical support regards self-analysis of the skills possessed and those to be developed in view of the hoped-for job and the definition of a skill development plan (relational, managerial, organisational, technical) consistent with the objectives of professional growth.

In preparation for the start of professionalizing actions, are mostly recurrent educational actions to support transitions as identified in the path for the young entrepreneur (*Cf.* section 4.3).

5.4.2.3 Path for the Work Insertion of Adaptive Young People

The young people inserted in this path have social resources that allow them having an immediately gratifying job, with respect to their expectations, and evaluating other possible alternatives, even of greater professionalisation, to find a 'steady, long-term work' (in the public, private and 'para-public' sectors).

The contextual factors (married life, marriage preparation, etc.) and job placement strategies – poorly defined – have a strong influence in the choice of job or in keeping existing ones, without looking for better solutions from a point of view of compatibility with the educational path followed.

Figure 6 – Main transitions detected for adaptive young people

PHASES	MAIN TRANSITIONS
1. Univ. Studies and occasional jobs	**Learning event –** (Studies, Training experiences) **Occasional jobs**
↓ *Comp. dev.*	
2. Univ. Degree	**Learning events –** (Training experiences)
↓ *Degree*	
3. NEET ◄	**Out of the education, training, labour market**
↓	
4. First post-degreee job search	**Learning events –** (random, on a short-term, if any, PhD application) **Temporary jobs –** (i.e.voluntary jobs, social cooperatives) **Personal events –** (marriage, own family set up)
↓ *1ˢᵗ job search*	
5. First job/ Comp. development	**Learning events –** (i.e. specialised post-degree Master on chilhood, legal pedagogy, PhD studies) **Permanent jobs –** (i.e. educator, teacher)
↓ *1ˢᵗ job/Comp. dev.*	
6. Second job (coherent) search	**Learning events –** (Master, vocational training courses) **Temporary jobs**
▲ *2ⁿᵈ job search*	

Type of propensity for work: the logic of a long-term job prevails, individuals expect job security, mostly in the public sector, a certain and long-term path of growth and career progression. They seek a job compatible with leisure time and personal life.

Types of transitions: in this case, the transitions, although complex, are fairly linear in the sequence of periods of inactivity (related, for example, to waiting for the publication of competitive examinations or scholarships) and periods of employment or professionalisation.

Factors impeding or facilitating the transition: obstacles to the progression of transitions to jobs or professionalizing actions (though present) are mainly related to the lack of openness to professional challenges disengaged from the stability of the employment relationship.

Educational actions undertaken: the pedagogical intervention, *preparatory to the transition*, supports young graduates in the design of educational interventions aimed at enhancing personal attitudes for the expression of professional aspirations that lead them to consider insertion in other paths (such as the path of *continuous improvement*) and other job positions.

Box 6

> "I thought a lot about the advice I received on the development of social skills in my work, to which I had not given weight. I think I have improved my relationship with the Director of the School with whom I actually have uneasy relations. Now I am trying to learn from those around me." (Participant no. 8)

Educational actions *during the transition* provide support in the evaluation of the professional insertion process more suitable and coherent for the young graduate.

5.4.2.4 Path for the Work Insertion of Discouraged Young People

The discouragement that characterizes this cluster of young people is connected to "not knowing how or where to seek work; an inability to find work matching their skills; previous job searches had led to no results; (…) the sense that no jobs were available in the area" (ILO, 2015, p. 3).

These are young people who actively search for work and opportunities of greater professionalisation to achieve a targeted and gratifying insertion. However, the results achieved in the course of their path affect the progression of transitions towards periods of recurring inactivity that they handle with difficulty.

The management of transitions in this path is mostly influenced by contextual factors and lack of clarity in job insertion strategies.

Figure 7 – Main transitions detected for *discouraged young people*

PHASES	MAIN TRANSITIONS
1. Univ. Studies and occasional jobs	**Learning events –** (Studies, Training experiences) **Occasional jobs –** (educator, non pertinent jobs)
↓ *Comp. dev./ occasional job*	
2. Univ. Degree	**Learning events –** (Training experiences)
↓ *Degree*	
3. NEET	**Out of the education, training, labour market**
↓	
4. First (pertinent/non pertinent) post-degree jobs/black market	i.e. waitress, barman, cleaning room officer, educator in social cooperatives, steward, clients management **Learning events –** (i.e. PhD preparation)
↓ *Occasional job*	
5. NEET	Out of the education, training, labour market
↓	
6. Comp. develop.	**Learning events –** (i.e.post-degree Master in Clinical Pedagogy, HR Management Master)
↓ *Formal learning experiences*	
7. NEET	Out of the education, training, labour market
↓	
8. Second (pertinent) job search	**Occasional Job** **Personal events –** (marriage, own family set up)
↓ *2nd job*	
9. NEET	Out of the education, training, labour market

Type of propensity for work: projects related to professional insertion are delayed with respect to other paths. The young graduates are aware of their discomfort associated to the termination or lack of professional assignments (whether or not relevant to their aspirations). Family ties are strong and can hinder job placement.

