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03 May 2026

Employability & Competences

Innovative Curricula for New Professions

edited by
Vanna Boffo
Monica Fedeli

FIRENZE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Studies on Adult Learning and Education

– 8 –

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Employability & Competences

Innovative Curricula for New Professions

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Monica Fedeli

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INTRODUCTION: THE PROJECT FROM BEGINNING TO END AND BEYOND

Monica Fedeli (University of Padua), Vanna Boffo (University of Florence)[*]

The present volume is the result of a three year PRIN Research project called *Employability and Competences*, which was developed in Italy in order to respond to the need for innovation and modernization in higher education. A consortium of universities (Padova, Firenze, Siena, Napoli Parthenope) conducted the research within the higher education system starting March 2014 and ending March 2017. The volume collects a relevant number of contributions of scholars that take part to the last conference in Florence, organized in March 2017.

This book had a significant impact, since it is calling into question the long tradition of teaching (transmission) in Italian universities, the innovation of teaching and learning in higher education and the challenge of employability consulting the Italian scientific community around four major foci of the research: didactics, traineeship, guidance and calling, and employability and transitions.

The purpose of the research was to generate new strategies, models, methodologies to modernize the traditional Italian university system, to create space for teaching and learning and to connect the university programs with the professional communities in order to improve employability after the economic crises of 2008.

Guiding research questions for the book included: How can we innovate the teaching and learning in higher education in our traditional context? How can we listen to the needs of the students and connect them with those of the labor world? How can we promote work-related teaching and learning in our courses? How can we manage the transitions from the university to the labor market, how can we train faculty to respond to these new challenges and students to be active and engage them during the college?

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These questions were explored by five research groups of four Universities (Padova, Firenze, Siena and Napoli Parthenope). Surveys and qualitative research designs developed with interviews, focus groups and observation. More than 20.000 students responded to the surveys and were involved in the studies.

This book is organized around two main parts.

Part I discusses the related research themes and how they help to establish a strong rationale for the PRIN project.

In chapter I Michelangelo Vianello, together with Anna Dalla Rosa e Barbara Barbieri, presents a three-wave longitudinal study, that investigated the role of mentoring on calling development, in the second chapter Barbara Barbieri discusses some reflections and results arose from the study on the calling construct presented by the colleagues of University of Padova.

In chapter II Monica Fedeli and Daniela Frison introduced innovative constructs of teaching: student voice, work-related teaching and learning and the related implications in higher education. The aim is to share with the community the results of the research, how we can listen the voice of our students and how we can design work-related practices for promoting employability in the classroom. Some case studies, data analysis and methodological recommendations in both contributions are presented to give clear indications of some implications for practice.

Claudio Melacarne, and Maura Striano present the internship and the importance of supporting this kind of situated and embedded learning experience for students and how it can generate awareness about their future professional choices.

Francesco Lo Presti, Bruno Rossi and Antonella Cunti focus their chapters on guidance as a pedagogical tool, and considers how guidance can develop meaningful paths for young people at the beginning of their university career. The main areas of interventions, the strengthens and weaknesses of the practices are discussed as well as how to improve some of these approaches to be more successful.

In the last chapter of Part I Vanna Boffo and Paolo Federighi deal with the last segment of the chain of higher education: employability and transitions, in particularly how to promote employability in higher education and how to support students during the transition from university to work and to attempt to match and connect the competences taught at university with those needed by the labor market.

These topics were discussed during the final conference organized in Florence with the contributions of international scholars invited to add global perspectives into the research and to create and stimulate the community to go beyond these results and to develop new ideas on the basis of the research results collected in the last three years.

Part II of the book is a rich collection of descriptive and empirical studies on the main topics of the project. We asked colleagues of the Italian pedagogical community to present their contributions in order to enlarge the perspectives and with the aim of improving, innovating and changing our higher education system. This aim is encouraged in the report on *Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions* (European Commission, 2013) which states: higher education institutions need to create environments and feedback mechanisms and systems to allow students' views, learning experience, and their performance to be taken into account (p. 28).

Another key recommendation is the involvement of students and business in curricula design, such that: «curricula should be developed and monitored through dialogue and partnerships among teaching staff, students, graduates and labor market actors, drawing on new methods of teaching and learning, so that students acquire relevant skills that enhance their employability» (p. 41). Furthermore, there should be an emphasis on providing counseling and mentoring services helping ensure that make their way to graduation and beyond. This part of the book is divided in four sections and each section deals with a theme related to the project.

Chapter I Didactics is a collection of studies on the didactics in the higher education. Valentina Grion, Concetta Tino, Nadia Sansone, Donatella Cesareni, Ilaria Bortolotti, Glenda Galeotti, Gilda Esposito, Daniela Maccario, and Nicola Adrian present some issues related to teaching in classroom, and to promote service learning, teachers' development and innovation involving students and teachers together.

Chapter II Internship deals with informal learning setting and traineeship. Giordana Szpunar, Barbara Barbieri, Manuela Gallerani, Cristina Palmieri, Andrea Galimberti, Tania Morgigno, Marina Barioglio, Maria Benedetta, Gambacorti Passerini, Alessandra Romano, and Patrizia Sposetti. This section is a collection of practices and studies developed in higher education and schools in order to give value to the informal experiences of situated and embedded learning, considering the role of students and teachers and how they can create partnership with organizations and labor market.

Chapter III Guidance & Calling is dedicated to the educational guidance and how to promote educational development during the guidance process. Furthermore, this section explores the new concept of 'calling' and its role in education and for the development of students' skills in order to improve their persistence in higher education and facilitate their entrance in the labor market.

Pierluigi Malavasi, Sergio Bellantonio, Natascia Bobbo, Silvia Lazzaro, Valentina Paola Cesarano, Marianna Capo, Maria Carolina Galdo, Maura Striano, Alessandra Priore, Marco Schiavetta, Sonia Startari, and

Barbara Barbieri present studies and practices related to guidance and calling developed in different fields of higher education from the medical to the international setting and with students with disability that give us a rich range of insights to take into consideration in our pedagogical community for future research.

Chapter IV Employability and Transition discusses from different perspectives the need to manage and improve the work transitions in higher education in order to foster employability. Massimiliano Costa, Andrea Strano, Maria Luisa Iavarone, Fausta Sabatano, Gaia Gioli, Cristina Lisimberti, Stefano Polenta, Carlo Terzaroli, Francesca Torlone, and Alessandra Vischi offer the readers classroom and informal learning experiences and practices. They provide concrete suggestions how to develop or implement new strategies for supporting students in the transitions and creating employability skills during college. Policies and university career services are taken into consideration as well as part of the discussion for the area.

In conclusion a personal note and acknowledgments is provided about the people who managed, supported and developed this project with us. We mention first the colleagues, with whom we had and still have the privilege to work; prominent scholars and friends who had never given up during this long journey that was rich of new insights, discoveries in term of research, but also difficulties and weaknesses. Francesco Lo Presti, Claudio Melacarne and Michelangelo Vianello and ourselves. We were in charge of the realization of the project and won the challenge to follow the research from the beginning to the end. This was a great opportunity for our career development. We grew up together united by the passion for research, with a constant attention to the results and the pleasure found in working hard and together. All this makes our community stronger and capable to share, builds informal relationships and develops a sense of empathy that became an instrument of creating better research and learning opportunities. Each of us was the leader of a research team, in which other colleagues, young scholars, and PhD students collaborate and make all that we reached possible!

Finally, our sincere thanks to all the colleagues of the entire pedagogical community that contributed in different ways to the development of the project and to the authors of this book. Most of them went through different phases of the project and share with us their studies and their consideration in many occasions.

Looking back, we feel more confident, that we will manage other projects together, looking beyond… We really want to create new opportunities and challenges to work together and to develop communities of scholars that are interested in thinking critically how to innovate the educational field and give young people the opportunity to grew up in a more engaging educational environment!

References

European Commission 2013, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

PART I

RESULTS OF RESEARCH THROUGH THE 5 PATHWAYS

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CALLING DURING COLLEGE: A 3-YEAR INVESTIGATION

THE ROLE OF MENTORS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CALLING IN STUDENTS: A 3-YEAR INVESTIGATION

Anna Dalla Rosa (University of Padua), Michelangelo Vianello (University of Padua), Barbara Barbieri (University of Cagliari)[*]

Abstract: In a three-wave longitudinal study, we investigated the role of mentoring on calling development. The results suggest that the mere presence of a mentor is associated with higher levels of calling and the development of a calling is fostered by the mentors' calling orientation, yet it is restrained by mentors' job and career orientation.

Keywords: calling, longitudinal design, calling development, mentorship.

1. Introduction

A calling is a multi-dimensional construct that describes affective, motivational, spiritual, and identity-related facets of the relationship between individuals and specific domains in life or work. Viewing one's career as a calling is critical to the individual success and central in promoting positive work-related outcomes (Dobrow, Heller 2014; Dobrow, Tosti-Kharas 2011, 2012; Duffy, Allan, Autin, Douglass 2014; Duffy, Douglass, Autin, Allan 2014; Hirschi, Herrmann 2012, 2013; Praskova, Hood, Creed 2014). Theoretical and empirical contributions suggest that a calling changes over time (Dobrow 2013; Duffy, Manuel, Borger, Bott 2011; Vianello, Galliani, Dalla Rosa, Anselmi, Unpublished manuscript) and involves an «ongoing process» (Duffy, Dik 2013) in which individuals evaluate the purpose and meaningfulness of their job activities and the quality of the interaction with the context. Despite an emerging interest in calling, little is known about the origin of calling and whether the social environment influences its development. Previous research suggested that the social environment may influence individuals' attitude toward work and help people live out their calling (Cardador, Dane, Pratt 2011; Guo *et al.* 2014; Harzer, Ruch 2012). Trusted sources of information and experienced individuals may play an important role in the development of calling by providing a role and an attitude model (Ragins, Cotton, Miller 2000).

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2. Theoretical backgrounds

2.1 The role of the social environment in calling development

There are only three published studies that investigated the role of others in the development of a calling, and all these studies focused on the development of a calling for the music domain (Dobrow, Tosti-Kharas 2012; Dobrow 2006, 2013). Dobrow (2006) found that parents' involvement in the arts had a positive effect on students' initial calling for the music domain. Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2012) investigated the relationship between calling and students' receptivity to the advice, provided by a mentor, which discourages them from pursuing a professional path in their calling domain. They found that calling reduces the effect of the discouraging advice, so that students with a higher calling are more likely to ignore negative career-related advice provided by their private music teacher. This result was replicated in a cross-sectional study that involved a sample of business students.

In 2013, Dobrow investigated the role of social comfort in the development of a calling. Social comfort in the music domain measures the extent to which students enjoy spending time with other musicians, and it was found to have a positive effect on initial calling and a small negative effect on its development over time. Finally, Dalla Rosa, Vianello, and Anselmi (Unpublished manuscript), found that social support provided by friends, family and a special person helps students to develop their calling. Taken together, these results suggest that a calling is not only an intraindividual phenomenon. There is evidence of a connection between the intimate experience of having a calling and relationships with others and the social context (Dobrow, 2006, 2013; Dobrow, Tosti-Kharas 2012). Indeed, participants in qualitative studies commonly mentioned the supportive role of others as a factor that influences the emergence of a calling (Duffy *et al.* 2012; French, Domene 2010). The effect of social comfort and support on calling suggests that the enjoyment and pleasure in being around others, and the presence of people with whom students can discuss their problems and who are willing to comfort and encourage them fosters calling development. However, we do not know whether these positive effects on calling are due to the mere presence of people willing to support or whether these persons may also represent a role and attitude model.

The study conducted by Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas in 2012 was the first to focus on the role of a mentor and suggested that having a strong calling is associated with greater willingness to ignore negative career advice on time. However, this study did not investigate the specific effect of having a mentor in the development of a calling. Thus, the role of the social context in the development of calling is still unclear.

2.2 The role of a mentor in career development

Research on career attitude and commitment highlighted the importance of others, especially family, peers and mentors, on career development. Some scholars have suggested that a mentor may positively influence the work attitude of a protégé (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, DuBois 2008; Ragins *et al.* 2000), may help to find a meaning in work (Rosso, Dekas, Wrzesniewski 2010) and may support the development of workplace spirituality (Buzzanell 2009; Reave 2005; Weinberg, Locander 2014).

First, mentoring was found to influence the way people experience a work role. Research comparing people with and without a mentor showed that the presence of a reference and a trusted person leads to greater career and job satisfaction, career commitment and involvement, positive job attitude and motivation (Ragins *et al.* 2000; Payne, Huffmann 2005; Chao 1997; Eby *et al.* 2008).

Workplace spirituality can be defined as «the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community» (Ashmos, Duchon 2000: 137). Weinberg and Locander (2014) suggest that a mentor provides not only psychological and vocational support, but can also provide spiritual support, encouraging the development of protégé workplace spirituality. Specifically, a mentor helps finding meaning in work activities, encourages a protégé to associate work with what they think is important in life, and might promote «a sense of transcendence throughout the work process by appealing to his or her sense of calling» (Weinberg, Locander 2014: 395). A mentor with high levels of calling might help a person to find meaning in an activity, to understand the deeper aspects of work and, consequently, provide the opportunity to develop a sense of calling.

Having a calling gives meaning and purpose to a life role (Dik, Duffy 2009; Dobrow, Tosti-Kharas 2011; Praskova *et al.* 2014), and it is related to well-being and positive work outcomes (Dalla Rosa, Vianello, Galliani 2017). Therefore, positive work attitude, work meaningfulness and workplace spirituality are all constructs that are theoretically related to calling hence we expect to find evidence of a relationship between mentorship and calling. In addition, a mentor can be perceived as a role model. This implies that protégés could carry on imitating and assimilating values and attitudes of their mentor (Bell 1970; Kaufmann, Harrell, Milam, Woolverton, Miller 1986). This may also be true for protégés' perception of having a calling.

3. Hypotheses

This study investigated the role of a mentor on calling development focusing on two factors: (1) the effect of the mere presence of a mentor, and

(2) the effect of mentors' orientation toward work on their protégés' calling. First, we hypothesize that students with a mentor have a higher level of calling than students who do not have a mentor (HP1). In addition, we expect the level of calling of students with a mentor to increase over time, and to remain stable or to decrease over time for students without a mentor (HP2). Second, we expect that mentors' orientation toward work influence their protégés' calling over time, making them more similar (HP3). According to the values of openness and reproducibility (Open Science, <https://osf.io/tvyxz/wiki/home/>), these hypotheses and analysis plans have been already registered and are publicly available at <https://osf.io/2wcky/>.

4. Materials and method

Data were collected in three waves using a non-experimental online survey. The second and third wave respectively occurred 12 and 24 months after the first data collection. A sample of 5886 bachelor's and master's students enrolled at four Italian universities was involved in the first data collection (T1), 1700 students took part in the second data collection (T2), and 881 took part in the third data collection (T3). The analyses presented in this study were performed on the sample of 434 students who participated at all the three waves.

4.1 Participants

The sample was mainly composed of women (63.8%, 65.8%, and 68% females at T1, T2, and T3, respectively). Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 69 (M_{T1} = 23.37; SD_{T1} = 5.39; M_{T2} = 23.47; SD_{T2} = 4.82; M_{T3} = 24.02; SD_{T3} = 4.50). Among the students who took part to the three data collection 28% (n = 123 out of 434) declared that they had a mentor at times 1, 2 and 3; 27% declared that they did not have a mentor at times 1, 2 and 3 (n = 118 out of 434). In our sample, a mentor is often a professor at high school (10.7%; 8.7%; 7% respectively at T1, T2 and T3) or at College (8.6%; 9.9%; 9.6% respectively at T1, T2 and T3), a friend or a relative (16.5%; 9.8%; 15.1 respectively at T1, T2 and T3).

4.2 Measures

Calling. We used the 22-item Unified Multidimensional Calling Scale (Vianello, Dalla Rosa, Anselmi, Unpublished manuscript), which measures seven facets of calling: passion, purposefulness, sacrifice, pervasiveness, prosocial orientation, transcendent summons, and identity. Identity was not assessed at Time 1. A detailed presentation of the measure is reported at https://osf.io/zc8ha.

Student and mentor orientation toward work. Students were provided with three paragraphs (Work-Life Questionnaire; Wrzesniewski *et al.* 1997) describing work as a job (e.g. people only interested in the material benefits of working), a career (e.g. people mainly interested in achievement and power), or a calling (e.g. people work for personal satisfaction and fulfillment), and asked which one best matched their orientation to work. We then asked them to indicate if they have a mentor (a person with experience, who is a wise guide, a reference model and a trusted advisor; Noe 1988; Ragins *et al.* 2000) and to describe the mentor's orientation toward work using the same scale.

4.3 Analytical Procedure

To test the effect of the mere presence of a mentor on calling (hypotheses 1 and 2), generalized linear models for repeated measures were adopted. The dependent variables were the facets of calling (within subject variables). The independent variables were the presence of a mentor at T1, T2 and T3 (between-subject variables with 2 levels: with and without a mentor). A full factorial design was estimated with the main effects of both the within (time) and between subjects (presence of a mentor) factors, and the interaction terms between presence of mentor and time. In addition, we performed t-tests and post-hoc analyses in order to test whether the dependent variables significantly increased over time within each group, and if the differences in the level of dependent variables were significant within time and groups.

To test the effects of mentors' orientation toward work on students' experience of having a calling (Hypothesis 3) we estimated and compared four alternative nested panel models (Little, Preacher, Selig, Card 2007; Selig, Little 2012). In each model, we specified alternative longitudinal relationships between mentor's orientation (job, career and calling) and students' calling (seven facets) and orientation toward work (job, career, calling). Model 1 was a baseline autoregressive model (no lagged effects) which estimated the effect of a construct on itself over time and the correlations between different constructs evaluated at the same time point. The second model added the cross-lagged paths from mentor orientation toward work at T1 and T2 to students' orientation toward work and calling respectively at T2 and T3. The third model added to Model 1 the cross-lagged path from students' calling and orientation toward work at T1 and T2 to mentor's orientation toward work respectively at T2 and T3. In this model, the opposite of Model 2, measures of student calling and calling orientation influences their mentor's orientation toward work. This alternative is possible, for example, if students chose a mentor according to their orientation toward work. Finally, the fourth model estimated all the cross-lagged structural patterns to test the hypothesis that students

and mentors influence each other over time. Models were estimated using MPlus 6.11 (Muthén, Muthén 1998–2012). To choose the best-fitting model between alternatives, we used the chi-square test of close fit, the difference in comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), and the standardized root mean squared of residuals (SRMR). We interpreted a difference in CFI and SRMR greater than .01 as evidence that the least parsimonious model should be chosen (Chen 2007; Cheung, Rensvold 2002).

5. Results

5.1 Hypotheses 1 and 2: effects of the mere presence of a mentor

First, we tested the effect of the mere presence of a mentor on calling level and development. Figure 1 show interaction and main effects of the presence of a mentor on calling facets. We found a significant main effect of mentor at T1 on passion ($F(1,419) = 8.20$, $\mu^2 = .02$), transcendent summons ($F(1, 380) = 11.54$, $\mu^2 = .03$), sacrifice ($F(1,415) = 4.64$, $\mu^2 = .01$) and pervasiveness ($F(1, 420) = 7.88$, $\mu^2 = .02$). Thus, students with a mentor showed different levels of calling depending on the presence of a mentor at Time 1. Specifically, within each time, students with a mentor have higher levels of calling than students without a mentor. We then analyzed the difference in the level of calling between the group of students with a mentor and the group without a mentor. Results suggest that students with a mentor at Time 1, 2 and 3 have higher levels of passion, sacrifice, transcendent summons, prosocial orientation, purposefulness, identity and pervasiveness than students without a mentor during the entire data collection (t test ranged from $t(239) = -2.99$ to $t(231) = -4.87$).

Regarding the effects of the mere presence of a mentor on calling development, we found a significant two-way interaction between the presence of a mentor at T2 and time on Sacrifice, $F(2,418) = 6.36$, $\mu^2 = .03$, and Pervasiveness, $F(2, 419) = 4.05$, $\mu^2 = .02$. The significant interaction of time and presence of a mentor means that the groups' level of calling changes over time and in different ways depending on the presence of a mentor. Specifically, sacrifice and pervasiveness decrease significantly over time only for students with a mentor at T1 and T2 who lose it at T3 (paired *t*-tests for sacrifice: $t_{T2\text{-}T3}(31) = 2.46$, $p = .02$; and pervasiveness: $t_{T2\text{-}T3}(31) = 2.11$, $p = .04$). However, this result was observed on a small sample of 33 students.

We found two significant interaction effects on prosocial orientation, specifically between the presence of a mentor at T2 and 3 and Time, $F(2,417) = 3.45$, $\mu^2 = .02$, and between time and the presence of a mentor at T1 and 3, $F(2,417) = 3.23$, $\mu^2 = .02$. Specifically, prosocial orientation increases over time for the group of students with an unstable presence of a mentor over time ($t_{T1\text{-}T2}(188) = -2.46$, $p = .01$; $t_{T1\text{-}T3}(188) = -3.27$, $p < .001$).

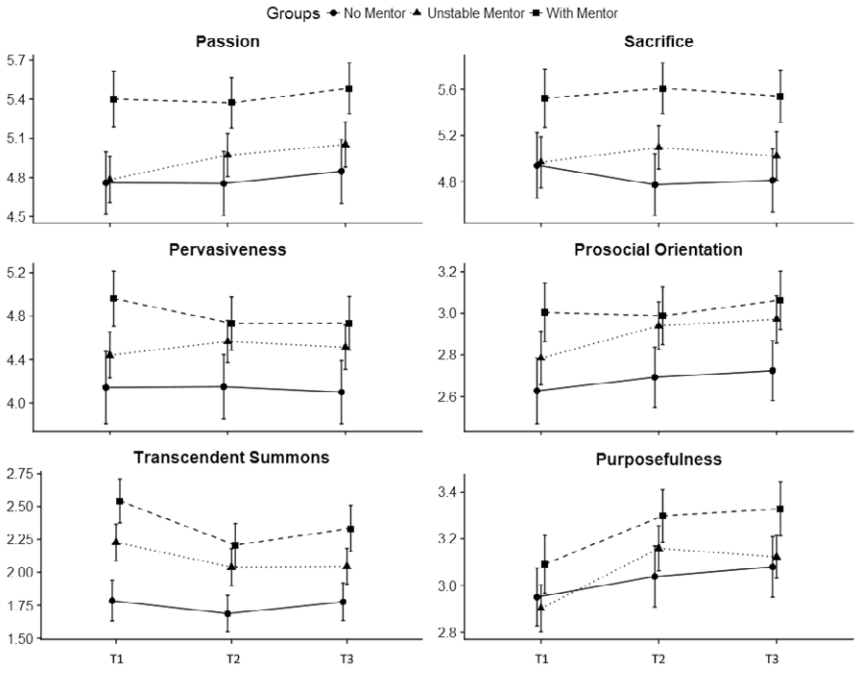
Finally, there is a significant interaction effect between time and the presence of a mentor at T1, 2 and 3 on passion, $F(2,418) = 3.38$, $\mu^2 = .02$. Passion increases over time for students who had an unstable presence of a mentor over time ($t_{T1\text{-}T2}(187) = -2.44$, $p = .02$; $t_{T1\text{-}T3}(190) = -3.16$, $p = .002$).

We did not found significant interaction effects on transcendent summons, however we observed that it decreases significantly over time for students with a mentor ($t_{T1\text{-}T2}(116) = 3.74$, $p < .001$) and with an unstable presence of a mentor ($t_{T1\text{-}T2}(173) = 3.37$, $p < .001$; $t_{T1\text{-}T3}(173) = 2.87$, $p < .001$).

Finally, purposefulness increases for students with a mentor ($t_{T1\text{-}T2}(122) = -4.05$, $p < .001$; $t_{T1\text{-}T3}(122) = -3.52$, $p = .001$), for students without a mentor ($t_{T1\text{-}T3}(117) = -2.04$, $p = .04$), and for the group with an unstable presence of a mentor ($t_{T1\text{-}T2}(189) = -5.00$, $p < .001$; $t_{T1\text{-}T3}(188) = -4.19$, $p < .001$).

These results provided a mixed picture of whether the presence of a mentor is associated with an increase or decrease in calling over time. Sacrifice and pervasiveness tend to decrease significantly when students lose their mentor. Both prosocial orientation and passion increase over time for students who have an unstable presence of a mentor over time.

Figure 1 – Interaction and main effects of the mere presence of a mentor on students' calling.



Different lines represent groups of students with a mentor (n = 123), without a mentor (n = 118) and with a non-stable presence of a mentor across the data collections (n = 193). Bars represent 95% confidence interval. Across time, students with a mentor showed higher levels of passion and sacrifice than students without a mentor. Pervasiveness was higher at Time 1 for students with a mentor compared to the other groups. Transcendent Summons was lower at Time 1 for students without a mentor compared to the other groups.

5.2 Hypothesis 3: The longitudinal effect of mentors' orientation on protégés' orientation and calling

To test the third hypothesis, we analyzed the effect of mentor's orientation toward work on student's orientation and calling. Table 1 shows model comparisons and fit indices for the four competing models. The models have a moderate fit to the data; CFI is around .90, with RMSEA lower than .06 and SRMR lower than .13. One possible reason for the non-excellent fit is that the paths between different dimensions of calling over time are not estimated. Since the focus of the analysis was the effect of mentors' orientation, it was decided to not modify the models and to focus on comparisons.

Table 1 – Results of Nested-Models comparisons.

	ΔCFI	ΔRMSEA	ΔSRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	p	Winner
Model 1 vs. 2	-.01	-.002	.024	102.38	60	<.001	Model 2
Model 1 vs. 3	-.006	-.003	.004	88.15	57	.005	Model 1
Model 1 vs. 4	-.014	-.005	.029	186.18	116	<.001	Model 4
Model 2 vs. 4	-.004	-.003	.005	83.803	56	.01	Model 2

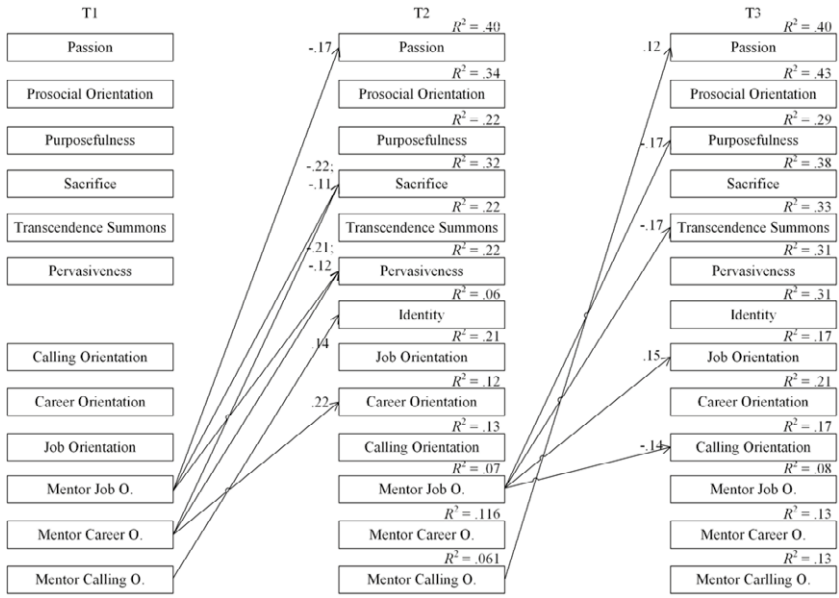
Note. Model 1 - autoregressive: $\chi^2(456) = 1064.80$; CFI = .896; RMSEA = .055; 95% CI [.051-.06]; SRMR = .13. Model 2 - Mentor influences protégé: $\chi^2(396) = 962.41$; CFI = .906; RMSEA = .057; 95 CI [.053-.062]; SRMR = .106. Model 3 - Protégé influences Mentor: $\chi^2(399) = 976.64$; CFI = .902; RMSEA = .058; 95% CI [.053-.062]; SRMR = .126. Model 4 - Reciprocal causation model: $\chi^2(340) = 878.61$; CFI = .91; RMSEA = .06; 95% CI [.056-.065]; SRMR = .101.

The chi-square difference tests between Models 1, 2, and 4 were significant, and the differences in CFI and/or SRMR were larger than .01. Model 2 and 4 fit the data better than Model 1. On the contrary, the differences in CFI and SRMR suggested that Model 3, which specifies student's calling as a predictor of mentor's orientation toward work, did not fit the data better than Model 1 and was then rejected.

Models 2 and Model 4 were then compared in order to identify which types of causal relationship, mentor to protégé or reciprocal, better de-

scribes our data. Model 4 (reciprocal causation) was favored over Model 2 by the test of close fit, but not by the differences in CFI and SRMR, which were lower than .01. Hence, we accepted Model 2 as the most parsimonious. This result suggests that mentors' orientation toward work influence student's calling and orientation. Figure 2 reports the non-null effects of mentor on students' calling.

Figure 2 – Model 2: Statistically significant paths from mentors' orientation toward work on students' levels of calling and calling orientation. Covariances and autoregressive paths are not depicted for clarity. O. = Orientation toward work.



The effect of a mentor on calling is mainly due to the career and job orientation toward work. Mentor's job orientation negatively influences students' passion, sacrifice, and pervasiveness at T2, and negatively influences students' transcendent summons, purposefulness, and calling orientation at T3. The mentor's job orientation has a positive effect on students' job orientation. Having a mentor who is interested in material benefits from work reduces student's passion, willingness to sacrifice, pervasiveness, purposefulness and transcendent summons. In addition, having a mentor with a job orientation promotes the same attitude on students and discourage a calling orientation toward work.

Mentor's career orientation at T1 has a negative effect on students sacrifice and pervasiveness, and promotes students career orientation at T2. Having a mentor interested in career and success, promotes in the protégé the same interest in career and success, while it reduces willingness to sacrifice and pervasiveness.

Mentor's calling orientation has a positive significant effect on students' identity at T2 and passion at T3. So, when mentors are passionate, when they live out their work as a vital part of their life, students tend to develop higher identification and passion in their calling domain.

6. Discussion

This study is, to our knowledge, the first investigation of the effect of mentoring on the development of calling. In agreement with hypothesis 1, we found that students with a mentor show a higher calling than students without a mentor within three time points. Second, the presence of a mentor was expected to increase the level of calling over time (Hypothesis 2). Our results did not provide a clear support for this hypothesis. The mere presence of a mentor is related to both an increment and decrement in calling: it is possible that individuals vary much on their calling development (Vianello, Galliani *et al.*, Unpublished manuscript) and that other variables intervene in explaining how the presence of a mentor influences changes in calling over time.

To test the third hypothesis we analyzed the effect that a mentor's orientation has on the students' sense of calling and orientation. A mentor was expected to shape the protégé's sense of work as a calling, a job, or a career, because there is evidence that a mentor influences their protégé's attitudes (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, Lima, 2004; Eby *et al.* 2008), and because people look to others for cues regarding how to think and behave (Social Learning Theory; Bandura 1971; Social Information Processing Theory; Salancik, Pfeffer 1978). The results support the presence of a longitudinal effect of a mentor on a student's calling and attitude toward work. The model with a mentor's job, career and calling orientation as predictors of students' calling (Model 2) better represented the data. Results suggest that having a mentor interested in career advancement or financial gain inhibits the development of a calling. Indeed, mentor job and career orientation emerged as strong negative predictors of protégé calling. If examples of people with a calling are not available, students might be less willing to find or look for their calling. On the other hand, the calling orientation of a mentor is associated to an increase in students' identification in and passion for the calling domain. Therefore, it seems that the role of a mentor can be more useful if it allows an individual's calling to be expressed in a particular job, profession, role or area of life, rather than orientating the calling to a particular job or role.

Even if these results are only tentative, they contribute to the literature on calling in many ways. Having a mentor is associated with higher initial calling and mentor's orientation influences a protégé's calling orientation and levels of calling facets toward work. Having a mentor

with a job or career orientation toward work may prevent the development of a calling. Thus, we do not know why students with a mentor have a higher level of calling than students without a mentor. One possible explanation is that students with higher levels of calling are more likely to look for a mentor. This theoretical account was not analyzed in this study, and represents one of the open questions that may be addressed in future research.

7. Limitations and future directions

Further analyses are needed to clarify some results. First, we did not investigate thoroughly the development of calling for students who lost and/or found their mentor during the data collection (unstable presence of a mentor). Thus, further research is needed in order to extend our results. Second, we did not investigate whether variables such as gender, duration of and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship, the type of mentorship relation (formal or informal), and the quality of the mentoring (role modeling, vocational and psychological support), intervene in explaining the influence of a mentor on students' calling orientation. Literature on mentorship suggests that gender is a key factor in influencing people's choices, quality of relationship and the effectiveness of a mentorship (Ragins, Cotton 1991; Scandura, Williams 2001). Formal and informal mentoring relationships (Ragins *et al.* 2000; Kram 1985) have different origins and different developments; we might expect an informal mentor to be more effective in terms of influencing a student's attitude toward work than a formal mentor. In addition, how much a person considers the mentor as a role model or the level of psychological and vocational support provided by the mentor may explain the association between mentor's and protégé's calling and orientation toward work that we found. As applied to mentoring relationships, role modeling can be seen as a form of relational identification (Mitchell, Eby, Ragins 2015); role modeling involves the protégé identifying with the mentor and the protégé internalizing valued aspects of the mentor into his or her self concept (Kram 1985). Third, a critical point in these results is that mentor orientation toward work was assessed only by students. Thus, a study involving both mentors and protégés is needed.

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THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: A REFLECTION ON THE CALLING CONSTRUCT

Barbara Barbieri (University of Cagliari)[*]

Abstract: This brief chapter arises from reflections on the research studies relating to the Calling construct, carry out by colleagues from the University of Padua. Basically this is a reasoning on the implications of which we should (as academics) always keep in mind when we are called to think about career paths for students, and how it could be important to help students to develop a Calling, putting them in the conditions of making an aware and passionate choice about their future working life.

Keywords: calling; multidimensional construct, vocational behavior, students career, University of Padua.

This brief chapter arises from reflections on research studies relating to the Calling Construct presented by colleagues from the University of Padua (Dalla Rosa, Galliani, Vianello 2014; 2017; Dalla Rosa, Vianello, Anselmi 2017) at the Final Event of the Project *Employability & Competencies. Innovative Curricula for New Professions*. Certainly, as my colleagues have suggested, from a theoretical point of view, a calling is a complex multidimensional construct that describes spiritual, motivational, affective, and identity-related facets of the relationship between individuals and a specific domain in life or work (Wrzesniewski *et al.* 1997; Dik, Duffy 2009; Elangovan *et al.* 2010; Dalla Rosa, Galliani, Vianello 2016). The longitudinal research carried out by colleagues on the development of a calling – the sample consisted of Italian college students – during three years of university, highlighted, very clearly, that calling is far from being a stable construct such as a personality trait, but is extremely dynamic. In addition, 'being called' is not a condition for engaging in domain-related activities or for developing a clear idea of our professional future, but quite the opposite, if anything: the more students have a clear idea of their future and the more they engage in learning activities, the more they will develop a calling. The findings underlined some important practical implications for both professors and university governance, namely, that if we foster students' engagement and if we let them explore many different domains, we help them feel passion for a domain and find a meaning in their work and their life. It is precisely upon this point that I will try to reason: on the implications of what we should (as academics)

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always keep in mind when we are called to think about career paths for students, and how it could be important to help students develop a calling, by putting them in the conditions of making an informed and passionate choice about their future working life. In fact, the topic is central for those research fields that focus on creating value within organizations, within a wider scenario which is that of the knowledge economy, where the gaze is increasingly shifted from human capital (what you know) to psychological capital (who you are) as a possible competitive advantage for organizations, in which the search for 'talents' becomes a necessary condition to remain competitive in the marketplace. Talent is a keyword within the theme of the calling, because one of the questions about this construct is just this: is it a gift or a talent?

There is no unambiguous answer to this in the literature, however it seems more interesting, for the sake of reasoning, to remain within the dimension of talent, since a talent requires exercise and an area of action in which its practice is defined.

As has already been said, the authors of this study have proposed a multidimensional and integrated definition of the Calling Construct, which describes the relationship between individuals and a specific domain in life or work. Hence, although it is a construct whose dimensions are individual, and in turn, these dimensions can be considered as individual personal resources, it should however be explained within a social relationship, for the above reasons.

Indeed, the findings of this research underline that a calling is an outcome of something, rather than a predictor of something else. In this regard, it seems important to emphasize what Hall & Chandler (2005) have pointed out regarding the definition and domain (subjective vs. objective) of calling, namely, the need to abandon an 'either/or' logic. Instead, it is the interdependence between the two domains that is the central question, to wit, the relationship between subjective and objective, or between individual and organization. Though a calling is something we 'feel', if we move from a transcendent dimension, it can be 'felt' only if it is tied to the dimension of doing, or can be 'discovered' only through doing, or 'found' within the process of attributing meaning to acting, which drives us to pursue a goal. Within this relationship between subjective and objective, the finding of the Calling Study tells us that the greater the engagement, the higher the chances of developing a calling. Therefore, it could be said that a calling is a *talent* that emerges.

Despite being rooted in the well-established theoretical and empirical tradition of vocational psychology, and in the more recent sphere of positive psychology, research into the Calling Construct is still in its preliminary stages (Dalla Rosa, Galliani, Vianello 2014).

A growing interest in its theoretical implications and potential applications (e.g. career counseling) make this construct important both in

research on vocational behaviour, and to provide vocational guidance. Furthermore, in the light of the above, it would be interesting to understand what facilitates the development of a calling in relation to its social and structural setting, for example, the opportunities offered by its environment (both in training and work environments).

From an organizational point of view, if we consider a calling an outcome, it might be interesting to explore it within the framework of Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger *et al.* 2001), where some objective social conditions can facilitate the emergence of a calling, for example in new hires. instead, within the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker, Demerouti 2007), it would be interesting to explore the role of the calling as a personal resource, able to, at least hypothetically, moderate or mediate the relationship between perceived or required costs by the organization as well as certain dimensions of stress and burnout.

Lastly, another intriguing perspective in which to explore calling is the relationship between motivation and the Regulatory Mode Theory (Pierro, Kruglanski, Higgins 2006) on goal-pursuit. It would be interesting, within this framework, to understand the relationship between a calling and goal attainment, namely the function of a calling between the steady pursuit of an object, and flexibility in the lens remodelling.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize this: the importance of the methodological and theoretical systematization concerning the Calling Construct, carried out by colleagues from the University of Padua, which underscores not only the complexity of the construct but also the necessity to pursue, in further researches, a more shared definition of what a calling is, to clarify its place in a nomological network of similar constructs; the importance of a calling in the practical implications for professional choices.

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CHAPTER II

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

THE STUDENT VOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF PROMOTING FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: This chapter presents a literature overview of the student voice in higher education, the main results from a three-year research project conducted at five Italian universities with the aim of investigating students' voices in higher education and how they offer insight into fostering Faculty Development.

Keywords: teaching and learning methods, student voice, Faculty Development, professional development.

1. Introduction

The report on *Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions* (European Commission 2013) delivered a strong message that highlighted key issues for universities in Europe. The report states: «Higher education institutions need to create environments and feedback mechanisms and systems to allow students' views, learning experience, and their performance to be taken into account» (p. 28). When considering this recommendation in relation to Italian Universities, despite their long and prestigious history of scholarship and research, the teaching approaches predominantly reflect traditional transmission model practices (e.g., Pratt *et al.* 1998), with little direct and active participation by students in course design and curriculum development. This lack of participation is reflected in the classroom by an over-reliance on didactic teaching practices, highly formal student/faculty relationships, and little access for student input in course curricula. Counter to this historical tradition and like other universities in Europe, there is a growing interest in Italy for a better understanding of what faculties are really doing in the classroom and the degree of innovation that might actually be taking place. To respond to this need for didactic innovation and the modernization of teaching, a consortium of universities (Padua, Florence, Siena, Naples Parthenope, and Rome La Sapienza) developed the PRIN EMP&Co project, and the team from the University of Padua investigated the teaching and learning

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methods at Italian Universities, starting from the students' perspective. Based on the results of the survey, which provide a clear-cut image of the students' perceptions and highlight how traditional higher education teaching is still based on lecturing, formal relationships, and on practices in which the instructor is more of a «Sage on the Stage» than a «Guide on a Side» (Morrison 2014), we have been encouraging the implementation of Faculty Development opportunities for instructors from the universities involved in the EMP&Co project since 2014.

The strong message of the European Commission and the peculiarly Italian context encourages the development of discussions of and research into higher education teaching. One of the more relevant needs that has emerged is to break the students' silence, to listen to their views on classroom teaching, and to include them in the innovation process.

2. The Student Voice: an overview

Too often students in higher education are not listened to. They passively attend lectures and are not encouraged to express their voices and actively participate. The student voice is one of the main theoretical frameworks of this EMP&Co project. Notionally, it should be framed within learner-centred teaching, an umbrella concept, seen as a «new way of understanding, interpreting, or viewing something» (Meyer, Land, 2005 372). This represents not only a different approach to teaching, but a new understanding of learning that includes paying serious attention to the students' needs and appreciating their experiences and points of view in the classroom. (Blackie, Case, Jawitz 2010; Spalding 2014; Weimar 2013).

Students are the most important actors of the learning process, and therefore including their perspectives in the planning and programming of teaching and the curriculum is essential. At the same time, instructors can improve their teaching as they listen to their students as partners in the learning process. Implicit in this are the assumptions that students' feedback and evaluation have an impact on the transformation of teaching practices, and that students are more involved if they can participate and take an active part in the process.

Despite the importance of the student voice, the higher education literature on this construct is very limited. What is known is that student-faculty partnerships are rooted in beliefs that highlight the importance of considering: students' insights to make teaching engaging; the value of listening to their voices in designing teaching

and curricula; and the potential of changing perspectives for both to become better teachers and students. (Cook-Sather *et al.* 2014). Benefits for staff, students, and institutions include enhanced engagement, motivation, and learning; metacognitive awareness and a sense of identity; teaching and classroom experiences; student-staff relationships and development of a range of graduate attributes (Brockett 2015; Cook-Sather *et al.* 2014; Dirkx 2006; Spalding 2014; Taylor 2007). When students take responsibility and an active role in the learning process, they become more aware of what is being learned, changing their role from passive actors to active ones and fostering a related reorientation of the academic staff (Baxter-Magolda 2006; Cook-Sather *et al.* 2014).

Although there are many benefits, engaging the student voice does require the Faculty to take some risks and transform their role as educators (disciplinary content experts) to include their role as a facilitator, and work collaboratively with the students (Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten 2011; Nygaard *et al.* 2013) with particular attention to students' interests and needs (Gentile 2014; Quinn, Owen 2016).

Even though there is a growing interest in teaching innovations in higher education, the student voice as a construct and a practice is not given the necessary attention when developing instructional practices (Smyth, McInerney 2012). Typically, teaching is related to the instructor's design and students have little influence on teaching approaches and curriculum development. (Bovill, Cook-Sather *et al.* 2015). Instructors are resistant to change and encouraging students' engagement. Furthermore, instructors in Italy generally have more formal relationships with students, which can discourage a frank and open climate for discussion. Furthermore, some of our classrooms accommodate a considerable number of students, up to two or three hundred, so that it can be even more difficult to build a rapport in this situation.

Moreover, institutional norms and practices in the Italian higher education system (managed by the government and the universities): for example, the considerable number of exam sessions, the freedom of the students to attend many courses or not, an over-reliance of certain programmes on a fixed curriculum and the institutions' overall lack of flexibility, do nothing to help create a collaborative teaching environment. Alternative strategies to promote innovation in our situations must be sought and applied to this context. This will be the challenge to face to create our own 'Italian-style' innovation and modernization.

The next paragraph will present some of the survey results collected within the EMP&Co project and analysed through the lens of student voice literature.

3. The Student Voice: suervey design

The research realized as part of the EMP&Co project (Boffo, Fedeli *et al*., eds.) was the most extensive survey of data exploring the students' voice in higher education in Italy. The questionnaire was submitted to over 50,000 students attending a variety of courses throughout the participating universities. It offers a unique national perspective of adult and higher education on a scale rarely presented and its potential is likely to lead to significant innovations in teaching and learning methods in both adult and higher education in Italy.

The findings of the study were organized around five focus areas:

1. Course organization;
2. Creation of a participatory environment;
3. Methods and resources for teaching and learning;
4. Feedback and assessment;
5. Work-related learning and university business dialogue.

Each area was represented by different items, 35 in total, asking students what percentage of instructors (0%-25%, between 25% and 50%, between 51% and 75%, more than 75% and 'I don't know') were engaged in these learner-centred teaching practices. Each focus area is discussed below.

4. Course organization

The first area of the survey aimed to explore the introductory part of the course and its organization (α =.801). The items (7) investigated whether the faculty explained the programme at the beginning of the course, and presented the related contents. This is generally the first information to be shared with students and eventually discussed and negotiated. The other questions were related to the textbooks and resources in use for the course and the reason for the choice, so that the students have a better understanding and can support the instructors and their proposals. Furthermore, it is important that the instructor explain what the students need to know, and which skills they must develop during and after the course. The last two questions of this set were addressed to the students' needs and desires, to understand whether there were any additions needed to the programme presented and if the instructor was willing to change the programme based on the considerations that emerged in the discussion with the students.

5. Creation of a participatory environment

The second set of questions was related to the class setting and the relational climate concerning the degree of questioning, discussing, and reflection on students' experiences and prior knowledge in each Faculty. This section consisted of (4) questions titled *Creation of a participatory environment* (α =.799). These questions aimed to explore the students' perceptions of their participation in the classroom and whether their ideas or proposals were taken into consideration by the instructors and other classmates.

6. Methods and resources for teaching and learning

The teaching methods surveyed in this section focused on active learning. Active learning is defined as «any instructional method that engages students in the learning process» (Coryell, 2016). Italy has a long tradition with instructors (Morrison, 2014), predominantly lecturing and demonstrating little interest in encouraging discussion and the sharing of student experiences. The aim of these items (9) was to investigate the methods and resources that the instructors devised for their classes (α =.756). These methods included group work or individual work, a flipped classroom, the sharing of studies and research on the topic, and adaptation of the type of explanation or lecture to the students' level and skills. In contrast, the survey also asked students about the extent of PowerPoint use and how the instructors used it (e.g., reading the slides aloud, or integrating with real examples). Another focus was the delivery/availability of new and varied resources on some of the proposed topics for students to explore more deeply.

7. Feedback and assessment

The fourth area investigated the activities of feedback and assessment (α = .678). This set of questions aimed to better understand the students' perceptions and how visible the processes of feedback and assessment were. The questions (8) investigated whether the instructors clearly communicated the methods and criteria of the assessment process in class. In addition, we asked students whether the instructors promoted self- and peer-evaluation in the group along with timely feedback during the activities they proposed in the classroom. The last two questions focused on the exam and how it was organized, if it was a rigidly pre-set type of exam or divided into separate parts to give students different tests and opportunities.

8. Work-Related Learning and University-Business dialogue

The last and fifth area (α =.837), asked students to express their perceptions on work-related teaching and learning methods to promote the dialogue with work and business partners. This approach is defined in American literature as *Work-Related Learning* (WRL) (Dirkx 2011) and in Australian literature as *Work-Integrated Learning* (WIL) (Cooper, Orrell, Bowden 2010; Gardner, Barktus 2014). This area of the questionnaire consisted of seven questions that aimed to understand how instructors foster/encourage a dialogue with business and work partners in their teaching, whether they explain the connections between course contents and related professions, and if they consider and encourage students to reflect on the ethical aspects of professions and their utility. Students were also asked whether the instructors invite representatives of the job market to their classes, or had ever proposed activities or projects in cooperation with organizations and professional communities.

9. The Student Voice: making sense of the findings

The survey was completed by 3,760 students (2,453 females equal to 65.2% and 1,307 males equal to 34.8%) from five Italian Universities. After a test run at La Sapienza University of Rome and Siena University between December and January 2015 (Creswell, 2008), the questionnaire was administered to a sample of students enrolled during the 2014-2015 academic year in Bachelor's Degree or Master's Degree Courses, and the former regulation primary education programmes, attending the last year of the legal term of the course, plus those attending the third year of all Master's courses. Each was sent an invitation to complete the questionnaire on the Moodle platform. The survey data were downloaded into SPSS and Excel and analysed. The findings of this study were rather significant, reflecting a university system with a long and rich scholarly tradition with instructors who are somewhat resistant to innovative teaching approaches. The dominant teaching approach continues to be the practice of lecturing, with the Faculty fostering little interaction with students in the form of class discussions and group activities. Moreover, there is an obvious lack of attention in providing regular and consistent informal and formal feedback to students, promoting peer- and self-evaluation, and lastly, very few instructors are fostering dialogue with professional communities or promoting employability.

One way to make sense of the findings is to recognize that the Italian University system has a very long tradition of teacher-centred

teaching. Furthermore, the current national evaluation for faculty career advancement in Italian Universities is based exclusively on research ranking and very little attention is paid to the teaching and other organizational or administrative tasks. In addition, instructor-student relationships at the University are very formal, distant, and hierarchical. Most of the professors focus more on their performance in the classroom and less on the students' interest. Students' perceptions highlight a low level of engagement and collaboration between students and instructors as promoted by the student voice. Consistent with this perspective, assessment and feedback are integrated in the learning and teaching process. (Fedeli, Frison, Grion 2016). These data confirm that these processes are still managed only by the instructors, who are leading the teaching and assessment process without listening to the students or negotiating some of the criteria to be assessed with them.

10. Implications for Faculty Development and the Student Voice

A recent significant result of this study was the creation of a Faculty Development Programme at the University of Padua. This project, called Teaching4Learning@Unipd, began in November 2016, and was a direct result of the survey, with the aim of training the Faculty to promote students' participation in their courses. In addition, there was also a growing interest in de-privatizing (Adam, Mix 2014), teaching through the development of Faculty learning communities that encouraged sharing beliefs and values among colleagues, and supporting each other in innovating their teaching. The first learning communities were starting to form, introducing the use of an informal peer-observation process among instructors.