Types of transitions: transitions are characterized by multiplicity, by the duration – usually brief – of periods of employment and by the repetition of the succession of periods of no work.

Factors impeding or facilitating the transition: job hunting in a restricted geographic area (i.e., province, region) and limited to avoid separation from the family weakens the progression in transitions and impedes settling in an organisational context. The search is broad and diverse in terms of types of structures and services but limited to a territory that is clearly saturated or uncompetitive.

Box 7

> "I feel frustrated by the job search: I have implemented all possible strategies, I don't know what else to do.
> If I can't find a job, even temporary, I'll try with a master's in HR Management, even in France (where I come from)." (Participants no. 13 and 20).

Educational actions undertaken: the support of pedagogy prevails in the *management of transitions along the way*. It is configured in terms of

– Self-assessment of the skills possessed as a function of the hoped-for insertion.
– Analysis of the skills required by the productive sectors of interest.
– Design of educational actions that motivate young graduates to move away from the family of origin or nuclear family to gain useful professional experience away from home or undertake professionalisation paths, even of short duration, if sustainable.

In preparation for transitions to short periods of employment, other areas of pedagogical intervention concern the self-marketing of acquired skills.

Downstream from the transitions, the educational action supports processes of reflexivity on the activation of other job insertion paths (of young entrepreneurs or enterprising young people).

Conclusions. Employability, Transitions, Placement: Educational Objects?

We started the research in 2014, in a national context substantially far from pedagogical reflections on issues relating to the transition to work. Currently, conceptual sensitivity has become more intense, also due to the commitment that universities in Italy are being called upon to make in "taking stock", we might say, of the design of educational curricula. The reference to placement, relationship with the professional world, presence in degree course councils of stakeholders that can contribute to creating a context of relations with the professions and trades, is present in the ministerial documents and Decrees of the Italian Ministry of Universities and Scientific Research (MIUR). In this sense, some key points have been instrumental in the creation of a framework of reference, we could say: 1) The review and cyclical reports; 2) The 'SUA-CdS' sheet (Legislative Decree 19/2012); 3) The 'SUA-RD' sheet; 4) The Third Mission Evaluation (Ministerial Decree 47/2013).

Perhaps the economic climate is changing the direction of the legislator. If on the legislative front many changes are taking place to create the conditions for implementing more intense and specific relationships with the professional world, much more needs to be done on the educational front. In this sense, education for employability has yet to be introduced and, on the cultural and scientific level, the road will still be slow and difficult.

However, that road has been taken and we cannot stop it. So, the legislative and regulatory conditions serve as a frame for the growth of awareness about the creation of pedagogies of employability, of work-related education, of reflective and critical apprenticeships, of embedded employability processes that can really, not only support, but create and prepare adequate transitions.

We can say that the named objects have, effectively, an interesting and remarkable pedagogical and educational value: 1) The transition from university paths to entering the professional world investigates the way of being of individuals, young adults in higher education; the transition itself is a way of calling for the transformation, the very modification of one's sense of self, one's interior life and one's vision of the world; 2) The skills to working in the professions are the result of carefully constructed educational programs, developed with specific apprenticeships that allow gaining experience and making the knowledge learned operational; 3) Employability is the summary category that has the highest rate of educational and pedagogical knowledge since it is the translation of a process of change, disciplinary knowledge, empirical knowledge, technical and soft skills and of the meeting between supply and demand: 4) Placement enters as the result of a training process; we should not worry only about what and how our students learn, we should be

worrying about where they will apply what they have learned. It is also a theme that touches on Education for citizenship.

The research on graduates of the education sciences encourages us to think and to believe in the introduction of these educational objects within personalized and work-related learning, encourages us to support the presence of alternating paths, to require more intense collaboration with entrepreneurs and companies that will have to be co-authors of a change in higher education.

A final point of reflection concerns the methodology used by the research that, in an evidence-based manner, has taken charge of the stories of people in training. The empirical investigation has confronted us, as researchers, with the lives of the graduates, their desires, their dreams and their thoughts. The interviews have shown us positive and negative differences; as researchers we started listening, listening to life itself and it has been an intense and lively experience. It has given us a way to detect errors and deficiencies in the curriculum, it has given us a way to understand the generational, status and gender distance between us and them.

The research offers intense, in-depth knowledge about the university world. It would be important to undertake a similar path in every university. In a certain sense, the career service movement initiated by Italia Lavoro[8] in 2006 is exploring new ways of support to create soft skills, to develop employability and to promote internship and entrepreneurship programs.