This programme aims to encourage greater awareness of the deep assumptions about teaching and learning and to offer the opportunity to learn new methods and techniques that encourage student participation and involvement. Bit by bit, policies, public relations, and mission statements can be revised to promote new strategies with the intention of innovating teaching approaches and students' participation in teaching and learning at universities.

The instructors involved in this project are self-selected, strongly interested and motivated to participate, with a significant propensity to sharing their own experience with other colleagues.

A group of experts at the University of Padua are working with a variety of departments, and are planning Faculty Development programmes. In the last two years, the results have been extremely

positive. Eight out of 32 departments have offered training to mixed groups (assistant-, associate-, and full professors) of 25-30 instructors including a one-week long training session for instructors from all the departments, a group of 28 young instructors who took part in a residential summer school and talked and worked together to innovate their teaching practices and share their thoughts and discuss their assumptions on teaching and learning.

Small groups of instructors who volunteer to come to the training sessions are starting to consider teaching an important developmental factor for their community. They collaborate, and share their teaching practices with colleagues. This is a synergistic process among faculty they share first-hand experiences, practices, and emotions about teaching in which trusting relationships are developed leading to further de-privatization of teaching. Consistent also with the research on transformative learning (Mezirow 1990, 2000; Taylor 2007) concerning significant personal change among adults, it is «trustful relationships that allow individuals to have questioning discussions, share information openly, and achieve mutual and consensual understanding» (Taylor 2007: 179). Multiple groups are starting to collaborate and create faculty learning communities (Cox 2004; Daly 2011; Nugent *et al.* 2008; Schlitz *et al.* 2009); learning communities (Mackenzie *et al.* 2010; Sherer, Shea, Kristensen 2003) of both interdisciplinary and disciplinary forms and differing in rank.

In the next month, the Faculty Development programmes will be evaluated both as to how they were received by the Faculty and the related impact on classroom practices. This will be a first attempt to see whether there has been integration of innovative practices in the classroom. It is interesting to monitor them and understand how to improve and share insights and ideas throughout the process.

This process of innovation is being promoted by the University management, which is starting to invest resources in developing organizational measures to respond to the need for change of some instructors, and to think how to develop policies to give more relevance to the teaching process in career evaluation.

The University is intending to allocate resources to finance more training and to create a reward system for those instructors who present projects that encourage student-instructor partnerships, and a higher evaluation of the teaching based on students' perceptions. Furthermore, instructional technology courses are being organized and offered to all instructors to promote the use of technologies in teaching, introducing blended courses and technological tools.

The intention is to create a system that places a higher priority on teaching and make it a part of career advancement policies. In a

monthly meeting with all the deans of the 32 departments, regular updates of Faculty Development efforts are shared. A first attempt at a reward system has been developed by issuing a 'badge' (a kind of certificate) for those instructors who take part in a Faculty Development training programme of at least 25 hours.

Despite these efforts, the change process is slow and incremental, particularly among individual faculty. Instructors and students are often resistant to new ways of teaching. More work needs to be done to help the Italian university to make sense of the nature of the institutional context and how the traditional culture of teacher-centred teaching is a significant barrier to more innovative learner-centred approaches to teaching.

11. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to share with the readers some of the results of the research developed within the PRIN EMP&Co project, in particular, the findings of the University of Padua unit, which was in charge of investigating teaching methods in our Italian university system. Further effort was made to highlight, through an overview of the student voice, the importance of listening to students and thereby encourage actions that consider their perceptions and some of their expressed needs.

The results of the research gave staunch support to the promotion of Faculty Development at the University of Padua with the aim of finding our own 'Italian way' to transform teaching and learning. The Faculty Development programme Teaching4Learning@Unipd began based on the evidence of the survey, study of the literature, and an investigation of national and international cases and situations, Efforts are continuing to find more formal and informal occasions to share the findings of this research project at conferences, workshops, seminars, and discussion circles at both national and international levels. These actions and results provide strong support in encouraging instructors to pay greater attention to the students' voice. This project, because of its highly competitive nature, gives the Faculty Development initiative greater credibility among colleagues at Italian Universities. Finally, the findings of the project have been shared with the didactic commission of the university, scientific committees, and other university bodies. Finally, the many studies and publications on the findings have supported our willingness and conviction that it is time to teach in a different way, time to engage the students' attention more in Italian and European Universities.

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THE DESIGN OF WORK-RELATED TEACHING & LEARNING METHODS: CASE STUDIES AND METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract: What kind of Work-Related activities/programmes do Italian teachers propose to their students? What are common elements considered in the designing of Work-Related activities by those proposing them? A multiple case study research programme was chosen as a method to explore the current Italian situation regarding Work-Related teaching and learning methods in Higher Education (Coll *et al.* 2008; Dirkx 2011) and to define some possible methodological recommendations to encourage the design of Work-Related Learning activities/programmes.

Keywords: work-related learning, higher education, case study, university-business dialogue.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore and identify some possible methodological recommendations to encourage the design of work-related learning activities/programmes in higher education, to promote links between theoretical contents and the professional world. The research was grounded on the National Project *Employability and Competencies*, and began in 2013 with the aim of exploring current teaching and learning methods in the Italian higher education system (Boffo, Fedeli, Lo Presti, Melacarne, Vianello 2017).

1.1 The theoretical and methodological background

As for the theoretical and methodological background, the research is part of a scheme to modernize the European Higher Education system which emphasizes the need to enhance the quality of Tertiary Education through the involvement of the business world (European Commission 2011), and to encourage more interactive learning environments and partnerships with the job market (Commission of the European Communities 2006, 2009).

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This European focus on university-business cooperation and teaching and learning methods to link education and work, refer to what is called in North American literature *Work-Related Learning* (Dirkx 2011) and in Australian literature as *Work-Integrated Learning* (Cooper, Orrell, Bowden 2010; Gardner, Barktus 2014). Both terms concern the integration between formal and professional contexts, to create meaningful benefits for students, organizations, and other stakeholders (Gardner, Barktus 2014).

A previous literature review (Frison, Fedeli, Taylor 2015) allowed the research group to clarify terms, theoretical orientations, and practical implications regarding *Work-Related Learning*. On the one hand, the term refers to a period spent in a professional environment with different purposes and objectives such as study, the development of generic or technical skills, and the exploration of possible career options and job opportunities (Coll, Eames, Paku, Lay 2008). On the other hand, it is more widely related to «a complex educational phenomenon. It is at once a set of educational missions (e.g. careers education), a range of activities (work experience), a collection of topics (understanding credit and work) and a repertoire of teaching and learning styles» (Huddleston, Stanley 2012: 11). Furthermore, adopting a broader definition offered by Dirkx (2011), *Work-Related Learning* (WRL) is defined as the process of learning that may occur «in educational preparation programs apart from the workplace, in formal and informal learning within the workplace, and in further education and professional development programs offered outside the workplace» (p. 294).

The definitions mentioned suggest a connection with the formal context and the strategies and opportunities of a link between education and the world of work developed in the educational setting. They allude to an open category that encompasses work-related programmes – for example internships – as well as didactic strategies to support students to better understand the relationships of theory-practice, education-profession (Litchfield, Frawley, Nettleton 2010).

Based on a literature overview and multiple definitions of Work-Related (or Integrated) Learning (Frison, Fedeli, Taylor 2015), the project *EMP&Co* – as it is informally called – carried out a first exploration of current WRL in Italy. A questionnaire was proposed to a convenience sample of Italian students enrolled in the 2014-2015 academic year, to explore how they perceive the use and competence of the teaching and learning methods proposed by their instructors (Fedeli, Frison, Grion 2017). Of the five areas of the survey, one was specifically devoted to work-related teaching and learning methods. The students' opinions referred to a scarce percentage of teachers who invite company speakers to classes or propose assignments or thesis

projects in direct cooperation with the professional world. Consequently, the EMP&Co survey revealed a university system cut off from the world of work and professions, as well as a very low level of connections among all disciplines even if strongly encouraged by the aforementioned European documents dedicated to the so-called «university-business dialogue» (Commission of the European Communities 2006, 2008, 2009).

1.2 Research design

Considering this general gap, to go more deeply into this topic, the research group became interested in mapping work-related activities/ programmes proposed by Italian teachers in relation to their classes to:
1) identify common elements considered by those proposing,
2) trace methodological recommendations to encourage the design of work-related learning activities/programmes.

A multiple case study research design was chosen as a qualitative methodology (Bassey 2003; Stake 2008), which allowed an in-depth understanding of the issues of interest. Indeed, as Yin states, the case study research design is more suitable when the goal is to provide and answer 'how' questions that aim to explain a certain phenomenon investigated in its real-life context (2009). Furthermore, case studies are a common methodological approach used in research into *Work-Related Learning* (WRL) because of the highly contextualized nature of these programmes (Coll, Chapman 2000).

Therefore, the research group has been researching and mapping multiple *instrumental cases* (Stake 1995; Yin 2009), such as cases selected to better understand the issue. To explore WRL, instrumental cases are different activities/programmes related to the academic courses that involve the professional world, to explore and analyse 'how' instructors propose and manage them, to identify the common elements taken in account, and to formulate possible methodological recommendations.

1.3 Instruments and procedure

Multiple sources of information are involved in the investigation of the selected cases (Creswell 2013; Yin 2009). First, semi-structured interviews were identified as an appropriate method to collect instructors' practices and experiences related to WRL. Second, documents, reports, and papers relating to the selected activities/ programmes were analysed, when available.

Due to the 'micro' dimension of the WRL activities/programmes proposed in line with instructors' personal interests and initiatives, a snowball technique was used to identify the cases (Morgan 2008). Indeed, snowball sampling is wholly suitable when cases or representatives of a population are difficult to locate, as in this case. A first small pool of instructors mentioned other cases according to the eligibility criteria (direct contact with the world of work, direct connection with a course or a study programme). The research group started from the University of Padua and from the educational area to then open to other disciplinary areas and universities (Siena and Florence, both involved in the aforementioned EMP&Co project).

Semi-structured interviews, audiotaped and transcribed, explored the following main themes and issues that emerged from the literature overview on WRL (Frison, Fedeli, Taylor 2015):

- Purpose of the activities/programmes;
- Integration: the process of bringing together formal learning and the world of work;
- Partnership: type of partnership between organizations and university;
- Support: type of support offered to students during WRL activities/programmes;
- Assessment: assessment forms and instruments;
- Learning: the "kind" of learning encouraged by WRL;
- Faculty needs to improve WRL.

1.4 Participants

As mentioned, a convenience group of instrumental cases provided a snapshot of possible WRL activities among a range of academic disciplines. So far, 3 universities have been involved in the exploratory study and 10 Faculties as shown below:

- University of Padua (7) from: Education (2), Chemical (1) and Industrial (1) Engineering (1), Mathematics (1), Psychology (1), Sociology (1)
- University of Siena (2) from: Education (1), Sociology (1)
- University of Florence (1) from: Education.

1.5 Themes and results

Several key stakeholders can be involved in WRL activities/programmes, such as faculties, academics, employers, professional accounting bodies, and the government (Abeysekera 2006) as well as, of course, students. Furthermore, there are several issues that need to be considered and clarified in relation to these stakeholders in order

to design successful WRL programmes (Abeysekera 2006; Cooper, Orrell, Bowden 2010).

1.6 Purpose of the activities/programmes and level of integration

The activities/programmes mapped can be divided into three main groups based on their work-related objectives and approaches (Fig. 1), from a *weaker* relationship with the world of work (Level 1) to a *stronger* and more direct one (Level 3):

Level 1

Problem-based or project-based activities strongly anchored in the theoretical contents of the course but with reference to real problems, contexts, cases, and real-life situations (2 cases) (Prince, Felder 2006). These activities are carried out in the classroom, and no direct relationship with the workplace is expected;

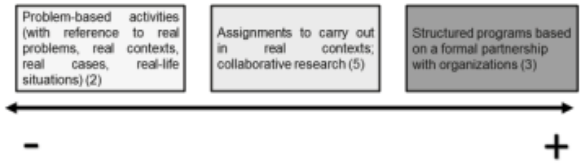
Level 2

Assignments to be carried out in real contexts (e.g. within the workplace) and *collaborative research* (5 cases) to develop research projects in cooperation with organizations and starting from real problems proposed by them (Frison 2016; Munari 2011);

Level 3

Structured programmes based on a formal partnership with organizations, such as workplace activities and programmes (3 cases) based on a longer period spent in the workplace, outside the formal academic setting.

Figure 1 – The 'work-related' content of the activities/programmes mapped.



The level of 'integration' of these activities may assume two different meanings. On the one hand, integration can be considered a process of intertwining theory and practice, theoretical contents, and professional issues (Cooper, Orrell, Bowden 2010; Litchfield, Frawley, Nettleton 2010). On the other, integration may be considered the process of recognizing work-related activities/programmes within the formal curriculum. In both cases, as Abeysekera (2006) stated, curriculum alignment is one of the key issues related to WRL. Since an important objective of these programmes is to increase students' employability, the content of the curriculum should embrace em-

ployability skills (Duignan, 2002; Fallows, Steven 2000). To reach this goal, the course should encourage analysis and interpretation of theoretical concepts, proposing assignments and tasks that need to be solved with an incomplete set of information, as in real situations (Fallows, Steven 2000).

This aspect of the integration of work-related activities/programmes and their purposes is strictly linked to a further dimension, that of 'support'. The literature suggests that students require support before, during, and after their work-related experiences and this can acquire different forms. It may be simply administrative assistance or something more, such as educational support (Cooper, Orrell, Bowden 2010; Frison 2016; Martin *et al.* 2012; Munari 2011). In most of the cases mapped (7/10), the instructors provided a theoretical background related to their courses, but no dedicated support was offered. Despite this lack of official educational assistance, the instructors were willing to informally support students in facing organizational issues, when requested. Only in the 3 more structured work-related programmes based on a formal partnership with an organization, or more than one, was dedicated educational support expected and provided to deal with the challenges posed by professional contexts and dynamics.

1.7 Partnerships

It is not possible to have work-integrated learning without strong partnerships between industry and educational institutions, as Cooper, Orrell and Bowden (2010) underline. A partnership ensures the representation of different interests and the identification of strengths and issues, as well as the strategies to reach common goals together (Cooper, Orrell, Bowden, 2010). As the authors highlight, a partnership exists at the individual practitioner and institutional level and may be transitory or ongoing, formal or informal, and involve single or multiple workplaces (Cooper, Orrell, Bowden 2010).

As for the instrumental cases mapped, we can identify two main partnership dimensions:

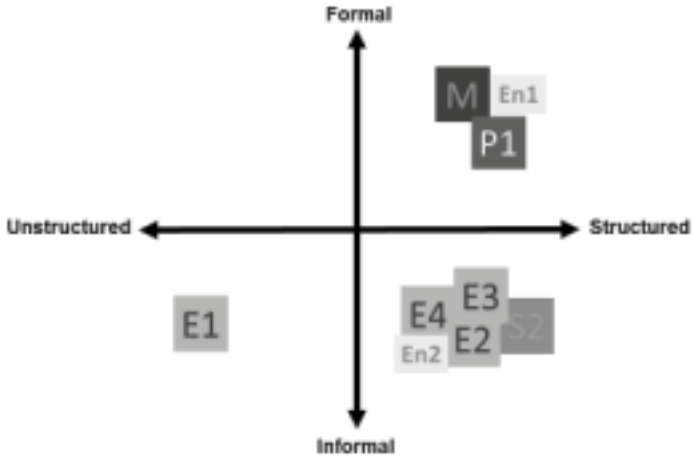
1) formal vs. informal;
2) structured vs. unstructured.

Indeed, the relationship between the university and organizations may be wholly informal, based on a direct and informal contact between the single instructor and the organizations' representatives, without an official agreement between the two institutional actors. Or else the university-organization relationship may be wholly formal, as in the case of programmes based on an institutional agreement (e.g. internships or work-experiences).

Additionally, the university-organization relationship may be formally structured, step by step, with planned phases and meetings, coherently arranged, and focused on timed objectives. If not, it may be unstructured, based on informal meetings according to the instructors' openness and willingness.

With regard to these two coordinates, the 10 cases explored are located as shown below (fig. 2). In only one case (Education area), is the partnership wholly informal and unstructured. This is the case of a problem-based learning activity proposed to the students during a methodology of educational research course. Most of the mapped cases (5) are based on an informal relationship between the instructor of reference and the organization/s involved. In any case, the instructor provides the students with a clear pathway to cover, made up of agreed phases and milestones to reach common objectives. The Mathematics, Psychology, and Engineering cases (3) present a strongly formal and structured partnership based on an institutional agreement between the university and the organization/s. In this case, the work-related activities refer to formal projects that involved students from the whole university (Industrial Engineering and Psychology) and the students attending a study course directly linked to the internship experience, within a Bachelor's Degree study programme (Mathematics). In every case, this institutional relationship was led by a teacher who oversaw the project as coordinator and took care of the organizations' requests as well as the students' needs.

Figure 2 – University/organizations partnership formality and structure.



E = Education; En = Engineering; M = Mathematics; P = Psychology; S = Sociology

1.8 Assessment

The concept of integration mentioned above refers to another crucial dimension of WRL: the assessment of these activities and their recognition in terms of grades or credits (Abeysekera 2015; Cooper, Orrell, Bowden 2010) based on the formal recognition of learning through practice. As Abeysekera points out, «academics could work with practitioners to jointly design learning outcomes and assessment techniques acceptable to both parties» (2015: 82), as well as being useful to students to understand their level of skills and competencies, beyond knowledge. Furthermore, as Martin and colleagues underline, these programmes encourage the combined use of both formative and summative assessment (2012). «Informal formative approaches are varied, ranging from the use of technologies such as emails, blogs and other e-journals, through to the use of more formal approaches such as reflective journals. Summative assessment provides a meaningful opportunity to assess, in particular, report writing and oral presentations both of which can be learning outcomes» (Martin *et al.*: 32).

Considering the cases analysed, only one bases the final grade of the study course completely on the assessment of work-related activity: a final group project report. (1) In the other instrumental cases, the final grade is the result of integration between an assessment of work-related experiences (through reports and/or oral presentations) and traditional exams (6). Sometimes neither form of assessment nor integration is expected for work-related activities (3), and the final grade is based only on traditional oral or written exams.

1.9 Learning

The literature analysed focuses on the experiential (Kolb 1984) and situated (Lave, Wenger 1990) dimensions of work-related learning. Indeed, the students learn through experiential learning in the workplace, by doing and interacting with professionals facing genuine professional problems and situations, where theoretical knowledge can be put into practice.

In the cases mapped, according to the faculty's perspectives, what kind of learning is encouraged by work-related experiences? The interviewees mentioned:

- emotional, experiential, inductive learning;
- learning of soft skills (team-working, problem-solving, public speaking, negotiation, leadership);
- learning on the job, situated learning;
- self-directed learning;
- multilevel learning (reflective, metacognitive, emotional, organizational, scientific);

- opportunity for self-awareness and awareness of the world.

Work-related activities/programmes can become a learning opportunity for teachers, too. In accordance with the literature, through WRL teachers can establish links with a wide range of employers and, through this, can ensure that their teaching is up to date (Fraser, Deane 2002).

Indeed, the interviewees underlined that for them the projects were an opportunity:

- to learn about business needs and new research topics, and for dialogue and exchange
- to strengthen relationships with organizations;
- to re-think teaching and learning methods and design;
- to change the role of instructor as Charon, as a guide;
- to design experiential didactics;
- to have fun and interact with other students.

1.10 Faculty needs

As the literature underlines, academics are the stakeholder most involved in designing WR activities/programmes (Abeysekera 2006; Reeders 2000). An Australian survey refers to the contents of training provided to academics on this topic, such as policy formulation, programme design, the preparation of students, sourcing of positions, assessment, student supervision, student mentoring, industry relationship, and programme evaluation (Reeders 2000).

As for the needs pointed out by the interviewees, they underlined difficulties related to the assessment of WR activities. They would ask for strategies and tools to assess students and to go beyond a traditional assessment form focused on knowledge rather than on skills and competencies. The connection between these activities contextualized to the workplace and the study course still remains the first challenge to face with. This challenge is strictly related to an effort to define intended learning outcomes, the choice of teaching and learning methods to achieve them, and the assessment strategies and tools necessary. Finally, interviewees highlight the need to receive support from the institution to manage relations with the organization, to create a wider network of available organizations and move from a personal initiative to an institutional strategy of partnership with the world of work.

2. Discussion and conclusion

The challenge of enhancing WRL in Higher Education is a conundrum that has been well detailed by European documents (Com-

mission of the European Communities 2006, 2008, 2009) and the international literature (Cooper, Orrell, Bowden 2010; Gardner, Barktus 2014; Dirkx 2011; Frison, Fedeli, Taylor 2015). Beyond that starting point, this exploratory study has begun to reveal strengths and weaknesses in the proposal, design, and management of work-related activities/programmes.

Firstly, support appears to be a crucial issue. WR activities should provide time and space for support, a sort of 'help service' that welcomes administrative and organizational problems, offering the students a 'learning guide' to cope with critical situations. Reflective spaces and tools, monitoring meetings, and peer-tutoring meetings have this goal, and the challenge is to make them compulsory and sustainable for both the students and the faculty.

Secondly, the change of attitude of the instructor from *sage on the stage* to *guide on the side* (Morrison 2014) is another central element. WR activities relate to an experiential and active learning process, where the students become more active. Based on WR activities/programmes, the instructors can bring into the classroom authentic research material and real problems, connecting these to theoretical contents, stimulating critical thinking and creative solutions, proposing simulations that can reproduce real-life and work contexts.

This point relates to a third dimension, that of recognizing learning through practice and its assessment, which are two crucial aspects of WR strategies to consider part of the curriculum, the formal one – as an academic plan – and the hidden one – referring to norms, values, and beliefs embedded in the curriculum, classroom life, and in the faculty's approach (Reeders 2000).

Finally, the faculty's approach to WRL and dedicated teaching methods is strongly bund up with the support offered to instructors to foster WR strategies, in terms of specific training to design WR activities/programmes or administrative services to assist them in the management phase. The cases mapped are based on a personal instructor's choice to encourage connection to the professional world. The challenge, as mentioned above, is to move from an individual choice to an academic strategy that recognizes and encourages learning in and through the workplace.

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CHAPTER III

THE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE AS A LEARNING MOMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

SUPPORTING INFORMAL LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNSHIPS

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Abstract: This paper addresses several critical issues relating to the organization of internships at universities, dealing above all with 'curricular' internships, i.e., those apprenticeship experiences included as mandatory in university courses. Starting from the idea of 'informal learning', the paper shows the strong connection between new workplace needs and the potentiality of pedagogical and reflective approaches in designing internship experiences.

Keywords: higher education, reflective practices, informal learning.

1. Introduction

In recent years, universities have been called upon to respond to numerous invitations: the new targets involved in higher education, the invitation to internationalize study courses, the request to work on students' acquisition of soft skills and, not least in terms of importance, the need to adopt teaching strategies that can foster dialogue and cooperation between formal knowledge and professional knowledge, both in person and online. University education is thus urged, with increasing weight, to configure itself as an 'expanded' place capable of integrating teaching methods and techniques that support the students' learning process beyond the classroom walls and the physical spaces of the university (Walton, Matthews 2017).

For example, many studies suggest that it is no longer enough to train students by transmitting organized knowledge. The importance of socializing the new generations to established cultural or scientific knowledge is not in discussion. Timeless, general, and universal knowledge is accompanied by a further need to examine the knowledge generated in specific 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 certain aspects of the concept of knowledge that universities still share with a good part of the school system, for example (Bertagna 2006).

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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 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 an individual situation dominate (Resnick, Levine, Teasley 1991).

As much research has shown, in Italian universities the dominant form of learning is individual, and students are judged by 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, by and large, 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 textbooks 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 tool 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 real events and objects may be lost. Finally, the university is mainly anchored to the objective of teaching skills and generic, 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 university is difficult to transfer to external practical contexts, and suggests that both the structure of knowledge and the social conditions of practical activities may differ more from what is achieved through formal education than previously thought (Resnick, Levine, Teasley 1991: 69).

What do these differences suggest about the relationship between universities and competence in work and daily life? At least two considerations: on the one hand, the need to discuss possible strategies to contain and reduce what many studies define as 'the encapsulation of scholastic learning', i.e., the problem of 'academically' training first-class students who, however, are unable to transfer what they have learned at university into daily practice. On the other, the opportunity to appreciate practice as a combination of knowledge and ac-

tions and to pose the problem of learning the knowledge intrinsic to actions. In the first case, we are faced with a problem of transforming university teaching. In the second, of supporting and designing curricula or settings in which students can 'learn from experience' or 'learn by doing', supporting informal learning both inside and outside university experiences.

Marsick & Watkins (1990) dedicated some of their most extensive research into describing, defining, and developing a more comprehensive understanding of informal and incidental learning within organizations. The authors start from a comparative description. In contrast to formal learning, informal and incidental learning refers to the natural opportunities for learning that occur every day in a person's life, when the person controls his/her learning» (p. 350). Marsick categorized the types of informal and incidental learning to include: self-directed learning, social learning, mentoring, coaching, and networking, learning from mistakes and trial and error» (p. 350). Watkins developed a theoretical framework or model to understand how the process of informal learning takes place. Thus, Watkins defined incidental learning as a "sub-category of informal learning [...] a by-product of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organization, trial and error experimentation, or even formal learning" (Marsick, Watkins 1990: 12). Informal Learning means reaching out to the person in the next cubicle and cultivating relationships through networking, coaching, and mentoring. It also takes place in varied self-directed ways by reading reports, newsletters, and memos, and by conducting research.

This paper aims to describe how internship activities could increase students' employability (Boffo, Federighi, Torlone 2015), supporting informal learning processes and organizational learning.

2. University, workplaces, and social knowledge

Higher education systems have undergone a momentous change that has irreversibly transformed its nature, goals, and scientific, educational, and organizational practices. In Europe, and particularly in Italy, new working scenarios and new knowledge needs have underlined the critical factors and contradictions of university curricula and governance strategies that are all too often fixed on a theoretical-disciplinary logic. Repeatedly, there is no parallel attention to pertinence with outgoing professionals, when there is a need to give the right amount of room to all the disciplinary areas in the courses. It is not difficult to trace experiences planned more on self-referential than workplace-oriented criteria. Thus, the

challenge of producing important, relevant knowledge for social, organizational, and working contexts becomes increasingly vital for universities, on top of spreading investigative strategies that can produce located knowledge.

There is still a significant gap and much misalignment between the world of work and the university, as there is between the university and students' need for personal and professional development. Planning courses that can intercept emerging, challenging learning needs in relation to current working scenarios by talking with stakeholders, are further commitments that characterize current academic policies. Some aspects of the new university set-up could be summed up by a few dichotomies: *user-client*, *general-located*, *vertical-transverse*.

User-client: Students are no longer merely subjects using a service, but are the possessors of wider, more complex interests than in the past. Parents' expectations, students' professional ambitions, personal attitudes, and critical factors and fragilities all contribute to people's expectations from university. More so than in the past, universities today must respond to questions of knowledge, but also of care, support, specialization, and integration. If we look at the profiles of current university students, we find that they have partly changed their status. They have become student-clients, with more awareness of what the organization must guarantee in terms of learning and services; they have different learning needs, have knowledge-gathering tools that can give value to services through universities' national and international rankings, they pay more attention to a balanced evaluation of the costs and benefits (taxes vs. occupation, distance from home vs. services offered, cultural vivacity vs. safety).

General-located: Those who work in university environments know that it is not easy to change the attachment that teachers have to an idea of general and universal knowledge, that can suit any course or any classroom. Many academic communities share unique meaning systems where a view of education as a job of knowledge delivery remains central and where the student's learning is mainly seen as an individual process independent of any kind of social involvement. From a view of knowledge as a skill that must be exercised and then evaluated in a decontextualized way, the idea that knowledge is *located* and therefore anchored in contexts, practices, and material and immaterial located restrictions, becomes central.

Vertical-transverse: Both the economic world and the European Union (EU), have supported various initiatives to help development of transverse skills that are useful for staff to carry out active citizenship projects and increase social inclusion and employment. Essential tools in these directions were the identification of key skills

in 2006, and a European reference framework on qualifications and academic certificates in 2008. The university is thus impelled to plan programmes that can support the acquisition of strictly specialized or technical-professional abilities, and 'soft' or 'transverse' skills.

Like any other organization, the directions of innovation that are taking over Italian universities are not straightforward (Raelin 2000), or even expected. Alongside routines that have difficulty in changing, are promising views that interpret the university's priorities in diverse ways, by cohabiting and expanding. New awareness has emerged from: a) the use of research as a transformational and collaborative process; b) the enhancement of professional knowledge; c) the professionalization of knowledge; d) training professionals whose skills are not simply rooted in knowledge of the subject, but also in the students' own informal learning. Knowing how to work in a group, problem-solving, knowing how to face improvisation and uncertainties that are a part of working practices, being a leader or more simply, an ability to write a report, are just some of the skills that universities are trying to offer across the board to the subject sectors and specific professional areas.

These new areas of interest outline promising openings so that universities can learn from their own experience and from the kind of critical incidents that occur and have been experienced in recent years. It could be said that we are in a phase in which universities are questioning the instruments, routines and premises that govern their strategies: governance, research, teaching, and relations with the world of employment. We have seen are still seeing a critical, reflective validation process (Boud, Cressey, Docherty 2006) for systems of meaning and activities embedded in the university organizational system (Yorks, Marsick 2000). Who can plan a course today without taking into consideration an outgoing professional figure, asking what the organizational routines contain that no longer works? Planning requires that the leadership, and often the entire academic community, question its own usual methods for working and interpreting problems.

Urged on by university reform and the changes in economic contexts, new spaces for discussions have opened up that have required the adoption of different codes for speaking, sharing, and resolving problems that are apparently no more than 'technical'. Students and their families have become more central in teaching-learning processes. What was routine a few years ago, is today the subject of negotiation, for identifying attractive professional profiles, and for planning sustainable study courses that can offer an education in a position to win over clients, research commissioners, and project partners.

3. Supporting Informal Learning in Internship Experiences

Regardless of the theoretical options at stake, the university needs 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 current work scenarios need? How to train a professional who will need to change jobs many times? How 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 the professional world, in addition to calling into question the meeting/exchange between these two universes, also requires consideration of the university's relationship with employment.

The problem that prompted and fuelled the survey set out below arises from the realization that training professionals who are 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, the latter often being involved in potentially promising activities with little attention to the monitoring and support processes implemented by universities.

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

Within this new framework, internships are increasingly:

- An educational opportunity, thanks to the chance offered to everyone to study and interact with work practices while attempting 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 authentic experience.

- An opportunity for socialization and participatory knowledge of working situations.
- An active orientation tool, given that they allow direct knowledge and experience in a work context and thus help students make future career choices.

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

4. The pedagogy of workplaces and learning processes

Internships play a key role in helping students enter current professional scenarios (Matthew, Taylor, Ellis, 2012) and in supporting the acquisition of real skills. Much of the knowledge that is useful for students in practising a profession and entering the 'swamp of professional practice' is, in fact, only partially obtainable from formal educational settings, in a classroom or through participation in workshops and seminars. Despite the significant overhauling of university teaching through the adoption of more participatory and active approaches (Fedeli, Giampaolo, Coryell 2013), for example by promoting students' acquisition of soft skills or instrumental learning, practical knowledge remains embodied in the professional community and only through special training instruments can it 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 to meet the supply and demand of work, to foster the development of professional identity and acquire tools useful for solving business problems (Billett *et al.* 2008).

How can students be given the ability to confront and solve problems similar to those they will encounter in life and the workplace? How can students entering professional communities that are not 'naturally' configured as learning contexts be assisted?

From an analysis of national and international literature, there are two paradigms that have laid the first foundations for envisaging an up-to-date 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 that are more careful to emphasize the critical-emancipatory dimensions of learning processes.

5. Situated Learning as informal education

In some empirical research conducted in collaboration with Wenger, Lave (1991) described some everyday practices of several groups and individuals with the intention of highlighting how learning is not merely a process of participation, but also involves certain social aspects and restrictions imposed by the community. For example, he describes how young Mayan girls often have a 'midwife' relative who introduces them to the expertise necessary for performing this task. Some women become midwives by participating in the practices of the 'experts', mothers or grandmothers, observing and implicitly learning what to do during childbirth, about 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 newborns 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 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 in which they occur and are realized. It is not possible to become midwives in the Mayan communities analysed 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 people perform a task, in contexts that ensure both a relationship and the possibility of gradually participating in the experience. From this perspective, learning a business, acquiring a skill, or developing abilities, involve a process of participation, of becoming a member of a community. This means that learning is situated in the social interaction area, in life contexts. Thus, the use of the situated learning construct does not seem applicable to all experiences, since it implies a gradual insertion into a practice characterizing a community which, in turn, depends on the willingness of the community itself to facilitate access through legitimization. The most important contribution of this focus was that it highlighted that learning is a process connected to social conditions of accessibility to knowledge embodied in practice.

More recently, the 'situated learning' construct 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 organizations (Pontecorvo, Ajello, Zucchermaglio 2005).

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 identified at least three success factors for participation to generate learning in an organizational 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 organized starting from simple tasks to arrive at 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, 1991; Wenger 1998); b) if the novice is supervised by an expert (Rogoff 1990); and c) 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 should not look at internship merely as an application experience.

Internship as an experience that takes place in a work context, it is not automatically an experience for professional growth. The problem is not only that of not letting our students experience insignificant forms of participation (making photocopies, dealing with administrative matters, handling routines with low innovative value), but of providing tools to study work practices, to become increasingly central in organizational routines, to intercept the most promising paths within the organizations hosting them.

Staying within the apprenticeship metaphor, internship becomes an experience organized 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 educational tutorship (Bellingreri 2015). However, no student can be left alone in the organization of these experiences of entry, stay and exit from organizations,

and certainly not if this experience is part of an educational offering in a university course.

6. From low skills to critical reflective 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 generated 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. This not only means participating in a legitimate and peripheral way that makes an experience a learning opportunity, but is an opportunity for the person to reflect on the experience afterwards that makes any experience a potential learning opportunity. The reflective approach, especially in its critical-emancipatory guise, 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 in 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 organization, or the professional community.
- Allowing broader reflection on the experience, including the emotional reprocessing of the experience (Mezirow, Taylor 2009).

In the light of these considerations, internships become an experience 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 students' acquisition 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 pass-

ing 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.

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORK-RELATED LEARNING FROM PROFESSIONALISM TO PROFESSIONALITY

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Abstract: Within a complex economic, political, and social scenario that requires high-level competencies as well as increasingly active citizenship, the European and international agenda for higher education needs to be renewed and re-articulated according to new goals and priorities. Higher education should offer students the opportunity to develop aptitudes and acquire advanced but flexible competencies and skills that go beyond mere professionalism and instead focus on the development of a sound professionality.

Keywords: professionality, professional epistemology, work-related learning.

1. Introduction

The European Commission has recently pointed out that higher education plays a unique role in the economic, political, and social development of member states, in view of the dramatically changing scenario, within which demand for highly-skilled and at the same time socially-engaged people is both increasing and changing.

As stated in the *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a renewed EU agenda for higher education*, in the immediate future, half of all jobs are projected to require high-level qualifications; additionally, jobs are becoming more challenging, complex, and flexible.

Within this scenario, Europe needs more high achievers who can be entrepreneurial, manage complex information, think autonomously and creatively, use resources, including digital ones smartly, communicate effectively, and be resilient.

In parallel, countering the growing polarization of European societies and a distrust of democratic institutions calls on everyone – including higher education staff and students – to engage more actively with the communities around them and promote social inclusion and mobility (EU 2017).

This requires an overall reframing of higher education curricula according to specific educational objectives, considering either the necessity to sustain students in the development of aptitudes, compe-

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tencies and skills that qualify them for any kind of job, or to reduce the increasing gap between high and low achievers.

Every student should be acknowledged and valorized on the basis of their talent and not of their background, and actively engaged in their learning project which should include the implementation of basic skills (literacy, numeracy, digital competence) as well as the development of transverse skills (communication, learning-to-learn, entrepreneurship, problem-solving…).

Moreover, students should be equipped with tools useful for a full and effective engagement in economic and social life, to cope with the challenges and requests of a fluid and flexible occupational scenario and of a highly complex political and social situation at both local and global levels.

2. Higher Education from professionalism to professionality

If we analyse and compare higher education curricula for specific professions, we can see that they are designed according to a clearly identified professional profile, characterized by specific funds of knowledge and competencies that are to be acquired and implemented on both theoretical and practical levels.

Degree Courses such as Medicine, Psychology, Pharmacy, and Educational Sciences, offer students both classroom courses, seminars, and workshops, as well as an internship experience in specific professional contexts or a practicum, which is mainly designed to relate knowledge and practice through the observation of an expert professional and a progressive engagement in professional practices with the supervision of a tutor.

This approach is oriented by what Evans (2008: 7) defined as 'professionalism', a reference concept that delineates «the content of the work carried on by the profession, as reflected in accepted roles and responsibilities, key functions and remits, range of requisite skills and knowledge and the general nature of work-related tasks» and incorporates shared elements of professional culture and practical knowledge.

Within this framework, professionalism provides us with an idea of professions that is mainly oriented by reference to a continuous procedural pattern becoming a professional essentially implies the acquisition of advanced and specialized forms of knowledge that require to be operationalized in specific tasks and roles, and practised and internalized in order to build up professional expertise that can be observed and evaluated according to a performative approach.

Accordingly, the learning experiences that make up the curricula are organized following a theory-practice linear sequence, and the

students are progressively engaged in professional practices within a protected setting where they are progressively accompanied towards the profession they have chosen through a guided training in professional tasks and performances, according to a common frame of reference. Professional expertise is learned through observation, and the imitation of professional practice and supervision by an expert performing a regulative task, and not an epistemic one.

When engaged in experiences of professional practice, students are therefore trained to acquire specific professional behaviour, but are not accompanied in the development of a specific professional epistemology characterized by a special way of using and implementing the funds of knowledge they have had access to during their studies, and of constructing new empirical forms of knowledge within the practices, deeply influenced by ideologies, attitudes, and ways of thinking and understanding.

In point of fact, the reference to 'professionalism' in higher educational curricula does not make room for a crucial element in the development and interpretation of a professional identity, which is what Evans, referring to Hoyle (1975), defines as 'professionality': an ideologically-, attitudinally-, intellectually-, and epistemologically-based stance on the part of an individual, in relation to the practice of the profession to which she/he belongs, and which influences her/his professional practice» (Evans 2002: 6-7). The focus is on procedures, tasks, and performance, and not on perceptions, reflections, and understanding, which are crucial in the development of a well-expressed and well-grounded professionality.

Learning is not therefore understood as a circular process but as a linear one, and the focus is not on the epistemological dimension that grounds professional practice, but on the performative and procedural dimension of the practice.

Students are not asked to elaborate and incorporate their knowledge into a specific form of agency sustained by a definite epistemology, but to apply and transfer their knowledge to specific situations through performances guided by defined protocols and routines, and this is extremely risky in long-term professional outcomes.

If students are not accompanied and sustained in the construction of a 'professional' profile, or in the development of 'professionality', they are not likely to be fully engaged in a professional role that reaches apical levels, nor be satisfied with it.

The development of sound professionality requires a deep analysis and exploration of the cultural and ideological grounds that have sustained the choice of a determined profession; reflection on individual attitudes, idiosyncrasies, and preferences, but also on the 'social representations' that individuals and groups have about that profes-

sion, over and above an active engagement in forms of thinking and understanding that are strictly connected to it.

One thing to consider is that there is a significant division in higher educational curricula between those oriented towards the acquisition of knowledge, competencies and skills useful within a specific professional field of practice (clearly defined and delimited) and those that are mainly oriented towards the acquisition of knowledge, competencies and skills that are not tailored to a specific professional role or practice, but provide students with tools that can be used in various professional contexts, other than the ones previously referred to.

Within this framework, Degree Courses such as Literature, Philosophy, and History are not organized according to this framework, but offer students the opportunity to become engaged in various cultural experiences and to reflect on them in depth at seminars or workshops, but without being directly engaged in any kind of professional practice.

Consequently, students may have the opportunity to develop various kinds of competencies, but the curricula do not specifically focus on the acquisition or empowerment of what have been identified as the 'key competencies' for lifelong learning.

Moreover, students are not accompanied and sustained in making use of their knowledge or in building up more advanced and sophisticated forms of knowledge within possible working situations, and are therefore not sustained in the construction of any specific kind of professional epistemology.

Finally, they rarely confront experiences that support the development of aptitudes, competencies and capabilities which are the basic fabric for an active, participatory, and reflective engagement in any professional role or in public life.

This calls for a profound reframing of higher education curricula, which should offer students the opportunity to explore their 'calling' and vocational orientation, but also their own cultural and personal resources, not only through dedicated services but throughout their curricular activities and experiences.

Moreover, to help them construct a professional epistemology, students need to be accompanied to learn through confrontation and reflection on practical issues and problems emerging from the field, with the contribution of experts who do not provide procedural models to observe and imitate, but offer a professional point of view highlighting how professionals normally frame and view situations.

The whole higher education curriculum should therefore be reorganized from within, focusing on the interconnection between theory and practice, curricular disciplines, and practicum, with the

aid of mediating instruments such as workshops, seminars, and online platforms that let students engage in the development of either a professional epistemology or a professional identity, both oriented towards the development of sound professionality.

The main challenge to face is to build up a significant and useful interconnection between knowledge and practice within the learning processes of higher education curricula, and this requires the reframing of curricular contents, learning materials, learning approaches and instruments, as well as learning settings, through a meta-curricular approach.

3. Thinking and learning to connect knowledge and practice

According to a traditional approach, within higher education curricula, the relationship between knowledge and practice is a linear one: knowledge anticipates and prepares practice, and practice is the field of application of ideas, models, theories previously acquired and elaborated within a classroom setting, and individual or collective study experiences.

In professionalizing courses, the practicum experience arrives late, and is mainly conceived as a field experience, somehow disconnected from the academic courses, even when it is sustained by a learning project supervised by both an academic tutor and an external one, which often offers students the possibility to collect data and materials to be elaborated for their final dissertation.

The practicum experience is rarely anticipated and prepared within those academic courses that engage students in forms of academic thinking and learning and not of professional thinking and learning.

A first challenge is therefore to engage students in forms of professional thinking and learning (which require a specific epistemic positioning) within academic courses in order to build up a significant learning continuity within the curriculum according to a circular and nonlinear pattern.

A second challenge is to offer curricular and disciplinary contents highlighting their practical and professional implications with a specific focus on contextual and situational references, which implies a reconstruction and reorganization of learning materials in different forms, using distinct languages and supporting tools.

A third challenge is to make use of elements and materials emerging from professional practice to build up significant learning situations which also implies the engagement of professionals in the construction, elaboration, and offering of learning materials to be used within academic contexts.

Each curricular discipline, even the most theoretical, has a meaningful relationship with life and professional practice and this must be explored in depth and emphasized to offer students meaningful learning experiences.

In fact, each discipline is the organized and systematic by-product of processes of inquiry developed to achieve a better understanding of specific phenomena and situations, as well as to solve problems and to act on the surrounding environment to bring about significant changes, and this root is the key for an epistemic re-positioning of the students towards the disciplines they encounter on their academic pathway.

An inquiry-based approach to academic disciplines is therefore particularly effective in helping students in constructing, reconstructing, and reorganizing their cultural background, which works as a platform that sustains further academic and professional learning.

Moreover, through interiorization of the pattern of inquiry, students learn to master increasingly articulate and sophisticated cultural and practical challenges, since this pattern frames either their approach to and use of new forms of knowledge, or their professional commitment.

By engaging the students in problems emerging from genuine practical and professional situations presented by senior students or by professional testimonials in the form of case studies, it would be possible to prepare the practicum experience in advance, and create a circular connection between academic and professional learning.

This approach to academic disciplines is particularly significant within liberal study curricula since it highlights the possibility of engaging the students in the development of transverse abilities and competencies (such as problem-finding and problem-solving competencies…) which is the basis for future experiences in a *lifelong lifewide learning* perspective, and plays a key role in any kind of professional occupation.

The traditional dichotomy between vocational and liberal disciplines and fields of study as well as between higher education curricula and programmes is no longer effective within current educational and political scenarios, which require students to be equipped with a set of transverse work-related competencies, not specifically connected to a pre-determined professional profile, but essential to help the students in finding their way in the future.

Work-related competencies are effective in identifying and detailing goals, in defining consistent sustainable projects, in testing and working out hypotheses within real-life contexts and situations and are sustained by a reflexive epistemology, which is the grounding of a sound professional engagement and a constructive professional development in any field.

Magnell (2016) highlights several approaches to include work-related learning in academic curricula: added on by someone else; added on by the profession; integration of teaching and learning activities and integration with added value. Each approach is connected to a specific but diverse understanding of the function of education for academia and of education for work outside academia, which include various perceptions of roles, types of work-related learning activities, and their integration in the standard curriculum.

Undoubtedly, the integration of teaching and learning activities and the integration with added value are particularly challenging, since they require a thorough reorganization of both the curriculum and the institutional organization.

4. Work-related learning and the construction of professional epistemology

In not providing meaningful work-related learning experiences, higher education does not offer students the possibility to build a specific professional epistemology (i.e. the way professionals use, reframe, and build knowledge) which is the core of any professional role. Moreover, there is the risk that professionalizing higher education might lead the students towards a positivistic epistemology of practice.

As Schön has highlighted in an analysis that can still be applied to current higher education scenarios, professional education is based on a positivist framework, which privileges the technical, the testable, and the objective, and separates ends from means while failing to train for the real problems of practice (Schön 1992).

Consequently, the epistemology of professional practice built into the very structure of professional schools and research institutions has been set forth as an exercise of technical rationality, that is, as an application of research-based knowledge to the solution of problems of instrumental choice.

Schön suggests reconsidering the question of professional knowledge referring to an alternative epistemology of practice, which takes full account of the competence practitioners display in situations of uncertainty, complexity, and uniqueness, and is mainly based on the capacity to practice reflection on and in action (Schön 1992).

Drawing on Schön, Kinsella (2010) highlighted the need for an epistemology of reflective practice based on a series of constitutive elements: a broad critique of technical rationality; a vision of professional practice knowledge as a form of artistry; a constructivist understanding of the processes of knowledge construction; acknowledgment of the significance of tacit knowledge for professional practice knowl-

edge, and, finally, the overcoming of body-mind dualism to recognize the knowledge revealed in intelligent action.

According to this framework, higher education should therefore be strongly learner-centred and focused on the necessity to engage students with real problems emerging from the practice contexts, making use of methodologies such as problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and role playing, in order to sustain them in the process of constructing a reflective professional epistemology, useful to build sound professionality.

5. Developing professional identity through legitimate peripheral participation

Professional epistemology is one key element of a clearly defined and acknowledged professional identity, which, as Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006) point out, can be understood according to three different perspectives considering career and role transitions, socialization, and identity work.

Professional identities are therefore constructed and developed through the process of career building based on the distinct roles played within career advancement: this is not the sum of the roles, but an integration of the experiences and expertise connected to these roles.

As highlighted by Greil and Rudy (1983), the organizations within which a professional operates play a crucial role in the development and shaping of professional identities, bringing about significant changes over time to different degrees.

Lave & Wenger (1991) explored how, within organizations, 'communities of practice' progressively sustain individuals in the construction of a definite professional identity through processes of 'legitimate peripheral participation' that acknowledge and legitimate the entry of novice professionals into a specific field of practice.

Individuals struggle to actively construct their professional identity through an interactive and problematic process which engages them in highly demanding 'identity work' (Pratt, Rockmann, Kaufmann, 2006).

To be effective, this professional 'identity work' needs to begin and be carried out very early in the course of academic studies, which should therefore be arranged in forms and ways that sustain the students in focusing on and designing their own career path, prefiguring advancements and developments but also moments of crisis, change, and transformation.

Moreover, higher education should offer students the opportunity to develop a sound understanding of organizational processes as well as

getting to know the language, narratives, and funds of knowledge that underlie communities of practices within different professional traditions. This would lead students to approach a professional engagement based on a sound awareness of the conditions under which they come to actively participate in productive life.

There is, indeed, especially in Italy, a lack of preparation of graduates in relation to their professional identity, since this demands constant confrontation with professional experiences and professional contexts.

Moreover, the construction and development of a professional identity requires acknowledgment of the existential potential of the job as well as the acquisition of languages, categories, narratives, and 'war stories' that are the inner fabric of any professional adventure. This calls for a strong and steady relationship between higher education contexts and professional organizational ones in addition to a constant engagement of experienced professionals as mentors and tutors for future graduates to sustain their legitimate and progressive participation in professional activities and practices.

6. Conclusions

The main challenge for higher education today is to sustain students in both the acquisition of professional expertise, and in the development of a critical and flexible professional epistemology that cannot be separated from a professional identity, in order to sustain an effective transition from the academic to the working life.

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CHAPTER IV

GUIDANCE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

GUIDING AT UNIVERSITY. THE PROTAGONISTS' POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract: Starting from both an Italian phenomenological perspective and some international works that develop the guidance theme in the direction of 'educational guidance', this chapter will briefly present the aims, instruments, and results of the Parthenope University Research Unit of the PRIN EMP&Co study, which focused on the specific segment of university guidance. The reflection generated by the study provides information and data to identify guidance methods through a pedagogical approach.

Keywords: pedagogy, educational guidance, higher education, life-project.

1. Introduction

The contemporary era is characterized by a substantial diversification of professions. The rapid changes in workplaces and the uncertain nature of employment situations are forcing individuals to constantly come to terms with continuous changes in their lives, which implies the need to learn to constantly rebuild a sense of Self. Flexibility and mobility in the professional field therefore require education and training that provide people with support that goes beyond the mere transfer of contents and knowledge. They need to equip individuals with the ability to cope with the experience of change. All those activities aimed at allowing individuals to recognize and develop their own aptitudes, skills, and competencies therefore become central in the educational experience, in order to consciously build and manage their life project; all such activities correspond to the term *educational guidance*.