The transition from reflection on transitions, on placement, to career service, passing through employability, is the direction for continuing the research. Precisely the career services are the natural development of this research to support and develop entry paths into the professional world. In Italy, a new debate on the subject is spreading and could, at the same time, be one of the solutions and a development of our objects of research for the future of the university and for the greater well-being of the population of young adults in higher education.

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[8] Italia Lavoro, now ANPAL Servizi S.p.A., is the in-house National Agency for the Active Labour Policies, settled on January 1, 2017 according to legislative decree No. 150/2015.

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Concluding Remarks

The Editors

The vision that has guided the research presented in the various chapters of this book was common and shared to provide knowledge and useful tools for enhancing the entrance of university students in the professional world. This objective was developed at various levels. In fact, the topics discussed relate to orientation upon entry to the university, progression through their program of study, the teaching methods used during the course of study, the development of a professional vocation, and the ways in which students enter the professional world.

The development of professional vocation applicable at work is an ambitious goal for an institution such as the university, which must combine this need with other objectives that are no less important, such as promoting the students' maturation, independent judgment, values and personal growth, to name a few. The role of the university in developing the employability of graduates is more critical in Italy than in other countries such as, for example, Germany, where companies - coordinated by industrial and scholastic policies - facilitate the school-work transition through effective apprenticeships (MacDuffie and Kochan, 1995) or, even, for example, Japan or the United States where vocational training in the workplace seems to be more recognized as necessary and implemented than in Italy (Ahmad & Schroeder, 2003).

The book captures the efforts of a groups of researchers who focused on the critical nodes of university education with the aim of creating and developing operating models and services to improve the academic success of students and the institution itself. These studies were run in a challenging context where severe and prolonged financial cuts brought many state universities to their knees and where the great recession started in 2008 keeps hurting the job market. In these difficult times, we believe that the practical and applicative consequences can be of great importance in guiding policy-makers during the arduous task of designing higher education courses that meet the needs of students, university teachers and businesses a decade from now. The validity of the results achieved in the near future will depend on both changes in the socio-economic context, in the higher education setting, and in the relationships between the environment and individual characteristics over time.

The first chapter of the book discussed a psychological construct that

seems to be basically stable over time: career calling. In this chapter the authors presented a theoretical model that integrates previous contributions of the relationships that exist between career calling, motivation, satisfaction, engagement and well-being. The results showed that having a calling, (i.e., a profound passion for a particular professional domain that gives meaning to our lives and that we feel to be part of our destinies), is strongly associated with how much individuals are involved in educational or work activities, the meaning attributed to their work, and how satisfied they are with their work. Results reported were summarized quantitatively for the first time in this chapter, which, on the one hand, helps us understand what career calling is, and, on the other hand, what it is not. In fact, results indicate a certain independence of the construct from others theoretically close constructs, such as identification with one's profession, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and the individual's adaptability to different career choices. The feeling of having a vocation seems to derive and depend on the level of the individual's involvement in the professional domain and creates a virtuous circle that promotes well-being and professional development.

One of the occasions in which university students most closely touch the professional domain to which they aspire is the internship. The chapter devoted to this subject proposed interesting results from this point of view: about 80% of the students responded that the internship was an experience that helped them understand their abilities, the type of work they wanted to do and what type of professionals are produced by their course of study. In fact, the authors suggest that internship is a crucial opportunity for improving students' self-awareness of their capabilities and professional aspirations and for developing medium and long-term career goals. In a perspective of enhancing the employability of graduates, this research shows that: a) internship is an essential teaching tool and a practice to expand in Italian universities; b) the students' internship learning outcomes are connected to the 'role modeling' processes, to the use of the technologies as learning springboards and to the reflective practices planned into and outside the organisation.

Similar results emerged from the research presented in the chapter that dealt with the personalization of teaching. This study allowed developing multiple theoretical frameworks based on three approaches; learner-centered teaching, personalized teaching and learning and student voice. The results from the survey, which explored the students' perception of the teaching styles of Italian universities, revealed strengths and weaknesses. In particular, with respect to the latter, teachers pay little attention to involving students in some crucial learning processes. Among these, there is little dialogue between teachers and students in negotiating the content of courses, a certain rigidity of role and reluctance to listen to the needs of students in the classroom (Waldeck, 2007). In particular, the educational offering is not based on the professional and