2. Theoretical premises, subjects, and methodology

Educational guidance appropriate to the current socio-cultural background should therefore be defined as a continuous process that accompanies all the phases of existence, aiming to put the individual in a condition to make conscious choices in order to exert control over their own life and to be positive and effective at personal, social and professional levels. However, the current state of education-

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al guidance has not yet seen the existence of a guidance system that concretely places itself as an educational and training support system developed within people's overall lifespan of. Most of the guidance activities currently being developed in the field of formal education refer to some training paths for individuals, identified as particularly critical, such as moments linked to the choice of their educational and professional pathway. In particular, the selection and entrance phase of the University represents one of the moments that sees the widest production of activities, aimed at supporting individuals in coping with this delicate phase.

Therefore, while emphasizing the need for a guidance system to define the horizon of its action to take in people's whole existence, education, and choices, the research presented in these pages concentrated on University guidance practices in Italy, understood at present as the most critical and sensitive crossroads of the training path. Most of all, the research concerned the approaches and guidance practices of University entrance in Italy.

The observed perspective chosen is of a pedagogical matrix; i.e., it interprets guidance as a process of an intrinsically educational nature, identifying education in general as a fundamental process which itself expresses guidance characteristics. In other words, the idea is assumed that an education which fully responds to its prerogatives must necessarily fulfil the fundamental goal of making individuals in training capable of coping in the context of complex living experiences and to guide themselves in their ability to choose and train.

Discussing guidance should therefore, in our opinion, be based on the key theme of human formation (Cambi 2003; Massa, Demetrio 1991) both in terms of institutional formative pathways and the mechanisms linked to them, and in the field of scientific research. This horizon acquires the existential concreteness of educational phenomena (Massa and Demetrio 1991) as a guiding principle for designing effective guidance and, therefore, for an 'up-to-date education'. In this sense, in recent years, the role and specificity of pedagogy have adopted a much clearer stance (Cunti 2008, 2015; Domenici 2003; Loiodice 2009; Lo Presti 2010, 2015; Pombeni 1996), through the design of methods and training instruments intended to integrate critical capabilities on their own, and on cognitive and identity processes that guide choices in relation to the opportunities in educational contexts (Bateson 1972; Bertolini 1988; Bruner 1990; Dewey 1946; Gardner 1991; Massa, Demetrio 1991).

In this direction, the overall aim of the research was to investigate both the most widespread practices in the Italian University system and the related models, with the specific intention of verifying the presence of *educational dimensions*, i.e., theories and methods focusing

on the goal of the overall maturation of an individual in projecting capability of choice.

From a methodological point of view, the research favoured a phenomenological-hermeneutical perspective (Bertolini 1988; Bertin, Contini 1983; Cavana, Casadei 2016; Husserl 1954; Merleau-Ponty 1945). The assumption of this theoretical horizon therefore, led the interest not towards mere facts, but in the direction of the impact they have on individuals through the meaning they assume in their lives: «phenomenology is seeking realities, not pursuing truth» (Mortari, Tarozzi 2010: 18). In this way, in the background, the research acquired the assumption that deeper understanding needs to pass via an individual's own standpoints. Similarly, the research strategy was of a qualitative nature (Clandinin, Connelly 2000).

Starting from these assumptions, the research developed in two phases. The first featured representatives of governance and guidance operators (rectors' delegates, coordinators and/or branch office operators); instead, the second involved groups of students attending their first year of University.

The specific purpose of the first phase was to identify the guidance models and practices in use at the Italian Universities involved, taking a closer look at their educational and training dimensions. The second, on the other hand, sought to identify students' guidance needs and the deepest individual aspects at the basis of their choices and life planning and, secondly, to try the same line of inquiry with students as a possible self-reflective guidance value strategy in the field of incoming University guidance.

3. The first research phase: aims, instruments, results

This phase involved, as anticipated, privileged interlocutors of the academic world and institutional representatives engaged in guidance actions. Specifically, 10 subjects (pro-rector, guidance delegate, operators, teachers) were involved, placed in key positions in the programming and managing of the above-mentioned proceedings at the Universities of Padua, Florence, Siena, Naples "Parthenope" and Naples "Federico II". The instrument chosen to collect research data, in qualitative terms, was the *semi-structured interview* designed and built to obtain profound, critical, and objective knowledge of the research subject from subjective points of view.

The interview was organized on the basis of specific thematic areas related to a description of the services offered, the *mission* and the approach pursued, the *organization and management of activities*, the *methodology and instruments used*, the *professional skills* and *competencies*

involved, the *evaluation of practices*, the *system actions* implemented, and the *interplay between guidance and University teaching.* The interviews were carried out with guaranteed anonymity at the various universities and were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and subsequently screened and transcribed in full.

The aim of this phase was, therefore, to return to the *knowledge*, representation, and *beliefs*, including *implicit* ones, which are at the basis of guidance actions in order to obtain a *background model*. In other words, from an individual point of view, it set out to identify and examine implicit and explicit patterns at the origin of the university guidance system, in a search for the meaning, logic, and educational dimensions that lie behind the practices, to define an image of the approaches through which it is organized and implemented in the institutional contexts in question.

Certainly, the results outlined do not constitute extensible or generalizable data, since it is not a quantitative statistical survey; more exactly, according to the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, they represent a key to reading the object which, through attention to the singularity of the cases, provides levels of knowledge and depth that contribute to clarifying its nature.

The interviews were analysed categorically with Atlas-ti 6.0 software (Muhr 2000), based on a network structure consisting of a corpus of hermeneutical units and an intuitive and creative approach to data usage.

The generative research question that motivated the categorical analysis was created based on the famous formula of Glaser (1998) "What's going on here?" and was expressed in "How does guidance happen in Italian university contexts; which approach do the practices imply?"

3.1 Data analysis

The analysis of the interviews was divided into three phases: *initial or open encoding*, which consisted of line-by-line text analyses, according to the presupposition that 'All is data' to identify the minimal meaning units (text pieces) and the thematic recurrences in the form of precisely defined 'labelled phenomena'; *focused encoding*, which allowed identification of conceptually wider macro-categories through a redefinition of the initial labels and their transformation into more mature concepts; *theoretical encoding*, which allowed development of a conceptual model that supplemented the main categories.

In the initial coding phase, 85 codes were identified (Code map) and these referred to all the sensitizing concepts that emerged from the first analysis of the corpus of interviews, regarding the initial search

inquiry. Subsequently, the codes considered redundant were grouped into a smaller number (32), then further reduced to 21. In the focalized encoding phase, the codes became 4 broader macro-categories, which through conceptual work were appropriately renamed and associated through semantic links. From these reports, in the last phase (theoretical encoding), the central category was identified, inductively identified by following the hierarchical work on the categories emerging from the data, from which a general theory on the University Guidance Process was integrated and delineated. This theory expresses all the points of view, facts, beliefs, and implicit knowledge of those interviewed, sorted into a unique configuration that generalizes the contents on the basis of categorical comparisons and combinations.

From this general theory comes a guidance approach denominated *matching*, in which choice is represented as the best result of the relationship between the individual and the university's educational offering. In this sense, the guidance is interpreted by the individuals involved as an instrument that links what the student likes doing to the corresponding Degree Course. This guidance approach would thus seem to refer to theories on personal-environment adaptation, which are defined as *matching theories* (Parsons 1909), and which describe choice as the most 'economic' result in the relationship between individual characteristics and environmental ones.

In addition, a generalized approach to guidance is mainly interpreted as a *marketing strategy* aimed at suggesting and attracting large, anonymous crowds of students in which every individuality is destroyed (Demarie, Molina 2007). The emerging theory is indicated as being of a predominantly informative nature, and is appreciated for its usefulness in the immediate future; in other words, it is assumed that information may possess the enlightening power to provide students with an instrument to recognize themselves in their own future. It emerges that the individual and the institutional dimension blend in favour of the needs of the latter to the detriment of recognition of the former, where, on the contrary, an individual's needs to project, construct, and give meaning to their existence, should in our opinion, become the primary aim of university guidance.

In short, even if, according to recent theoretical models, guidance interventions should provide a response to individuals' need to reflect on themselves and know themselves to construct a life project that fully represents their subjectivity, it is clear how such models do not actually find a precise correspondence between theoretical/declarative aspects and practical/applicative developments in the actual perpetuation of an informative-divulgating approach.

From the general theoretical project that emerged, four macro-categories of synthesis were obtained, connected by semantic links,

which explain the University Guidance Practices in the view of the interviewers and offer the opportunity to reflect critically on them.

The four macro-categories that emerged are as follows.

Political Model

This category essentially represents a series of points of view and acquisitions that follow a hierarchical mode in determining the planning of guidance strategies; a mode in which the rules, visions, and educational values that the guidance determines seem more compatible with the requirements of the University system, rather than being tailor-made to the individual student. The process outlined by the categorical analysis of the corpus highlights how guidance is understood as coherently based on a vision of a linear pathway in which choice is interpreted as already clearly present in an individual, being directly linked to a specific training course and hence a presumed aim of the working world that corresponds to it.

Literature Model

This category expresses points of view that generally place individuals and their characteristics at the centre of guidance processes; in fact, it would outline an alternative to the political model in conceiving the paths that lead individuals to build their own identity, educational paths, and career. However, for reasons likely to be traced both to logistical and infrastructural crises, and in a common difficulty in clearly identifying a widely recognized and shared theoretical-methodological background, this kind of model fails to be coherently and concretely placed to guide planning. An awareness regarding the importance of referring to a scientific-theoretical model of guidance emerges, supporting and helping the political model, which, however, remains unchained to the practices, staying confined to the background of a merely declarative dimension of the principle lines.

Students as painters of themselves

This category expresses awareness of the complex dynamics that interact in individual decision processes, in which the significant individual narrative is supremely relevant. As a result, the subjects interviewed showed that they recognized the complex aims of effective guidance, clearly identifying the subjective and variable nature of the dynamics that make up the student learning experience; however, even in this case, such awareness did not match the relevant practices.

Guidance-teaching dichotomy

The fourth category groups the opinions that describe the lack of recognition of a meaningful relationship between guidance and teach-

ing as if the latter did not already incorporate a guiding prerogative. In other words, the planning of guidance and the management of 'ordinary' didactics appear to be out of step: teaching does not usually cover guidance and does not benefit from the actions carried out by guidance services, except where it is believed to benefit from the presence of previously well-trained students. Teaching and guidance are therefore represented as two fields disengaged from one another, although the teaching experience never plays a neutral role in subject guidance processes, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

The theoretical system derived from qualitative analyses of data therefore leads to the conclusion that, for the subjects involved, the prevailing concept of University guidance, even if tendentially structured according to an approach and a mission based on more or less clear theoretical guidelines, still has some gaps. We would like to emphasize the disagreement with the strong need of individuals to be accompanied in the task of giving meaning to their existential projects and projecting themselves towards the future (Benasayag, Schmit 2004).

To conclude, analysis of the set of results linked to this phase very quickly highlighted, the following critical points:

- Substantial dissolution between emerging models and the quality of practices actually developed
- Failure to refer to a shared system of projecting and guidance management (absence of a recognized and unambiguous legacy)
- Unmodified direction of guidance on the educational side
- Failure to recognize individualization and centring elements on the subject.

4. The second research phase: aims, instruments, results

The second phase, as anticipated, directly involved the students, aiming to identify their guidance needs, the deepest individual aspects at the basis of their choices and life planning, and possible guidance strategies to respond to these. In this case, the instrument chosen and considered the most suitable to achieve the objectives was the *focus group* (Merton, Kendal 1946), which, with its interactive mode, represented a useful instrument both to recover deep-seated information about the points of view of the students involved, and to activate a reflective interactive posture that could guide the subjects themselves to become aware of their active and constructive role in the processes of choice. This second aim, in particular, was intended to correspond to the intention, which we have already referred to, to experience a short 'educational path' of a reflective nature, dur-

ing which participants could talk and swap opinions on the theme of guidance by drawing on the elements of reflection useful to activate internal self-revaluation processes, concerning their own knowledge and competencies.

The use of the focus group was therefore linked to the choice of using narrative to generate dynamic reflection on complex themes that affect the individual's guidance within a context of group interaction, the latter being seen as a resource useful to collect information, points of view, personal problems, stances, but also to collectively produce alternative ideas and viable solutions (Duggleby 2005; Krueger, Casey 2000).

The planning that preceded the focus groups was split into a phase of conceptualization and development of the themes and of the related questions and techniques; a phase of choice and recruitment of the potential participants, and finally, a stage of logistics and projecting organization regarding the manner of conducting the discussion and the moderators to be involved.

The participating students were recruited from membership lists through the guidance information desk by a personal request for participation by email. Starting from the consensus obtained, heterogeneous groups were created by age and scope of training in order to promote greater variety and exchange point of views and to promote a certain dynamism in the discussion.

As regards the implementation phases, groups were created of 12 members and a moderator team, consisting of a moderator, responsible for presenting questions, stimulating materials and facilitating discussion, 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 chosen mode of conduct was mixed, and, broadly speaking, it had the moderator playing a marginal role during group discussions and an active role in launching themes and supporting discussions with encouragement and meaning feedback. The setting for the discussions – warm, friendly, permissive, and non-threatening (Krueger 1994) was a neutral space at the University's facilities that the students regularly use, and was therefore familiar to them and non-inhibitory.

Considering the complexity and multidimensionality of the object of the focus group, it was decided to create 3 sessions per group one week apart, to give the necessary time to reflect on the personal aspects that emerged during the discussion and to produce narrative material useful for the next session. The structure of the focus group sessions started from the way in which Savickas and Hartung (2012) organized career history production according to the famous formula *Telling-Hearing-Enacting My Story*, which, in the case of the present

research, was arranged and adapted to the *educational story* which becomes a *life project*. In the work described, the focus group was used as a qualitative instrument of the narrative revelation, but also as a training moment for the students involved and a chance for the research group to build a pedagogical university guidance proposal that dealt with educational issues.

4.1 Data analysis

The qualitative data collected through the 3 focus group sessions was subjected to categorical and content analysis with the support of Atlas.ti software. The analysis of the corpus was divided into three phases: initial or open coding, which identified the meaningful text parts containing the sensitizing concepts (60 codes); focused encoding, which redefined the labelling work as well as 20 conceptualized macro-categories; theoretical coding, which identified and elaborated the most mature concepts in the form of a conceptual model (9 codes). The analysis therefore allowed the formulation of a theory that explained the process leading the participants to fathom and/or change their meaning in life.

The core of the conceptual system has been defined as *Fragility of Choices* and it represents the widest and most branched category emerging from textual analysis. The theme of choices is redundant in the participants' narratives and is described as an element characterizing their life paths in a pervasive way, since, although it represents a growing and formative opportunity for the person, it does seem to have been lived in negative terms, as a *weight on the shoulders* and a time of difficulty to cope with. In fact, the description of the choices that emerged from the analysis refers to dimensions such as those of obligation, conditioning by others, renunciation, and, above all, an absence of those fundamental aspects – knowledge, passions, interests – starting from which decisions are made that consider both rational and emotional-affective aspects. In other words, the *core category* highlights that the choices acquire deep meanings which transcend a mere selection from among different alternatives, in order to decisively affect the future. Not only does this create the fear of failing to make sufficiently weighty and profitable choices, it does not tolerate the possibility of making mistakes either.

Around the central core just described revolve another 8 macro-categories, held together by semantic links, which explain how the participants come to build their meaning in life:

- Recursive transitions
- Ambivalence about institutional education;
- Personal experience;

- Significant adults;
- Guidance disconnected from needs;
- Self-guidance;
- Vocation comes at work;
- Sense of existence between work and knowledge.

The imminence and obligation of choices intensifies due to, and at the same time as, *recursive transitions* which mark the participants' life paths. The transitions referred to, are, for example, the canonical ones that affect the community of teenagers and young adults in the transition between different orders and degrees of formal education. In fact, although change and transitions represent a structural datum of people's whole life-cycle, those described in the narratives seem to have a potential for criticality precisely because of the need to make some choices that clearly also include a degree of resolution with oneself and the surrounding environment. Thus, what appeared to have, at least in the previous decades, an evolutionary potential in terms of emancipatory change (transition as an exclusively positive event) is characterized today by its involutional character, to procrastinate and/or stagnate. What emerges, therefore, is worry, and the need to identify educational and professional paths that are satisfactory and congruent with one's personal expectations and aspirations.

Moreover, the ambivalence of institutional education emerges, which, despite undertaking for individuals one of the privileged contexts for assuming a 'form', in the sense of acquiring a specific way of being and living, seem to be ineffective in supporting and educating *choices*. In this regard, it emerges, above all, that high schools are described as a pathway which, instead of welcoming and 'keeping', 'alienate' the subject as a place where teenagers cannot perceive the possibility of recognizing themselves.

Instead, the side of *personal experience* is interpreted as the most significant in relation to identity-building and self-knowledge; elements that prelude the choice and, therefore, help clarify the existential projects.

The process leading to Self-determination is clearly seen by others, in particular by significant adults, parents, and teachers, who, in a few cases, were described as fully able to offer the instruments to make the self-construction of choice paths concrete, for example, by offering themselves as an example or a guide, since they are more often considered as figures predominantly engaged in providing prescriptive indications and advice that channel their idea of others into pre-established paths.

What emerges from the quality of the teachers' educational work reflects in a substantial way the meaning that guidance assumes in institutional contexts. According to the participants, guidance is un-

dervalued, tackled superficially, not supported by specially trained educational figures, following an informed approach, considered virtually ineffective in responding to their needs. However, the participants did identify an alternative guidance instrument that they categorize with their work experience. In fact, this represents one of the most pregnant occasions in understanding what they intend to be, since it offers an opportunity to practically experience professional roles through the introduction of knowledge, skills, and aptitudes that only in this way they discover they have. It follows that *vocation comes at work* through discovery of self-related aspects of the professional sphere that were previously latent.

Consequently, guidance is described by the participants not as a habitus born and cultivated in formal educational contexts, but as a form of self-guidance that takes the traits of an adaptive response to the lack of educational actions in this direction. In other words, the participants looked independently outside institutional contexts for the instruments they needed to make choices that were not hasty and superficial.

All this interrelated system of contexts, processes, reference figures, and divisions that affect the personal and professional sphere contribute to determining what represents their meaning in life. What guides and motivates the sense of existence is also in this case embodied in elements such as personal fulfilment and satisfaction concerning work and, in a more general perspective, the need to know and discover oneself and the surrounding world to find constructive forms of self-expression.

There seems to be a certain degree of autonomy in the exercising of choices and, therefore, in the ability to guide oneself, but this is generated mostly by cases of absolute necessity, which turn to a natural guidance predisposition, rather than a sense of responsibility and self-awareness. In other words, self-directed choices and paths are accompanied by a continual latent sense of restlessness, as a result of a 'leap into the dark' rather than the result of a project that combines self-knowledge and opportunities. This seems to indicate a tendential ineffectiveness on the side of educational responsibilities, which do not emerge as significant in the perception and interpretation of the subjects in relation to their guidance needs. In this direction, what appears relevant is the reference to work and the category of direct experience as the main sources of guidance; sources linked, however, to chance, and above all not filtered by a systematic critical exercise of the subjective value it could have. In other words, in the individual interpretations, 'personal experience teaches' more than educational institutions, although this does not directly imply that experience itself is the subject of critical analysis.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the path ultimately highlighted some elements of knowledge that are useful in defining the pathways of educational guidance to be tested, validated, and improved on successive occasions within further contexts comparable to more typical characteristics. These elements are:

- the effectiveness of educational work carried out within group discussions as a privileged place for the expression of a narrative-dialogic perspective;
- the use of narrative as a reflective and viatical instrument fundamental for the development of knowledge, awareness, training, and self-education;
- acknowledgment of an educational benefit perceived by students in terms of self-awareness, of reflective and guidance competencies that would also indicate the need to plan guidance routes according to systematic, structured, accompanying forms, which are repeated at good stages marking the academic year;
- the fact that, despite focus groups having been conducted in different contexts, universities, and territories (which also led to diversity in the field of objective opportunities), there was a strong overlap in the aspects that characterize student experiences with respect to themes of choice and the future in general, as well as of the generally expressed guidance needs.

The theme of the *competency of choice*, as the central guidance category, appeared transversely, in the light of the outcomes, deeply bound up with constant exercise in self-questioning and reality. The option to direct guidance practices to the concreteness and density of the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of *making meaning*, rather than merely providing information and knowledge, or measuring abilities and aptitudes, appears effective with respect to the aim of highlighting the link with personal experience as a subjective experience of reworking meaning that acts as a *theory guiding action*. The dialogic-relational dimension, too, proved to be a structured and effective reflective space (governed by models, methods, and instruments) for constructing meaning and, therefore, 'directions'.

Consequently, all of this reinforces the idea of an adequate pedagogical approach to guidance, and points towards further commitment to concrete experimentation with consistent practices and educational-reflective instruments that make them operational within heterogeneous and pluralistic contexts in a sharing and systemic view.

Our work has been moving along this road and the information that has emerged seems to confirm the need for a further and con-

tinuous evolution of the skills expressed by the educational system towards the ability to meet, interpret, and support the singularity and complexity of the most current needs of subjects in training.

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SELF-TELLING TO ORIENTATE ONESELF

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ABSTRACT: The guidance experience, pedagogically considered, is above all the process of identification, recognition and consolidation of individual resources of which the person is the bearer (attitudes, capabilities, inclinations, expectations, desires, projects), is the conquest of one's own identity, the research of constituent elements of personality, the awareness of 'being-different-from-everyone-else'. Within this theoretical assumption, the narration is a suitable placement as estimable and relevant device for self-guidance and transformation of the self. In the guidance actions the use of narrative, reflective and autobiographical paradigms can represent an effective aid in the direction of the redefinition of identity, empowerment and self-empowerment. Narration is the search for the truth about the self, or even more the process of re-thinking and re-design the self. It means to discover and achieve a deep knowledge about the self, to reconstruct one's own life plan, is to de-form to re-emerge, to re-form it. In a broad sense, it is in some way to 'die' to be reborn regenerated.

KEYWORDS: narration, identity, project, skills assessment.

If the watchword of the culture of orientation has generally been 'aptitude', it is now possible to affirm that the real keyword is 'identity'. Every valid guidance experience allows people to meet their inimitable typicality and define the ideal of a Self that is generative of the intent to circumscribe its role within the social fabric accompanied by a readiness to bring meaning to subjective existence.

Conquering self-oriented competence is an educational goal of no small account, thinking particularly of the fact that the health of any personality is identified by an image of itself that is both complete and unified, including not only the concept of what it is, but also of what it wishes to be and should be. Self-awareness is equivalent to reconstituting the identity of a subject seeking the achievement of essential goals, through constructions and reconstructions, structuring and destructuring, learning and unlearning.

Being conscious of one's own worth and need, perceiving oneself as different, contributes in no small measure to eliminating any sense of insignificance and existential banality, and brings the necessary strength to respond responsibly to the appeals of life. Suffice to recall the concept of *psychological education* to refer to the fundamental educational task of fostering the 'I'. This is a task which is very different from nurturing escapism and solipsism, individualism, and selfishness. What is at stake is the

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emancipative undertaking to make people master their psychic life and thus help to defend them against prejudices and conditioning, mortification, and manipulation, and to conquer a force of expansion and a generation of humanity that nurtures their personal, social, and cultural lives.

The concept of the *development task* may serve to indicate programming indispensable for psychosocial education, for a positive and rewarding growth, and for the conferral of direction, unity, and consistency in one's evolutionary journey. In this sense, the various development tasks are arranged as educational commitments, which, as such, demand the possession of principles and rules, and ideals and values, that can bring order to the many decisions a human being is required to make.

This concept leads us to focus on the commitment and effort, courage and creativity, the availability of renewable energy and the drive towards perfection that a subject must express in taking shape, thereby emphasizing the fact that the various evolutionary achievements have nothing to do with the occasional and contingent nor axiological neutrality and intimism. An authentic personal development, while it bears the beauty of adventure and constant discovery, can also be appreciated for its strong passion for regulative principles that are beneficial for the human being to grow and improve.

1. Self-knowledge and the self-project

These are considerations which help to underline that orientation, even sooner than being scholastic and professional, is something personal. We are in the presence of a dynamic maturation process that requires the use and operation of all the dimensions and forces of the person understood in a realistic way, and that, in its realization, activates the affective, cognitive, volitional, moral, and relational spheres. In this way, orientation is equivalent to the integral formation of the personality since achieving full possession of their aptitudes and exploitation of their potential allow people to implement and practise subjective, free, and intelligent tasks that are therefore truly creative, in virtue of a continuous transcendence of their existential situation and an intentional projection towards others and reality itself.

In saying this, we are sustained by the conviction that the guiding experiences are the detection, recognition and consolidation of the resources people possess (aptitudes, capacity, enthusiasm, inclinations, desires, plans), is the conquest of their own identity, is the search for the constituent elements of their personality and awareness of their own 'being-different-from-everyone-else'.