personal experiences of the students, but primarily on rigid and prepackaged curricula. With respect to methodology, teachers clearly pay little attention to group activities or classroom exercises. In fact, lecturing is by far the most common method, occupying the majority of teaching hours, and only 4% of students say that more than 50% of teachers gave them the opportunity to experiment in teaching a small part of the program, a practice that the literature shows to be particularly effective in the generation of new learning (Weimer, 2013). Other areas for improvement regard formative assessment and, specifically, activities of self-assessment and peer assessment, which are minimally used in classrooms and central to the constructs explored for the involvement of students (Cook-Sather, 2009). The last section of the survey concerned teaching and dialogue with the professional world, to understand how classroom teaching can be connected with professional (work-related) domains and how to generate opportunities for discussion and debate on work issues. In this case as well, the results provide very clear directions, demonstrating the limited connection of teaching practices with professional dimensions and, in particular, with ethical and social aspects and the development of generic skills (Dirkx, 2011). Only 10% of students say that more than 50% of teachers stimulated classroom reflection on the social importance of the professions and proposed collaborative activities with the professional world, such as research with links to the professional dimension.

Another important aspect in higher education for the construction of educational and professional paths is "guidance". The qualitative research study that investigated institutional guidance processes in Italian universities highlighted some problems, including a difficulty of the Italian university system to implement and apply theoretical models that place individuals at the center of the process (Guichard, 2012; Savickas et al., 2009); the over reliance on a information-dissemination model that does not encourage student involvement; and the lack of a clear recognition of the significant relationship between guidance and education. In the perception of the students involved in the research, guidance is generally undervalued, superficial and not supported by trained counsellors. Starting from the results and testing a brief course of reflexive guidance, implemented through student focus groups, several aspects were highlighted that may contribute to the creation of a training path for guidance counsellors that needs to be tested, validated and improved on subsequent occasions, with the aim of setting up an effective strategy that could be implemented as an institutional path of "orientation to a life project and education". These aspects are: 1) the effectiveness of the educational work carried out in group discussion; 2) the use of storytelling as a reflective tool for the development of knowledge, awareness, education and self-education; 3) the finding of an educational benefit perceived by the students in terms of self-awareness, ability to reflect, guidance skills; 4) the need to plan guidance

courses in the form of structured, systematic accompaniment; and 5) the generalizability of these aspects across the different contexts and territories surveyed.

Finally, the issue of school-work transitions discussed in chapter 5 revealed four interesting transition clusters, which the authors call the transitions of the entrepreneurial, enterprising, adaptive and discouraged student. Each of these paths has peculiar levers and barriers to employability. The work outcomes can be observed on at least two major fronts: an internal and micro character and an external and macro character. The first aspect is the application of the transition analysis of the Florentine graduates in Adult and Continuing Education and Pedagogical Sciences, which allows stating that educational activities of a formal nature, the transformation and changing of university curricula are necessary for implementing favorable conditions for the construction of skills useful in the professional world. The transformations of curriculum correspond, in pedagogical language, to transformations of educational actions. Changes could regard work-related learning, the implementation of intra- and trans-disciplinary courses, and new links between higher education programs and the labour market. The second aspect concerns the role of higher education in Italy and its inability to provide the tools necessary for the development of careers and professions in line with the degree and level of study. The qualitative analysis of the transitions also allows stating that the influence of the family context and personal characteristics are relevant factors supporting the ability to make an adequate transition from graduation to work and, above all, from the first job to a more stable situation with the second entry in the professional world.

The chapters presented across different approaches trace research paths for contextualized research on a number of topics starting from incoming guidance, through teaching, to arrive at the dimensions of career counseling and entrance into the professional world that can stimulate reflections for possible changes. The results provide direction for future research that places students at the center of all processes analyzed and the role of the institution as the catalyst of processes that regard the insertion of the student in the professional world.

The project aimed at identifying directions for innovation in higher education, seeking to identify lines of change within institutions ingrained in with long and deeply held traditions, a transformation that could take years and significant efforts. Among the most obvious is the need a) for collaboration and dialogue between the professional world and students; b) to de-privatize teaching (Robertson, 2007), so that teachers can jointly develop engaging and effective teaching approaches, c) to revise curricula based on the demands of the business world to develop a third mission of universities, making study courses useful, and finally d) for engaging university education in developing career callings that support individuals during their professional development

and the pursuit of well-being at work.

A great deal of data was obtained through these surveys and further analysis of it is ongoing. The authors consider it essential to continue the exchanges and sharing in coming months, creating opportunities in which all stakeholders can consider, discuss and validate these research findings. In order to express its value, a project of this type requires sharing at the institutional, national, international and policy-maker level. In this sense we are still in the initial stage. In fact, this book is placed precisely in this context and would like to mark its beginning. Our hope is to disseminate and promote these results even at inter- and trans-disciplinary level, the only possible way to transform our research into a common patrimony of scholars, researchers, university teachers, students and policy-makers who want to invest in improving and innovating higher education.

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