Through a continuous analysis of their motivations, aspirations, interests, and expertise, people come to build their own image of themselves

(what they actually are, are worth, possess, what they know, can and want to create), they valorize themselves, measuring their value against external reality, produce their own existential project, exercise a capacity of personal initiative, inventiveness and creativeness capable of producing high rewards for themselves and the community.

Orientation is essentially a way to manage their own life according to vocationally significant decisions from an independent and free being engaged in the choices of planning life in which and with which they foster the full development of their personality. For this reason, orientation cannot mean one technique or some improvised advice that reduces it to a point of view or opinion in a process prompted by specialized staff or an operation carried out from the outside by experts, nor in an event of the aptitudinal-measuring-diagnostic-informative type, but in a process that finds its beginning and evolution in a person's ontological substantiality and ethics, while necessarily noting the importance of social factors, so that, not infrequently, the dynamics of decision-making are the product of a compromise.

In this sense, self-orientation follows on directly from introspection and self-assessment, i.e. from a critical and objective analysis of one's desires and aspirations, capacities, and interests, both hidden and obvious from the precise assumption of 'being-in-the-world', in other words, from the consideration of one's own self interrelated with the experiential reality that has significance for the self.

In short, the roots of self-knowledge lie in self-exploration and self-objectification, thanks to which human beings can precisely trace their destiny, establish their own existential project, and take the decisions for their own life independently, developing appropriate forms of original assertiveness to defend themselves from pseudo-vocations and external pressures, while taking note of adaptations and pseudo-participative dynamics.

Within this theoretical framework, narrative can find a suitable location as an estimable relevant pedagogical instrument of self-orientation and self-transformation. In guiding actions, the use of reflexive autobiographical narrative paradigms can be the guarantor of an effective aid in redefining the identity of the existential design of *empowerment* and *self-empowerment*, i.e. gaining a set of facts, skills, and relational modalities that can facilitate independent research strategies to achieve the goals of innovation, constructiveness, and social and professional protagonism.

There is a close bond between an ideographic conception of orientation and narrative methodology: orientation cannot be substantiated by the narration itself. Life stories told in the first person bolster the guidance process, and ultimately establish identity processes. The legacy of stories possessed by people is the source of their stability and transformations, their compass, an instrument to interpret their own world and

contribute to building it. In this way, the orientation shifts its centre of gravity from 'orienter' to orienting, acknowledging that these competencies and powers, abilities, and resources, have a potential for self-conduction and self-direction.

2. The story, hermeneutics, rewriting

Self-telling is the search for a truth about oneself, taking care of, rethinking, replanning oneself, being reborn. The history of a life possessed may become a valid navigation chart, thanks to which we can orient and guide ourselves, undertake a journey towards and tend to ourselves, expand and gain mastery over ourselves. Self-telling is a chance to rewrite what can no longer be relived, to interpret the past in the light of the present in the prospect of a future which is a promise of regenerating possibilities, of new investments and new forms of action, re-motivation, and learning.

Self-telling is rekindling the memory. This is relevant to estimate the contribution it can offer regarding the processes of self-description and self-reflection, investigation and discovery of re-evocation and introspection, of self-seeking and biographical awareness, self-acknowledgement, and self-assessment, of a reconstruction that becomes interpretation and edification.

When people re-read and re-interpret themselves, reconsidering their existential journey and understanding themselves over again, it becomes possible to rewrite their own 'individual novel', the re-construction of identity and therefore a change and a growth, managing to experience things with greater awareness and therefore discovering that they are more a protagonist of their own story.

Through the hermeneutics of the autobiographical road and an understanding of the motivations and dynamics of things that have happened as well as their many meanings, people can identify their own roads and evolutionary and transformational seasons through which they developed.

Through this hermeneutics, it is possible to give an explanation to one's own past by giving meaning to the various experiences, decisions, and choices, and to impart a sense of one's own future, to become aware of one's own affective, social, cognitive, and moral history, and to exert a planning impetus, to explain and critically review learning and cognitive processes occurring during actions that produce particular epistemic postures, to orient motivations, targets, and formative itineraries, to discover unexplored values and interests to be transformed into objectives that can allow us to make best use of our subjective potentialities, to gain an inner coherence and continuity in space and time, and to formulate realistic assumptions about our future.

Being able to tell of oneself means making discoveries within ourselves and about ourselves, means being able to reconstruct our own life plan, means de-forming in order to re-form, to gain a new form, in some ways means a 'dying', to be reborn regenerated. Self-telling does not mean making a mere chronicle of one's own past, since the affective, ethical, aesthetic, and cognitive dimensions are all involved. Self-telling is to give meaning to experience, renaming it, re-evoking it, commenting on it, with the conviction that this is not to be understood merely as a practice in itself, but also as an understanding of the meaning of what was and is being experienced, as a process of questioning the past and the present.

Self-telling becomes precious reflective practice for the processing of one's own biography, the interpretation of one's own formative biography, for the reconstruction of the meaning of personal existence and personal life choices, for the meaning of events, for conferring meaning on expectations and projects, desires and duties, as well as for the understanding and connection of happenings and events intended otherwise to separation, fragmentation and desemantization, as well as for (new) awareness-raising of one's power and sense of self-efficacy.

Commemorating oneself is offered to people not so much as a mechanical repetition of the past but as an itinerary in and for itself in order to give shape, as an activation of existentially significant experiences to draw on, *inter alia*, in order to gain awareness, assume responsibility, and clarify, deepen and bring meaning to one's life. The past can be considered a burden that slows and hinders change, or a container of events and experiences that can be used to tackle the problems of the present and to give meaning to life, to stem the suffocating arrogance of the present, to eliminate constraints and obstacles that hinder the process of self-emancipation and self-idolization, to gain the tools and resources to make subsequent experience formatively more solid and productive.

Historical memory can help people become aware of hopes, dreams and utopias, projects which, if interrupted or reabsorbed over time, still maintain the concrete potential of germinating the new and never-before-seen. Being human also means remembering what we were. In virtue of a recall, of a selective, critical, and interpretative recall, sympathetic rather than explanatory, processes of self-knowledge and self-awareness are triggered, dynamics of re-evocation and self-probing are activated, investigations of self and biographical awarenesses are prompted, learning and relearning occur, a self-identity profile is gained that is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic.

At stake is the progressive development of a dynamic self-portrait through the multiplicity of identity that dwells within the subject, through the different identities that have oriented and continue to orient one's actions, the choices imposed or desired, personal representations and projections.

Thus, starting from oneself permits the emergence of that subjectivity that is so strongly demanded by current scenarios. Starting from oneself also permits hermeneutics, self-recognition, re-appropriation and redefinition of one's self, actions and one's own context, re-interpreting and re-weaving one's own story, self-consciousness as a subject that learns, (re)discovery of one's own learning style, refinements of one's skills as an aware learner, the achievement of new learning mode.

Using the narrative experience, it is possible to help learners gain an idea of themselves as a subjectivity that can decide, choose, and act. For this reason, a valid activity of empowerment is outlined, favouring the gaining of agentivity and self-directionality.

Thinking in particular of the work experience, what is in question is the ability to promote in subjects the design of a professional self, starting from their life story, in order to emphasize the most significant elements, to help them recover and express the personal dimension of their formative experiences, to prompt a critical dialogue with the motivational situations and decision-making processes encountered, to think about the problems tackled on a daily basis, to display their theoretical and practical knowledge, to learn, with the goal of self-transformation, from their personal biography, as well as facilitating the identification of a professional act deemed promising and significant, and therefore the solicitor of professional guidelines and plans so as to provide a greater capacity for an intelligent and autonomous location within the working processes.

Of note is the close connection between professional development and the attribution of meaning to the formative or professional conduct and experiences, as well as the related maturation of the concept of the formative and professional selves. It is important to accompany subjects to define not only their professional interests but also their goals (remuneration, autonomy, responsibility, relational quality, recognition, pride, self-esteem and self-confidence, learning, and professional development) that they seek to achieve by means of their work, and the importance that this plays in their life.

In question is the opportunity to help them gain guidance skills (self-planning, awareness of their own resources, decision-making practices, self-assessment) capable of sustaining the quality and efficacy of personal actions geared to check and direct noteworthy events characterizing the development of their careers.

There may be a feeling of impossibility both to understand human conduct ignoring their intentions, and to understand these, ignoring the contexts in which they have meaning. We find it essential to emphasize the need for the formative experience to help people reflect on the singularity of their character and knowledge, to develop a realistic idea of themselves, an appropriate vision of personal potential, inclinations and basic skills, whether technical-professional or transverse (professional in-

terests, beliefs of effectiveness, professional styles, motivation to work, professional values), without failing to observe that knowledge of employment possibilities, professionalizing activities, the gaining of skills and technical-specialist capacities alone cannot bring completeness to professional identity.

3. Skills assessment, guidance technology

In this regard, we should learn to appreciate skills assessment, thinking especially of its contribution not so much in identifying the degree of mastery of one's skills based on abstract taxonomies, nor so much in terms of roles, but as recognition of real work and therefore of located knowledge, knowledge in action, local and contingent knowhow, concrete action abilities, personal capacity expressed and acted out 'locally', in contexts of organized action, of the possibility of responding successfully to a typical question, therefore far from idealized and generic models of theory and practice in the workplace.

The application of skills assessment seems particularly proper and effective in those professional places characterized by dynamic variables and subject to multiple and continuous changes that determine a demand for new goals and new skills, different tasks and roles, different professionalism and responsibilities, of intuitive interiorized and refined capacities in virtue of which to deal creatively and effectively with problematic situations.

Through recourse to skills assessment, at stake is the aid offered to organizational subjects to become (re)builders of their own employment history (choice, initial work, training, vocational development) and interpreters of a professional assessment, and therefore to examine and valorize their potential and personal psychosocial resources (representations, aptitudes, values, interests and motivations related to work) and professional ones; to recognize and verify the knowledge and knowhow acquired, their experiences and unspoken aspirations, the intelligence and skills built inside the workplace (in different working situations), the learning-by-doing gained, and to facilitate the identification of the most suitable training for personal needs, to draw up a project for professional development and manage a repositioning as regards work, employment transition, mobility and re-insertion into the job market, along with any ongoing adjustment and occupational redesign.

By means of a re-enactment of the experiential, subjects can be made aware of their potential, can acquire a reflexive gaze at themselves and the way in which they have organized and structured their personal experiences, and can think in terms of skills and therefore think of themselves as a subject-in-a-situation, can re-describe themselves placing themselves

within specific binding places, can reflect on what they are able to do, even in terms of applicability in the world of work, on what should be improved in relation to the demands of the world of work, as well as on what they could do to more easily enter or re-enter the job market through greater responsibility with respect to their future work, and thus catch a glimpse of the brand new, the not-given, the not-yet, resources and personal riches that have remained unknown, unexplored, and unused.

At stake is the aid offered for the reconstruction and analysis of personal, educational, and vocational history, of recognition, of the ownership and integration of the abilities and skills acquired, identifying strengths and areas of increase in personal skills, evaluation of the applicability and transferability of the skills possessed to other working environments, other geographical locations, and professional roles. In this sense, it may be considered formatively significant to accompany subjects in gaining the ability to update, enhance, and modify their skills, boosting basic ones as well as expressing their critical capacity to operatively translate them, both in specific learning environments and in an instrumental way.

Favouring the methodological path of self-exploration and self-assessment rather than that of diagnosis and self-assessment, skills assessment is not to be seen solely as a repertoire of technical skills acquired by subjects during their educational and professional life, but also as an instrument to allow the investigation, destructuring and rebuilding of some of the components of their subjective identity, together with the reconstruction of that set of skills and resources of different kinds which enable them to manage their own tasks at a given moment of professional development and organizational life.

Far from identifying it as a diagnostic or evaluative instrument, or as a mode for selecting personnel, we can look at skills assessment as a formative experience that allows people to redefine their own patterns of thought and action, and therefore as an experience that can bring substantial lifeblood to the planning self, to facilitate a disposition to reflective planning, and therefore to contribute to the maturation of self-reliance and an ability to take charge of their own future by measuring themselves against the world of work and educational opportunities.

In this sense, it seems legitimate to argue that the skills assessment, not stopping at the present and looking to the future, is configured as a training instrument characterized not so much by 'measuring' tasks as 'predictive' ones, featuring not only an 'overall' significance but also a 'preventive' one, therefore able to make subjects aware not only of their being and doing, of their knowledge/knowing how to be/knowing how to do, but also of their being able to be/being able to do/being able to become, not only of their 'abstract' knowledge and abilities, but also of concrete knowledge and abilities and therefore, professionally speaking, their 'specifications'.

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GUIDANCE SPECIFICITY IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH. CRITICISMS AND AREA OF INTERVENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to discuss and reflect on the Neapolitan section of the PRIN project from a critical perspective. The research underlines the relevance of combining the dimensions of meaning, continuity, and change, giving individuals the chance to try out promising educational itineraries where guidance is understood as a pedagogical tool of higher education contexts.

KEYWORDS: higher education, personal and professional identity, self-realization, guidance, counseling.

1. Introduction

Guidance is undoubtedly a complex theme, primarily because it represents the development of educational processes. Indeed, it is from its close relationship with education that the necessity arises to link it to, amongst others, the processes to develop the Self, the various forms of conditioning and educational care, and the quality of interpersonal and social relationships. It represents a critical perspective coherent with the fields explored by the PRIN project, also considering the trajectory it followed before becoming a part of educational research. Traditionally, guidance has been a field of psychological and sociological research: the former, throughout its complex evolution, focusing predominantly on the possibility of harmonizing students' motivations (not only cognitive, of course) with those of the workplace. These studies, while at various times giving precedence to one or the other, have aimed at producing a match that would satisfy both, and therefore benefit people's wellbeing as well as the system development. The latter adopts a mainly analytical point of view of the processes of change within social systems in respect to individual working existence. Both approaches describe and link objects and/or phenomena, however, such a perspective falls short when the challenge facing guidance becomes that of creating, both educationally and structurally, contexts, relationships, and organizations capable of stimulating and growing needs, desires and strategies, as well as

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guidance skills, to evolve developmental paths of thinking, feeling and acting; in other words, to develop the Self.

2. Guidance as an educational emergency in Higher Education

It is increasingly widely acknowledged that guidance has become not only that of creating upon what we have, or of developing our potential, but also of making sense out of all of this by means of reflection on individuals' development within their own contexts. If this is to be one of the main pedagogical goals in guidance processes, the educational task in this area – and therefore also the social and political tasks, can be none other than to design, verify, and enhance theoretical and practical structures to define, detail and clarify the role of pedagogy. It was from this perspective that the Neapolitan research unit worked, focusing on guidance as a fundamental educational tool, and at the same time a complex subject bordering many others, and requiring both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches.

Although guidance is a lifelong issue, particularly due to the weakening of social and community support in transitional life-events, and because of the precarity of self-determination during adulthood, it is especially important for young adults, and therefore also the main educational systems that take care of them: school and university.

Postmodern characteristics (Bauman 2005, 2000; Lasch 1984) create a widespread crisis which is felt profoundly by young adults in higher education, since society requires them to overcome several developmental tasks crucial to their social recognition as adults. If the choices have multiplied vertiginously, the youth crisis is nevertheless connected as much to the unavoidability of making choices regarding their own future, as to the unpredictability of the consequences that each choice might lead to (Cunti 2008; Cunti and Priore 2014; Cunti, Priore, Bellantonio 2015).

Postmodernist society, deeply marked by risk (Beck 1986), uncertainty, and precarity (Bauman 2005), inspires a view of the future as a threat (Benasayag, Schmit 2004) rather than an opportunity or perhaps a promise (Cunti *et al.* 2015). This inability to trust in the future prompts many young adults to remain firmly in the present, so that a consequence of disenchantment (Cambi 2006) is the very underwhelming realization of an imagined future that should allow young adults to think of themselves in a guise different from the present, nurturing desires and expectations for the future. All the above calls for an educational undertaking to deal with the unexpected (Morin 2001: 14).

Young adulthood today is a particularly problematic moment of anyone's lifespan, investigated in depth by many research and disciplinary perspectives. The transition to a new condition can be identified when, at the end of high school, young adults are not only asked to simply wonder about their formal education and professional future, and ideas of the latter begin to steady in their minds and within what we might call a 'speaking community', as more than just a concept that will soon concern them; a multitude of opportunities, points of view, information, and individual and social criticisms, but, above all, the necessity to make choices that will directly impact their future, decisions for which they are responsible.

One of the educational roles that universities perform is student job placement, not only in terms of supporting the learning of knowledge/competencies coherent with specific cultural and professional profiles, but also of contributing to the development of one's personal, educational, and professional Self. The learning process is focused on a 'learning-as-adults', i.e., their own knowledge and knowhow are prioritized to allow them to structure their identity, while the major difference between university and school puts young adults in an adult relationship with knowledge, their education, the sense of this for their lives, for the realization of their Self as individuals, men/women, and citizens.

The educational quality of these systems must therefore be directed primarily at education itself, teaching students to take care of their own education, to create and sustain an aptitude to learn during their lifetime (Alberici 2002), and to identify, define and enhance their own individual, dynamic and emancipatory desires. This form of support must therefore regard methodological and innate guidance (Cunti, Priore 2014). Supporting such educational processes requires the dismissal of a concept of learning that corresponds to something well defined, therefore with the ability to adapt to those dimensions recognized as a personal and social success (OECD 2017).

Desired learning, rather than being intended as what someone wants to become, consistent with own experiences and the ability to elaborate these in the pursuit of transient, emancipatory, and transformational goals, is often flattened by being already decided, where formal education urges individuals to do everything on their own. The almost excluded value of learning is inherent to the 'freedom-from', at best anticipating often systematic and improvised attempts to pursue the 'freedom-to' (Berlin 1969), in this case welcomed as an educational task to remove obstacles that might surpass the conquest of the identified goals; accordingly, schools and universities cannot avoid educating to desire, to realize oneself as a person and a worker.

In light of the above, guidance opens up to multi-faceted interventions primarily regarding the institutional processes of designing,

structuring and putting into practice systems whose heart is the development of students' competencies, and the identification and realization of their desire and/or need for educational emancipation. In this sense, this part of the research, through contact with both university representatives and students to collect real and perceived data, encouraged reflections on the theme and offered an important study from which arise criticisms, and potential and significant areas for improvement which universities can work on in synergy.

It is well known that educational systems, universities included, are attributing an increasingly key role to guidance; in recent decades, ever since it became a strategic theme for the organizational and educational development of these institutions, the need for research to improve the productivity of systems, as well as students' emancipative wellbeing, has become more important. Consequently, pedagogical research on guidance is called to offer its contribution, to contribute and enhance knowledge, interventions, and improvements; from this point of view, the ability of institutions to make decisions based on the need for evolution represents the most important indicator of quality in guidance. The possibility of contributing to the growth of the system by one of its most important components, i.e., students, is not discounted, but must be accompanied by educational processes that press students to reflect on their own living environments and personal evolution; the PRIN research in question has assumed this fundamental value through the action of focus groups to learn from oneself in comparison with others, intercepting views and multiple experiences, as well as differentiated growth prospects, fundamental to activating closed forms of mind without which it is much more difficult to imagine, and imagine oneself, in unknown ways.

Referring to the perspective adopted by this research, and its methodological and procedural choices, there are two things to consider: firstly, the fact that guidance has somehow induced educational research to embrace and share with psychological and sociological disciplines, rigorous methodologies based on a methodological pluralism with both quantitative and qualitative aspects. It has also pushed such research to adopt an empirical base and confer a transformative dimension on the scientific field, with the intention of creating a useful, collaborative strategy for the development of society. Secondly, the challenge of maintaining the link between individuals and their contexts, without which guidance cannot be properly examined and transformed; this complexity calls for targeted actions that consistently refer to the web of elements which in turn depend on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary aspects. Nowadays, the link between individual and environment arguably necessitates the educational construction and implementation of new adaptation processes which

incorporate this relationship. The challenge is to connect them creatively, in order to explore living and working environments, identifying elements corresponding to the characteristics of individuals, and basing these processes on self-reflection with a view to discovering one's authentic desires. From this comes a need to bring individuals to the forefront, giving them the choices of responsibility and honour for systems and their own personality, given that education today cannot be separated from the concept of each individual as an integral part of their living and learning environments. Hence, the issue of an 'ecological individual' (Bateson 1972) represents both a priority and a gamble for guidance. We might ask ourselves, then, considering the principle aspects covered by the PRIN research, how the aforementioned aspects were explored while adopting the key to reading educational guidance.

One key dimension regards the relationship between *general* and *local*, which gives rise to a question of order and structure that is inherent to the research. As we have already underlined, guidance represents a priority for educational systems, the aim being to advance and streamline social and economic systems, both for the satisfaction of individuals and the development of communities. From such a perspective, the correspondence between European guidelines (ELGPN 2017) and their implementation in each country is irrefutably critical. At a structural level, the particular conditions to be created are not envisaged, thus there is always the risk of stopping at the stage of good intentions, without eliciting processes based on best practices capable of creating, testing, and implementing the identified options. The PRIN project shows that guidance is often an add-on, rather than an integral part of education and other systems, where its integration would require changing the organizational culture, especially regarding the promotion and optimization of generative and leading systematic interactions. With regard to educational research, which is essential to improving practices, it seems that the key to developing rigorous methods is transferability rather than generalization; using the former we can appreciate the diversity of contexts and document research processes and results in order to increase our knowledge and our ability to develop guidance methods. With reference to university guidance in particular, the circularity between knowledge and the practices of various contributors could include students as consultants in the process of action-research and its implementation, in which a qualitative and quantitative exploratory dimension is combined with an aspect of planning to improve institutional guidance. The intention is not to enforce a rigid barrier between the people benefitting from a system or action programme and those dedicated to obtaining satisfactory results, but instead to allow everyone involved to become

a researcher in their own right, and to act for both their own good and that of the system they are participating in. Indeed, rather than changing behaviour according to external advice, it is more productive to focus on self-reflection, both individually and in groups within institutions, to explore methods of triggering a virtuous circularity involving all relevant parties and the quality of their interactions.

A further aspect is the transverse nature of the methods in an attempt to cope with the complexity of guidance itself, as well as that of university systems. In this regard, one of the most important aspects of guidance relates to didactics, given that the subject of university guidance is so tightly interwoven with that of didactic processes (Fabbri, Melacarne 2015; Fedeli, Grion, Frison 2016). The realization of a varied and interconnected approach to guidance necessitates using didactics as a guidance oriented to one's whole education. Knowledge processes must be supported and enhanced since the ways in which they are determined can lead to the building of a subjectivity capable of knowing and improving for the rest of people's lives; this requires the examination, primarily, of the methodological processes necessary for the construction of knowledge (Domenici 2009). Transversality also refers to the necessity for a kind of education that keeps levels of thinking, feeling, and acting together. In this sense, best guidance practices regard the implementation of a laboratorial methodological instrument to guide students through self-reflection on their own guidance as individuals and workers, a process that can be implemented, enacted, and improved.

3. Guidance aspects in Higher Education

As mentioned previously, educational settings are called to the fore of the struggle against this general sense of crisis, in particular, higher education contexts. For this reason, guidance has become a central theme in educational policies both in Italy and internationally (ISTAT 2016). The crisis revolves around the vision of future, in other words, the ability to imagine ourselves in the prefigurative dimension created by human beings, or to project ourselves into a guise different from the present. The difficulty in visualizing a future in which we could realize our desires prompts us to amplify and emphasize the present, a phenomenon which, alongside the consequential procrastination rather than action, particularly characterizes the young world (Benasayag, Schmit 2004). Hence it would appear to be an educational role to promote the development of capabilities (Sen 1999), i.e., the collection of resources available to a person and their ability to enact most of them. Only then can they concretely act and

become aware of their own capabilities and the way in which they can emphasize and grow them, as well as using them in conjunction with other resources, settings and people, and seeing change as evolution: this is decidedly one of the greatest and most important educational challenges.

The need highlighted is that of accompanying students' educational courses, which does not mean simply transmitting contents, but rather, concentrating on how these contents aid students in developing their own individual identity.

University contexts should, therefore, provide systematic accompaniment and support for students during their career, not only in cases requiring specific and specialized intervention. A second aspect is to enact a guidance-based didactic method, since what is being imparted is not merely the quality of the content but the way in which it becomes learning. The ultimate challenge for university contexts is to spread the culture of the 'helping requirement' in tricky situations, meaning that the possibility of counseling should be considered by students as an opportunity to be accompanied throughout their career in order to cope with critical situations. Entering, albeit in a synthetic way, the merits of the divisions identified, they should accompany and support a full expression of the abilities of choice, for an empowerment aimed at the enhancement of personal and environmental resources.

The accompaniment of knowledge processes is geared to a guidance that enables individuals to build an 'Educational Ego' (Cunti 2008: 23), in other words a Self-building process as an individual capable of learning and enhancing for a lifetime. This first subdivision opens up to education and didactics, to the guidance aspects of knowledge, provided that the methodological level in the process of accompanying knowledge-building is emphasized, also in the sense of acting in relationships in all those contexts where education is carried out in collective environments, in contrast to transmissive models.

The intrinsic guidance value of formal-learning knowledge requires an appropriate methodological itinerary so that it can express itself. In other words, scientific disciplines have a guidance value in themselves, recognizing this presupposes certain educational and didactic qualities. Learning and teaching processes are primarily processes of guidance to knowledge and culture; in this sense, guidance can be act as a strategy for educating thinking also to build oneself and the future. Thus, learning to be part of the process of creating knowledge can make one become an artisan of one's own; knowing how to grasp the dynamics at the basis of the construction of scientific knowledge cannot mean being vigilant about those that stimulate one's cultural education; knowing how to draw from time to

time on the knowledge that is useful may mean learning not to depend on what someone knows, wanting to express oneself as an individual even in the presence of culture and towards education. In general, difficulties in educational contexts are challenging to interpose between teaching and guidance, as if didactic activity did not incorporate an orientative prerogative and the didactic experience was anything but neutral in the individual guidance process, regardless of whether this happens intentionally.

As far as the definition and relationship between work and education is concerned with individual existences, this second subdivision refers to quite specific approaches, to a kind of informative, predictive, and diagnostic work/education guidance (see skills assessment) or verging more on the promotion of resources. The innovative perspective could be of Self-realization, where the work dimension has a very important definition value, oriented to enhance the theme of desire and what is important to oneself. Moreover, recent international documents have shown that often what is good for the individual is already defined and corresponds to the quality of competencies and achievements by which an individual can best be sustained. In this sense, also some of our research data (Cunti, Priore, Bellantonio 2015) underline a perspective of adaptation to the environment by coinciding with what can be done, and this also means that flexibility is understood as adaptation to the environment. Priority should, however, consist of giving the floor to the individual, in a historical spirit in which the fragmentation of the working context is not indifferent to the fragmentation of the Self – even Richard Sennett with *The Flexible Man* (1999) warned that flexibility could lead to corrosion of the Ego.

If the work dimension has a very significant definition of Self and the educational task can be considered above all to teach individuals how to cultivate their own desires, it is important to note not only the presence of so many professional biographies characterized by discontinuities in choices, providing that the responsibility for these is almost entirely on the individual; therefore, retrieving the pedagogical dimension of guidance can mean educationally working on those that are two key concepts of navigation in the society of complexity, as well as two pedagogical words: narratives and project.

The last dimension, but not for its importance, is that of counseling, which is a methodological and educational interpretation of guidance that contributes to changing visions, re-activating resources, and imagining new paths. Counseling is understood here as a methodological agent for the re-definition of design in demanding situations. Working with others can be seen as a critical approach in the sense of an obstacle analysis, an examination of reality in which dif-

ficulties are found, ways of seeing inadequate ones that constrain the achievement of objectives, and, at the same time, a 'clinical' recovery of one's own history, experiences and past, and then of research and the accomplishment of desires. In the foreground, from a methodological point of view, the narrative approach and reflexivity are considered exquisitely pedagogical dimensions. Guidance is understood here as educational counseling, i.e., as one form of counseling (Simeone 2002) and methodological accompaniment that creates the conditions for activation and a full expression of the abilities of choice. Also to the fore are the ways in which individuals live their relational universes to allow for an exploration of what, for example, characterizes or hinders the realization of personal expressive and existential incentives, and the descent into the realm of desire, anchoring them to their own story, to their own identity manifestations. This perspective of counseling represents a significant ramification of the guidance theme in the international literature (Savickas 2005, 2002; Guichard 2010, 2005), and is a useful key to methodological and educational perspectives on guidance.

In the international context, the dimensions of caring and being cared for have been designed specifically with reference to work choices, with a view to making them synchronic to individual propensities and transformations of those individuals' existential paths; in general, it is no longer the environment that guides occupational and professional choices favouring the expression and realization of individual specificities, but individuals who are helped to become aware of themselves and their desires (Savickas 2011, 2001). The accompaniment of people to reflect on their subjectivity which manifests in the different aspects of existence, fully reflects the work of the Self according to evolutionary circularity and self-emancipation; life-designing counseling therefore looks at individuals in all their complexity and tension to impress coherence and design vitality on the various roles and functions, supporting them above all in the most critical moments of transformation (Guichard, Di Fabio 2010, Savickas *et al.* 2009).

4. Conclusion

The Neapolitan section of the PRIN research looked at the role of guidance processes in creating the education of students in higher education, highlighting, specifically, the importance of combining the dimensions of meaning, continuity, and change, in other words, the development, structuring and permanence of the Self and, above all, experimenting with possible educational itineraries. If it is the

quality of educational experiences that are promoted to make a strong impact on people's guidance processes, it is essential to accompany educational processes in all the contexts where they occur, also by identifying emerging pedagogical questions on guidance that can also become research questions beyond education, to then try to create and test possible pedagogical and guidance responses.

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CHAPTER V

EMPLOYABILITY AND TRANSITIONS

EMPLOYABILITY AND TRANSITIONS: FOSTERING THE FUTURE OF YOUNG ADULT GRADUATES

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Abstract: Starting from questions inspired by the tremendous changes taking place in the worlds of education and employment, this research focuses on the role of employability in the building of new skills in higher education contexts. This longitudinal survey conducted on a sample of 52 graduates from the Educational Science sector found certain key characteristics in the transitions to the world of work, allowing reflection on those educational activities whose impact is more favourable to develop job placement.

Keywords: employability, adult education, higher education, competences, work pedagogy.

1. Introduction: from research to the existing state of affairs

In a context of constant and rapid changes worldwide, the quest for meaning that involves universities, and especially Italian universities, puzzles teachers, researchers, and citizens alike. And this quest has become transformed, for the most part, into a question of what knowledge, skills and capabilities will be needed to enable all the students who reach the final levels of higher education to enter the world of work fully informed and accountable for their own future.

Some medium- and long-term drivers are shaping a world that is as much in flux as it is different from the past; suffice to think of demographic changes such as the ageing of the population, but also of globalization or the digitization expressed by the advancement of robotics, Big Data, the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, and the digital platforms that interconnect new forms of cohabitation within the «Smart City» (Brynjolfsson, McAfee 2014; OECD 2017). In the face of these ground-breaking changes that are not so easy to understand, higher education must reflect on its ability to achieve satisfactory educational objectives that will allow its graduates to keep pace. This is especially true in Italy where a growth in access to third-level education, the university, together with an improvement in the quality and relevance of graduates' skills is considered one of the most vital challenges by the OECD, along with the MIUR and ANVUR (OECD Skills Strategy: Italy 2017: 11). In fact, what we know is that, in addition to having a small number of graduates and graduate workers compared to the average in European

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countries, Italy also has a limited flow of graduates arriving in the world of work. Only 20% of Italians graduate between 25 and 34 years of age, compared to 30% of the OECD average (Skills Strategy: Italy 2017: 11). Italian graduates have a lower level of skills (26th place out of 29), in their levels of both literacy and numeracy, i.e. our graduates are at the same level as graduates in countries such as Sweden, Germany, and Finland. It is also necessary to improve the relevance of university studies with respect to the skills required by the job market, the skills gap being particularly pronounced where several companies are struggling to find the required profiles for their business development.

As the OECD report indicates, this urges significant reflection on what are the links between university courses, outgoing competencies, transition abilities, and the capacity to enter the world of work. Too often, the outgoing qualification does not reflect the skills learned and possessed, creating doubts over the possibility of proper alignment and especially the chance of befittingly meeting the supply and demand requisites. On top of this, often the employers themselves have long since left university, if they ever attended it, or are not adequately familiar with the transformation in higher education courses. There is reassuring data coming in when graduates have learned high-level technical, professional, and cultural skills, when their profile is clear, when their preparation is immediately understandable; in these cases, the graduates' applicability and employability become motivating factors, effectively supporting a safe and certain transition (OECD 2017: 12).

The theme of work placement for graduates is consistently linked with that of Italian University courses in the 2000s, alongside the problems of employment for young adults with higher education qualifications, and an Italian job market marred by structural contradictions. If on the one hand, it seems that there is a lack of work, on the other, there are vacancies and sectors struggling to find the best candidates.

As part of the PRIN project on *Employability and Competences,* the University of Florence research unit took its cue from an analysis of the transition of graduates towards their first work placement (Ecclestone 2007; Furlong, Cartmel 2007; Teichler 2007, 2013; Eight, Atzmüller, Berthet, Bifulco, Bonvi *et al.* 2015) with the aim of studying the access methods, the desire for professional advancement, the awareness of the skills acquired and needed for work and daily life, and the tools/techniques/roads useful in defining the professional goal.

It is assumed that, subtended to the theme of *placement*, the dimension of *employability* developed during their education can be found, being a process category related to the educational path more than a product category for the job search. The transition theme is explained, interpreted, and reasoned through that of employability. What we might say is that, in higher education, the transition to work is an *embedded employability*

process. The principal studies on employability were conducted between the mid-1990s and the end of the first decade of the 2000s (Harvey 2000, 2001, 2003; Knight, Yorke 2002, 2003; Yorke, Knight 2006) and attest the commitment that higher education should take to *train/educate* for work, for a profession, but above all to build the capabilities to remain/persevere in view of the transitions of a world in constant evolution and change (Morin 1999, 2001, 2015; Nussbaum 2010, 2011).

2. From employability to transitions

The main question of the investigation looked at the problem of understanding the process of transition of young graduates from the taking of their Degree, to their search for a job, and their placement. What deep dynamics underlie the initial transitions to the world of work of young adults (22-29 years) leaving higher education? More specifically: how do graduates look for work, how do they prepare for the transition step, and, above all, how do they go about building employability during their years of university study?

The objectives that emerged from the analysis of the research question concerned: 1) Understanding the attitudes of the young to work; 2) Interpreting life prospects; 3) Mapping implicit strategies for transitions; 4) Observing the range of choices of young people; 5) Acquiring elements to improve university teaching; 6) Looking for the presence of *employability* in the practices of university curricula. In effect, if the theme of the research work focused on understanding the transition process, it appears that this process has been understood as an indicator of the building of *employability*. What we can say is that the main objective was to include a central category for the construction of professionalism.

If the PRIN research as a whole looked at higher education, including *calling*, *orientation*, *teaching*, *internships*, and *transition to work*, we could say that the category of *employability* underlies a process that has been identified to justify the term 'Higher Education'. This reflection has been maturing in a historical, cultural, social, and political period in an Italy squeezed between the world economic crisis of 2007 and its inability as a country-system to recover the lost pre-crisis positions, emerging from an economic mire that mainly affected the most heavily disadvantaged and among these, undoubtedly, young adults. In this state of affairs, although the graduates themselves have reacted (AlmaLaurea 2017), it is the structure of the university institution that has shown the principal shortcomings. At present, ministerial recommendations strongly steer study courses towards constructing professional skills, but without these being backed up by cultural reflection to support the transformations that higher education is being called upon to make by law. Employability is

the category that justifies work orientation, conceptualizing the need to acquire skills for lifelong learning, which makes it possible to model traditional teaching on work-related or digital learning. Here, there is a strong link with education of a pedagogical pattern, and with learning processes that are self-directed, organizational, and subject-based.

Studies on employability were developed in the Anglo-Saxon area starting from the 1960s, but only at the end of the '90s did substantial thinking begin to theorize on the centrality of employability in understanding the role of educational institutions for the job market: «In essence, the debate is about what employers want and what higher education institutions can do to enhance the employability of students» (Harvey 2003: 3). The question arose from observation of the demands of the world of work that did not find in UK graduates the skills required to advance production. The problem was not the economic growth of a country, but the education of the students. About 15 years ago, at the beginning of the 2000s, Harvey, the then director of the Center for Research and Evaluation at Sheffield Hallam University wrote:

> There is a growing awareness in the UK of the importance of higher education in providing the innovation and creativity for the development of a knowledge-based economy in an increasingly competitive global market. Three major policy initiatives have contributed to this over the last decade: 1. widening participation and improving retention; 2. enhancing employability. 3. lifelong learning. Both higher education and the graduate labour market are changing rapidly. The student intake is becoming more diverse, in age, background, previous educational experience and interests and ambitions, although the government's efforts to broaden the social base of the undergraduate population has recently been characterised as a limited success (Harvey 2002: 4).

A definite sign that a gap of approximately 20 years separates us from other countries when it comes to reflection on employability. A reflection that has grown in various disciplines from economics, to quality assurance, sociology, statistics, and education engineering. The result has been a study of different forms and models using both qualitative and quantitative research.

In general, even in countries where the debate on the presence, monitoring, and evaluation of employability has been more intense, there has been reluctance to include the concept in reflections on the future of universities. To speak of the future is never easy, but even more so in this case. What should the role of the university be in a country? Higher education should, indeed, question the meaning of the transformations it needs to make in a world that is changing, is being transformed, shifting direction. The educational factor is always present even if we are talking about learning. Thus, we must not be afraid to veer towards

the dichotomy «Learning as Education» or «Learning as Training» (Harvey 2003); speaking of *employability* means dealing with Learning and Training in the same breath. Not in opposition but in conjunction. The writings of Harvey, Yorke & Knight (2006) confirm this, and empty the field of erstwhile rhetoric.

Therefore, the models that have followed in recent years, for the most part – since the debate is young – can be summarized in three different visions. One is integrated with and broadens the previous one, providing us with an exhaustive picture of the sense and meaning with which we, today, look at the process of employability as being embedded within every curriculum of studies that steers the educational path towards a natural development from the place of learning to the world of work.

One interesting reflection on the theme of employability in university contexts was conducted by Harvey (2002, 2003, 2006), and at the same time by Yorke & Knight (2002, 2004, 2006) in the early 2000s, even if the whole debate had been extensively prepared by reflection on higher education in the English-speaking world over the previous two decades of the 1990s. Both the prospect of Harvey and that of Yorke & Knight link the concept of employability to higher education and raise the problem of the use and presence of an ability 'to live', so that fittingly solid bridges can be built with the world of work. In a social context that demands more and targeted skills for a greater number of graduates to create better growth for countries with a fairer distribution of economic and social resources, reflecting deeply on the category of employability becomes key to understanding in which direction efforts need to be made to improve university teaching, create work placements and internships, and construct specific links with businesses, associations, and the public and private production sectors. Harvey's definitions, on the one hand, and Yorke & Knight's on the other, introduced didactic-pedagogical elements and broadened the concept until it founded an innovative way of considering higher education. In 1999, Harvey offered this definition: «The 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 organization» (Harvey 1999: 4). In fact, the real problem would seem to be the *attributes* that a graduate should possess, which should match those that businesses require. Instead, Harvey stresses that the fundamental problem is the consideration that *employability is a process* and it is this that creates the real problem, in the final analysis:

> 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. Despite appearances to the contrary, the real challenge is not how to accommodate employability but how to shift the traditional balance of power from the education provider to those participating in the learning experience (Harvey 1999: 13).

Equally inviting of reflection is Yorke and Knight's definition, which is by far the most sweeping and decisive: «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, Knight 2005: 3). The work of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) coordinated by Mantz Yorke from the early 2000s, has been a point of reference, unique of its kind, to understand the passage from considering employability as a concept of a hazily economic nature, to a category with a clear commitment to learning, i.e. to the pedagogic-didactic spheres of higher education. Starting from a series of texts, research, and published volumes, processed using evidence-based research methods, the opportunity arises to reflect on the educational paths, teaching practices, and the pedagogical content of the category.

3. The survey method for reflection on transition pathways

The research conducted at the University of Florence followed a qualitative survey method, and used a comparison with two samples of graduates, one interviewed at the University of Padua, during the LM50&57 study course, the other at the University of Würzburg, during the MA course in Educational Sciences. The survey method allowed us to grasp the phenomena to be studied according to a map that was not predetermined, but constantly being modified, as happens when the prospect of work fits a context of ecological research of a pedagogical-educational type, with socio-anthropological characteristics (Glaser, Strauss 1967; Glaser 1992; Guba 1990). Consequently, application of the Grounded Theory approach proved to be a research practice in the field that allowed us to first draw out the analysis categories and then the interpretation, starting from the subjects, or better, starting from the interviewees' experiences. One important trait of the method was the longitudinal data collection.

The research strategy was based on Case Studies, which provided precise indications on the procedures to be followed to conduct the survey itself (Mortari 2007). The Case Study proved useful in a line of inquiry that thoroughly analysed the sample of young adults, all MAs. The survey technique, i.e. the data collection mechanism, was twofold, even if

taken in a single solution, that of the Focus Group for prior knowledge, and in-depth interview to get to know the individuals. The Focus Group form provided some fixed fields for a mutual understanding of the research subjects. The semi-structured interview was then conducted using a second form. The protocol was rigorously developed at each step, in the sense that the contacts, the Focus Group, the period between the first meeting and the subsequent meetings, were steps scheduled temporally and materially in an identical manner over the years of research.

The expected results focused on four fields of reflection: 1) Volition; 2) Skills; 3) Channels; 4) Expectations. The subjects of the investigation included 52 graduates (39 from the University of Florence, 2 from the University of Padua, and 9 from the University of Wuerzburg in Germany). The data collected from the 10 samples of graduates who took part, from June 2014 to July 2016, covered 110 in-depth interviews. The samples were selected from the LM57&85 MA course in Adult Educational Sciences, Continuing Education, and Pedagogical Sciences at the University of Florence; the LM50&57 course in Educational Services Management and Continuing Education at the University of Padua; the MA in Educational Sciences at the University of Wuerzburg. A comparative interpretation of the interviews was carried out jointly by the group of researchers. Some series of metadata or indicators were defined after comparison of the graduates' studies.

Particular care was taken over the role of the interviewer/researcher. Three researchers covered this function flanked by three junior researchers who recorded and photographed the successive phases of the group meetings and interviews. The aim was to obtain constant feedback on the attitude of the researcher when listening, plus willingness to change practices or behaviour where they appeared inappropriate to the research work. Researchers also assumed the role of careful facilitators of the path of 'self-care'; the interview became a means for the graduates to reflect on their past learning and studies, while, in some cases, a series of two or three interviews carried out at a distance of six months acted as appointments for job orientation and the improvement of transversal competencies of the personal kind.

4. The results of the longitudinal survey

The analysis of the data from the Focus Group constituted the reference background from which the working group began to highlight the collocation of each graduate. The Focus Group constituted the first level of knowledge on the theme of the transition to work, and was used as a moment for mutual reflection in constructing the relationship between the researchers and those investigated.

The interviews were transcribed in full and constitute the main corpus of the research data. They were analysed using a metadata template relating to educational characteristics of the subject, the educational actions lived/undertaken, the type of employment taken pre/post-graduation (Training, Apprenticeships, Mobility, Theses, Laboratories, Employment Before Graduating, Coherent/Non-Coherent Employment, Adverse/Supportive/Indifferent Educational Actions, Work-Place Learning Potential – WPLP, Employee Value Proposition – EVP).

The data analysed from the interviews showed that: 1) the transition from university to the world of work involves the way of being young adults in higher education, while the transition itself is a way to call the transformation a modification of the sense of one's own self, one's own interiority, one's vision of the world; 2) the transition does not begin with the degree, but is prepared by previous studies, both in terms of hetero-managed and self-managed educational terms while, within university and secondary school curricula, it has a determinant family matrix; 3) the skills to operate in professions are the result of expertly constructed educational pathways, even if sometimes not fully consciously, developed through specific courses that allow the gaining of experience and make the knowledge already learned applicable; 4) work placements are a constant (jobs, coherent casual jobs, return to education); 5) the existence of a post-graduate degree period in which the young adult gradually becomes aware of their new condition, a path that sometimes lasts 10 months and more; 6) the transition period is lived with the determination to reach a goal coherent with the studies; 7) the gap between the pre-graduation and post-graduation volition is manifest; 8) awareness of the difference between the skills learned and those required by the job market is detectable; 9) informal networks for research work rather than the use of social or formal networks are identifiable; 10) workplaces are considered venues with a high potential for training and orientation.

Research results to be considered: 1) *employability* is a summary category that holds the highest rate of pedagogical knowledge on educational action to be undertaken in the pre-degree and educational process within university curricula, translating a process of change that may occur before graduating, and potentially supporting the process of transition, preparation and delivery; 2) *placement* is the end result of an educational process, we need not worry about how much nor how our students have learned, we need to worry about where they will apply what they have learned; 3) the relationship between education during study courses, university education (mobility, traineeships, apprenticeships, work-related and work-based learning, E-learning and M-learning), and the world of work, needs to be strengthened and developed synergistically; 4) business culture, the culture of professions and knowledge of the job market need to be implemented in university curricula; 5) the location

and development of skills (reports, communication, problem-solving, context analysis, data usage, self-efficacy) can be defined in higher education pathways.

4. Final remarks: interpreting the data

At the end of the research, we might return to reflect on the initial request and be aware that it could be divided into three parts depending on whether the data analysis is going in a *micro*, *meso*, or *macro* direction. At the *micro level*, the question could be reformulated thus: how do young adults face the transition to work? At the *meso level*, we could ask the question: how does the curriculum of the university's educational offering support the transition to work, in terms of skills? At the *macro level*, we could ask the research what the role of the university in the development of *employability* is. The answers to these questions can be considered in these terms:

1) *Employability* represents a process of change which prepares and accompanies the transition process. It represents a category umbrella, retaining pedagogical awareness of educational actions that need to be developed to obtain a Degree;
2) *Placement* is an educational process that starts far back, it is not nourished by knowledge, but by skills of a technical and transversal nature, acquired in institutional and formal situations, but also in those of non-formal and informal learning;
3) The relationships between the study course, university education and the world of work are decisive for the prospects of transitions oriented to faster placements;
4) Work culture understood as the preparation for a profession through the acquisition of *transversal skills* is a discriminating factor in the transition after graduation.
5) Drawing up an inventory of the skills required by the job market for Professional Profiles in the Educational Sector and the Social Economy: new professionals/entrepreneurs/experts.
6) The transition to the first job takes approximately 6-10 months after graduation, and represents only the first of several successive steps. In no case had stable jobs been found, but only fixed-term contracts in the best of cases.
7) A close synergy with the world of work is necessary for the creation of competence.

The most obvious problem lies precisely in this last point, which we could call the 'competence supply problem' or how to train good minds for first-class professionalism.

In the past, the issue of competence supply was resolved through the *training of good managers*. This was matched by business models where business schools took care of people's growth. Today most companies theorize and practise more for *lean training models and brain mobility*.

It takes staff with seniority – competent professionals – and short- to medium-term projects. This has consequences on the function and the university of *mismatch problems* faced by graduates who are not first-rate professionals. Rare cases of real unemployment: students are activated. But in all cases, a significant phenomenon which we attribute a symbolic value that forces students to extend by one year the period of training for entry into the labour market: the lengthy period for entering the job market. The year after graduation has a crucial function for the encounter with the job market, with 'coherent' work and investment in training. This is a year in which young people: re-define their professional identity (false expectations) seek alternatives to training, especially when they have begun to work (knowledge of MDL segments), build and exploit networking, use dynamic learning.

In the end, three questions arise from the research in support of graduates' future transitions to working life:

1. Can we bring work culture into the construction of study course curricula (without limiting this to apprenticeships, certain events, or services)? How can we support the construction of a coherent future for professional identity through university teaching?
2. Since a professional future depends less and less on headhunters and more on the social networks (personal, professional, entrepreneurial, institutional) that young people belong to, can the University take this into account?
3. The happiest cases of transition to work found were those in which there was a close relationship between teaching and applied research. How can we encourage this practice in a public university?

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NON-LINEAR PATHS IN TRANSITIONS THROUGH THE LABOUR MARKET

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ABSTRACT: Entering a study course and the subsequent transition to the labour market is no longer the rule. In the past, routes were linear, today transitions are non-linear. The research undertook to contribute to studying the factors that promote university students' transition to work. Some of the research activities have been devoted to a longitudinal study where the ways Educational Science graduates manage their own professionalization strategies have been investigated. It is a cluster for which in several countries the lowest return has been estimated in relation to higher education investment. If we manage to clarify the terms of non-linear transitions paths we can succeed in understanding the types of measures to be introduced, how to relate them to processes that will professionalize students, when to activate them, and how to evaluate their impact.

KEYWORDS: higher education democratisation, non-linear transitions, professionalization measures in higher education.

1. Transitions, efficiency and fairness

Since the Seventies, the idea that the production system requires people with good levels of higher education has gradually gained ground in public policies. Over this same period, the higher education systems of many countries have expanded rapidly. This has had significant and profound impacts on labour markets and in the way in which employers use highly educated labour. «These expansions have, for the most part, been predicated on the assumption that more education is good for individuals and for society as a whole, not only in terms of economic outcomes like wages or employment, but also for a wide range of social outcomes like improved health, reduced crime and higher well being» (Machin, McNally 2007: 5).

In more recent years, the OECD has focused government strategies further by shifting the emphasis from the quantity of accesses, to the quality of the learning outcomes of investment in higher education: «Labour market relevant knowledge and skills drive and support economic growth, innovation, and the evolving needs of the labour market» (OECD 2017: 16). The number of years of study or the certification acquired are still considered relevant, but only on condition that these correspond to a satisfactory level of professional skill that meets the needs of the labour market.

This approach has inspired strategies to reform higher education systems and has strengthened the request for more coherence «between the

level of (graduate's) skills and the skills required at work» (OECD 2017: 16) as for closing the gap between university and industry.

The traditional education model based on transmitting knowledge in the various fields of study has started to change in favour of a model that advocates the development of competences.

> The introduction of a competence-based approach in the defining and preparation of the learning outcomes is probably the most distinctive feature of the current university reform and is closely linked to the enhancement of graduate employability, given that it gives a higher profile to and involves their professional ability and its applicability in the workplace (Coromina Saurina, Villar 2010: 24).

Consequently, the entire process of educating students has become an object of study and modifications: from guidance in upper secondary schools, education and training during the period of study, to the transition to the labour market. The success of the transitions to the labour market is no longer left to individual destinies. The mechanisms and dynamics that regulate them have been made visible, their logic studied, and then refocussed through corrective actions.

The outcomes of higher education are not identified simply with the skills possessed by graduates, but by the quantity and quality of «graduates who are part of the labour force. They include employment status, earnings, and the match between the level of their skills and the skills required at work, etc. Outcomes also take account of graduates who are not enrolled in further schooling, and are not part of the labour force» (OECD 2017: 16).

Possession of the skills requested is not enough to justify personal and social investment. What counts is the employment status, the wage premium, and the timeframe within which these results are achieved. The devices that accompany the transitions should therefore be corrected by reducing the impact of the invisible factors that favour those with an exclusive social and family background, and promote integration into the labour market irrespective of merit. If not, the mechanisms accompanying the transition of graduates towards the world of work will only strengthen and aggravate the university's social reproduction.

Expansion of the access to higher education has dealt a blow to the very automatisms of industrial society, the direct relationship between school and factory. Companies too have abandoned the old business school models and their function of induction. In the past, the mechanisms to be activated were relatively simple. The routes were linear, as were the automatisms that ushered people towards a relatively predictable and stable professional future.

Nonetheless, the automatisms have not been replaced by an equally linear transition process that ensures a place in the labour market after the studies are over. The linear segmentation into three synchronized phases (study, job matching between demand and supply, employment) recurs infrequently. The transitions are non-linear. There is no longer a proportionality between the actions put in place and their effects, i.e. between entering a study course and the subsequent passage to employment. According to some studies (Burke, Threadgold, Bunn 2017), the absence of linearity is related in a unique way to the paths of university students from historically under-represented backgrounds when they transition as graduates into an insecure labour market.

Therefore, deepening knowledge of the paths that characterize the process of transition from higher education to work helps to understand what mechanisms to put in place to reduce the negative impact of a graduate's socioeconomic status, and to restrict higher education's social reproduction systems (Harrison 2017). Clarifying the terms of the non-linearity of transition paths lets us understand the types of measures (activities and services) to introduce, how to relate these to processes that will professionalize students, when to activate them (at the end of the university career or during the study course), and how to evaluate their impact.

The Emp&Co research undertook to contribute to studying the factors that promote university students' transition to work. A part of the research activity has been devoted to a longitudinal study of the ways in which Educational Science graduates manage their own professionalization strategies in the first two years after the end of their university studies. The choice of this segment of the population aimed to collect new facts on the numerous ways in which the processes of professionalization and transition to the labour market operate in different academic sectors. This type of study is known to be rare. At the same time, this is a sector that belongs to the field of 'education' and therefore to one which, according to all the studies, ensures a wage premium that is considerably lower than other sectors, both in the short term and considering cumulative earnings over 20 years (OECD 2017: 55). Most of all, this is a cluster for which in countries such as Sweden, «the lowest return has been estimated (the others include Religious Studies, Psychology and Mathematics/Natural Sciences)», but in others, such as Spain «a negative return is estimated for graduates with degrees classified as 'other social sciences and humanities'» (Machin, McNally 2007: 23). Therefore, a study of the processes that affect graduates in extreme situations should enable us to better understand the factors of exclusion and inequality which could affect graduates in all the pro-

fessional sectors most exposed to the risk of a mismatch, not due to a lack of competence, but to their socioeconomic status.

2. Professional growth paths

The interpretation of the set of professional growth paths for Educational Science graduates shows the presence of three driving forces that guide individual activities:

1. Collection of information on the potential labour market and on how to establish a coherent professional profile
2. The gaining of professional certification (with the function of signalling) and the enrichment and visibility of professional potential
3. Gradual building of independence in life and work.

We are using the term 'driving forces' and not 'steps', since there is not a temporal succession between these three components. If anything, it is a matter of objectives undergoing constant evolution, which those concerned work on synergistically, albeit with differentiated strategies and levels of effectiveness (Boffo 2017; Torlone 2017).

To achieve these objectives, while carrying out their university studies, the students follow paths characterized by:

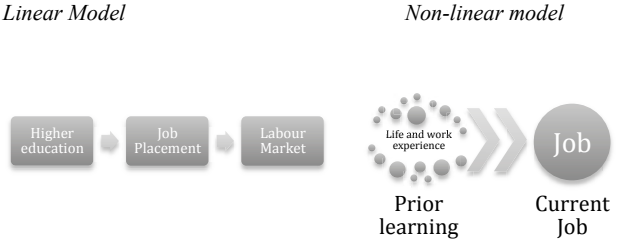
- a commitment of various kinds to work activities (in addition to internships)
- participation in vocational training activities
- building of «dynamic learning networks» (Reich, 1991).

At the end of university studies, the paths are divided further with:

- breaks from every type of formative and professional commitment
- further developments in the building of «dynamic learning networks»
- participation in structured activities targeted directly at job placement
- the beginning of the path to develop a professional career with transitions from the first, to the second, and the third employment contract (again within the 18-month period considered by the research).

The individual paths differ in the combination of the main types of activity (study-work-networking-idleness), beyond the rhythms of their duration and succession. Entry into the labour market and professional growth are not the result of a linear process followed with discipline, in which each step is based on proportionate effects produced by the previous one. It is instead the result of a set of learning outcomes acquired through diverse types of activity (including those carried out in higher education) on which the new job is founded.

Figure 1 – Two interpretive models.



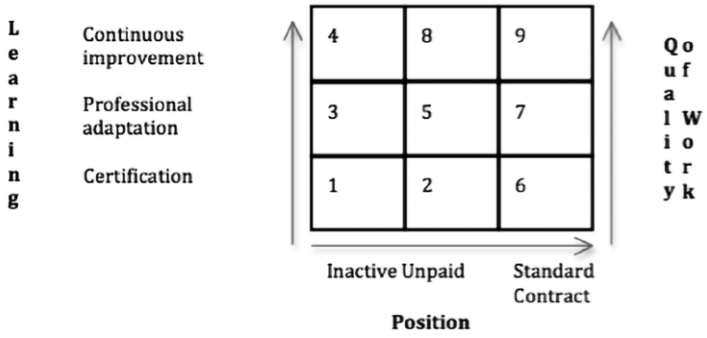
Interpreting professional growth paths using a non-linear model means attributing a value to each type of life and work experience had by the students; it means that the development of a professional career is the result of a set of learning outcomes (prior learning). From an educational perspective, the achievement of a first employment contract and then subsequent ones is interpreted as the result of what was learned in formal education, through individual dynamic learning networks, the educational and cultural infrastructures accessed, and experiences of work (whether paid or unpaid). The Emp&Co research allowed us to observe in the graduates' professional growth paths, the following four types of educational activity:

- Formal education comprising the customary academic path enriched by internships, study abroad, and participation in research. Both during studies and after graduation we can observe the tendency to return to further training of a professional kind. This may be directed to strengthening areas of competence not covered by the university offering, to acquire knowledge of new professions, or to build new networking relationships.
- The building of networking relationships and dynamic learning networks occurs in all professional growth paths with a positive outcome. Accessing networking and strengthening it seems to be related to graduates' family backgrounds and a capacity for autonomous initiative in the creation of new social and professional networks (associations and business). As well as constituting a hub of opportunity, networking represents a context in which it is possible to achieve mutual learning and swap knowledge.
- Access to and use of educational and cultural infrastructure and services appears to be a further component present in numerous growth paths of graduates. This is a factor that has been investigated only marginally. Access to services and programmes provided by youth policies proved of use in the cases found (e.g. Youth Guarantee Programmes). What remains to be investigated further is the recurrence and importance of the use of digital infrastructures as well as generic cultural ones (from the library, to the museum, music, and so on), both for their function of direct access to information on the labour market, and their mediated function of skills development and the creation of networking.

- Lastly, work proves to be part of the opportunities that work culture had already generated before university studies ended. Work is simultaneously the expected result and the means through which the students develop their ability to learn and produce new knowledge. The opportunity to move from one job to a different and better one could be interpreted as the fruit of prior learning accumulated through the different educational activities participated in.

Therefore, the detectable differences in individual paths which emphasize the non-linearity of the trajectories can be attributed to the quality of the opportunities enjoyed. To explain the stasis or change found in the individual paths observed, we could use a descriptive model that combines the various positions covered (idleness or non regular work, unpaid employment, standard contract), with varying levels of educational quality potentially expressed by the activities the graduates participate in (certification; vocational training, services, and networks; continuous improvement processes through joining soft or hard innovation projects). Figure 2 shows the existing relationship for new graduates between educational activities, position, prospects for growth in the quality of work, and the expectation of moving to a new job. The weights assigned to the individual boxes have a purely indicative value and correspond to the probabilities found to progress towards a better position. Position number 9 is considered the most advantageous, since it is open to new positions.

Figure 2 – Learning activities and new graduates' positions.



3. Professional growth and development at work

In the context of the Emp&Co research, work, as a means for personal education and an end for its realization, is treated as a priority since it is a resource for personal growth. Other aspects, although relevant (e.g. the ROI from university education) were not investigated.

From this perspective, the most significant factor to consider is the workplace learning potential, in other words, what can be learned by a worker covering a specific productive position at a given location. We are referring to the learning processes that are part of the productive activities of everyday life.

The research showed how the characterizing data (the mode) consists of:

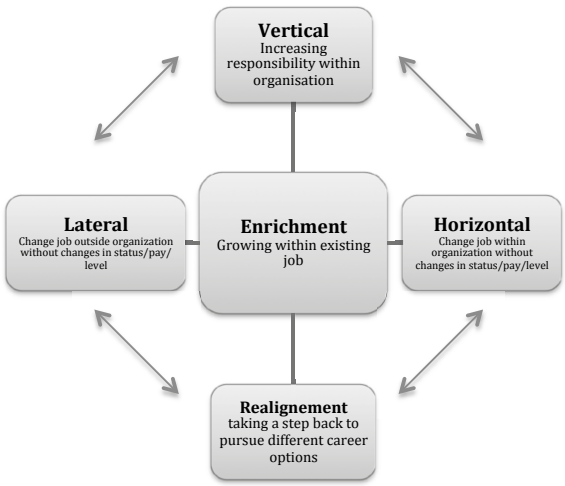
- possessing regular work experience coherent with the type of studies carried out,
- being employed when the interview was carried out,
- having had more than one job experience.

All the graduates had passed through small casual jobs and then moved towards positions related to identified and defined professional profiles.

Vertical and horizontal mobility, also towards economic sectors (agriculture, tourism, commerce) not coherent with the training received united all the subjects examined. The cases of vertical mobility involved a passage towards more qualified professional roles, or towards forms of contracts with greater guarantees.

The voluntary termination of an employment contract is an experience common to all employees, and is connected to the choice of: assuming an entrepreneurial role, changing organization, or returning to education. In Fig. 3 we describe the five possible directions the professional mobility of new graduates can take.

Figure 3 – Career Lattice. [Adapted from:Young, B., Ladder vs. Lateral Career Paths, in *Career Development Toolkit*, 2011, <http://www: hrmcareerdevelopment.blogspot.it>]



The dynamism that appears after the end of university is particularly intense and expresses itself in an active search for new career prospects with a willingness to change professional contexts and roles. From an educational standpoint, this behaviour can be attributed to two factors: the process of building professional identity, and an increased ability to read the positive or negative signs of the workplace learning potential.

The process of *building professional identity* intensifies with the possession of additional information on the potential labour market and the maturing of new expectations with respect to previous work experiences. The comparison between past and future potential is probably an accelerator of the beginning of the process that leads new graduates to engage in the building of their own professional identity. Since these are professions exposed to constant evolution, and persons simultaneously engaged in distinct roles and tasks, the task of building «meanings that individuals attach to themselves in the context of work» becomes even more complex. In fact, this commitment – starting from their personal attributes, membership of social groups and professional roles – leads individuals to give «meaning to who they are and what they do in the workplace» (Caza, Creary 2016: 4).

Whether we are talking of professional identification (as a state of being that explains how individuals view themselves vis-a-vis their profession – Caza, Creary 2016: 7), or of the process of building professional identity (the way in which individuals have the agentic role of creating their own professional self-image – Caza, Creary 2016: 7), in both cases, graduates are prompted to redefine their professional identity both because of prior learning, and fresh job opportunities.

Furthermore, two further elements must be considered, due to the particularity of the professional group of reference for Educational Science graduates. This, more and better than other professional profiles, helps to understand the phenomenon of transforming the boundaries of traditional professions, of their hybridization, and of another two phenomena that affect young people: the high probability of not only changing jobs more than once during their career, but also of changing profession, plus the gradual spread of the phenomenon of multiple professional identities linked to the simultaneous employment of persons in two or more jobs. This is a phenomenon that is not limited to those who take the entrepreneurial road or choose to be freelance, but also those who are self-employed. The idea of a single-profession career is becoming outdated. Many professional workers today are not simply acquiring one set of specialized skills and knowledge, but instead are accumulating multiple sets of skills, and applying these in quite distinct ways (Caza, Creary 2016: 13).

The *workplace learning potential* is a factor towards which the attention of skilled workers is increasingly turning, and which is also used to ex-

plain the attraction for low-wage premium study paths. This is the same dynamic to which individual professions and careers/professional identities are exposed, making the workplace the setting to build their own professional growth, and not only in terms of career development. The Emp&Co research shows that it is not only the expectation of a wage premium that determines the decisions of students and graduates. The Employee Value Proposition (Minchington 2010) is an element that better explains present and expected job satisfaction, and that motivates the high propensity to occupational mobility found in the research. Within this frame is the evaluation of learning potential of a workplace, definable as "the power of a work setting to integrate learning at work with the result of behavioural changes and the generation of new knowledge. Such a workplace offers accessible information, opportunities to learn, and real support by peers and managers" (Nijhof, Nieuwenhuis 2008). On this basis, it makes sense to assume that students and graduates with some work experience develop perception and knowledge of the learning mechanisms present in a workplace and are driven to assess their relevance in relation to expectations of professional growth. Thus, their choices can be guided by an assessment of each of the factors that are included in the workplace learning potential:

- The strategic dimension, i.e. the development prospects of an organization, objectives for growth in the medium and long term.
- The organizational dimension, i.e. the richness of cultural containers, the knowledge accumulated by the organization, its level of structuring, its definition of management processes and innovation (Vicari 2008).
- The existing distributive rules which regulate access to knowledge of the organization and to their creation: timeframes, ways of cognition, and the types of process people are engaged in (Eraut 2007), the possibility of creating endogenous know-how producing new knowledge in relation to the product, customer, market, and process that the organization needs.

4. Employability and restriction of higher education institutions' reproductive functions

The traditional educational model based on the transmission of knowledge in the different fields of study does not have as its benchmark an image of the student and graduate corresponding to the professional identity and prospects found.

Enhancing the relationship between students and their labour market is a challenge that requires universities to unavoidably adapt and modernize their educational offering: «One of the main objectives of higher edu-

cation is to provide its graduates with the skills needed to succeed in the labour market» (OECD 2017: 9).

It is well known that access to the labour market is determined as much by economic factors (the state of the economy, labour market regulation, the existing stock of skills), as by the graduates' charcteristics. Studies on the impact of factors such as ethnicity, gender (for the earnings gap compared to men), socioeconomic status (family background and quality of networking), age, or disability, show how each play a role in the labour market and can affect the market outcomes for certain graduates. Research similar to that of Emp&Co carried out in Australia (Burke, Threadgold, Bunn 2017) shows "how social and cultural differences (e.g. socioeconomic status, gender and ethnicity) and inequalities (e.g. of access to and participation in HE and paid work) «are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society (Collins 2000: 42). […] This lens helps to uncover how socioeconomic status is bound together with social and cultural differences in the educational and work structures».

Other research shows that the social background often produces a durability of disposition that is not easily dismantled or modified in and through university contexts. This is what emerged from a study carried out on the functions of higher education in Jordan and Egypt (Assaad, Krafft, Salehi-Isfahani 2014):

> Family background, gender, and geography, and to some extent secondary school performance, appear to play a much larger role in labour market outcomes, even in this select group of graduates, than the type or quality of their higher education institutions. This suggests that the labour markets do not in fact reward skills, or do so to a very limited extent, so that neither higher education institutions nor students have any reason to seek out the type of higher education that builds productive skills (Assaad, Krafft, Salehi-Isfahani 2014: 16).

Changing the function of the university's social reproduction does not depend on measures taken at the level of organizational and teaching models. Yet it can be restricted through strategies that mitigate the effects and enhance efficiency, by acting, for example, on the period of adjustment, the time it takes for a graduate to become effective in the workplace. This means putting the university in a condition to train «transformative employees», «people who can use higher-level skills, such as analysis, critique, synthesis, and multi-layered communication to facilitate innovative teamwork» (Harvey 2003: 11). The task of the university is not then limited to facilitating the meeting between demand and offer of employment, «in essence, the emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner. Employment is a by-product of this enabling process» (Harvey 2003: 3).

5. Measures to support employability

The gulf between the university and the world of work makes the definition of students' investment choices and career more problematic and open to risk, especially for those who are inequitably located in navigating their aspirational journeys (Harrison 2017).

The success of the transitions to the labour market is not attributable solely to the quality of individual self-improvement projects. «Those without access to supportive social, economic and cultural capital and the readiness to negotiate transitions effectively are typically those who require these capacities the most» (Billett, Thomas, Sim, Johnson, Hay, Ryan 2010: 484). In these cases, but not only, the success of the transitions also depends on the willingness and ability of higher education system to adopt practices and behaviours that help develop labour market-relevant knowledge and skills. But to be able to train students, it is necessary that individual universities engage in paths of institutional learning that will enable the same university to learn how to transform themselves and create their own new social identity and their new positioning with respect to the labour market. The construction of a process of capacity building at university involves governance interventions based on policy levers to enhance labour market relevance. At the system level, these results are obtained with governmental policies that act: on the criteria for *funding* universities; on *regulations* and on the rules that govern the everyday life of businesses, organizations and students; on *information strategies* to influence the behaviour of students and higher education institutions; on *activation of the organizational resources* of the various public agencies (from ANVUR to the various ministerial bodies) to help achieve their goals by steering or influencing higher education systems.

There are however practices and behaviours that do help develop labour market-relevant knowledge and skills, which universities can adopt as a learning process and organizational change that are relatively autonomous with respect to the action of governmental policy levers.

Below, we examine a selection of some of the measures consistent with the Emp&Co research results, whose effectiveness is confirmed by studies carried out at an international scale (OECD 2017: 64-74) relating to the following final considerations:

1. The capacity of higher education institutions to respond to labour market demand

This depends above all on the ability to offer relevant study programmes. The availability of human resources (i.e. academic and support staff), and physical infrastructure have a significant impact, and depend on local choices (selection of personnel, investments).

2. Informed student choice

The students' choice of study must be able to rely on existing information. Guidance activities must focus on providing information on genuine employment prospects. The students' choices must not be influenced by the need of individual universities to increase their number of enrolments. Information on employment prospects is a service that must be ensured throughout their career, also to help reshaping their choices.

3. Student admission policies and practices, and academic support for students

The procedures by which students are admitted and supported in their studies can also make a difference in the relevance and quality of the skills developed and this ultimately affects labour market outcomes. Students who are selected by higher education institutions based on previous strong academic results and completion of relevant pre-requisite subjects (at secondary school or through other tertiary education) are more likely to succeed in higher education (Hiss, Doria 2014).

4. Curriculum design and delivery

«The curriculum is at the core of higher education learning: in any field of study, a well-designed curriculum is an important step towards ensuring that students develop good skills that position them for labour market success» (OECD 2017: 67). The construction of curricula is exposed to the challenge of the dynamics of transformation of professional groups, of the hybridizations of various profiles, their constant changes, and of various forms depending on organizational contexts. The answer to this problem can only partially be entrusted to continuing education provided after the end of university studies and in workplaces. To this must be added the fact that the idea of a single-profession career is becoming outdated. Part of the disciplinary knowledge provided will not only become quickly obsolete, but also irrelevant with respect to the sundry figures and professional roles that students will be required to interpret.

The interdisciplinary response, not based on a mere juxtaposition of curricula in different disciplines, could constitute an effective launchpad for curriculum design. However, it clashes with both the prevalence of organizational models based on the separation between disciplines, and with the lack of information on the future of the professions. In a national economic structure dominated by small- to medium-sized enterprises, forecasts of the skills demand for the medium to long term are scarce.

5. Learning and teaching and delivery of curriculum

«The ways in which the curriculum is delivered can also play an important role in generating high quality skills that support good labour market outcomes for higher education graduates. The traditional ap-

proach to higher education teaching has long been for an experienced academic to provide a lecture that "imparts knowledge" to students» (OECD 2017: 71). Teaching practices based on the lecture-based model are known to be ineffective. They do not take account of the fact that higher education institutions operate with adults, who normally work, and already have their own background knowledge and experience. In short: they do not consider how adults learn. The problem also concerns innovations in teaching, the use of technologies that are by now a part of people's daily life. However, this limit can be overcome with the use of typical adult education methods (e.g. group activities, oral presentations, problem-solving scenarios) as they are developing professional and technical skills. The education of 'transformative employees' – i.e. people who are entrusted daily not only with tasks of mere execution, but the creation of new knowledge of products, organization, processes, and markets – is mainly realized through the method of delivering the curriculum.

6. Work-based learning and workplace learning

The Emp&Co research shows how the education of students also depends on the learning potential of their current job. The work-based learning provided by curricula must therefore also communicate with workplace learning processes in which the student participates.

> Participation in quality work-based learning (sometimes known as work-integrated learning) can improve labour market outcomes. There are several types of work-based learning processes in higher education. These include field experience, mandatory professional practice, co-operative education placements, internships, applied research, project learning and service learning. Graduate apprenticeships have recently re-emerged as another way of combining work and academic studies to enable people to 'earn-as-they- learn' (OECD 2017: 73).

Participation in workplace learning processes puts the student in a position of dynamic interaction with the learning factors present at their own workplace. This may be a limiting factor, given that their image of work is determined by current experiences and their quality. At the same time, they constitute a wealth of theoretical, methodological, and practical knowledge, on which the student can exercise their critical-transformative skills, bringing innovation to this context. Moreover, the students are constantly exposed to a benchmarking exercise that puts them in the condition to give meaning and evaluate the theoretical and practical experiences offered by the curriculum. For the university, this means learning to deal with the work experiences and cultures the students bring, and to manage and steer the learning processes that they generate.

7. Internationalization

The development of the international dimension of educational pathways makes it possible to deal with labour markets other than local ones. The prospect of working abroad for a period of their lives, and thus being confronted with different national labour markets, is an opportunity that is gradually extending to all professional groups. The exclusive relationship between the university and the local economy covers an increasingly limited proportion of educational and research activities. «Undertaking part of a higher education programme in another country can enable students to develop important transversal skills and thus support good labour market outcomes» (OECD 2017: 72). Studying abroad helps students expand their knowledge of other societies, languages, cultures, and business methods, and develop cross-cultural competencies and sensitivities. These skills, in addition to the resiliency demonstrated by exiting one's comfort zone to pursue education in a foreign setting can send a strong signal to employer about the employability of graduates (OECD 2013).

8. Career Advice and support

The results of the Emp&Co research show that the functions of career advice and support may not be concentrated on the moment of transition between higher education and the labour market since these transitions are non-linear, and because many of the students already have a job before completing their studies. The expected function is to foster the transition towards a new job, possibly of a better quality than the previous one. Career advice is emerging as a function relevant to all the measures listed above. It is a by-product of them. As Jääskelä & Nissilä argued (2015): «Pedagogy and guidance services (*are*) a systemic entity». It is however questionable whether this type of service can be limited to students, or if even universities should behave like other stakeholders of learning, and provide a 'post-sales' career advice service. As part of the Emp&Co research, the delivery of this type of service to graduates was tested. A final consideration is that this is an initiative that is sustainable and coherent with the ethics and values of a contemporary university. The service could play an even more significant role if all university teachers provided students with the contacts and information in their possession relating to the production world that they cooperate with.

This function is also accompanied by career services.

> Many higher education institutions now provide career services or career centres to help students connect with prospective employers. These centres assist students by helping them apply for jobs, write their curriculum vitae or resumé, and prepare for job interviews. They also provide students with access to employers by organising job fairs and employer visits to campus, and by distributing employer postings for work-based

> learning opportunities and post-graduation employment opportunities. Increasingly, they also provide counselling and advice related to new skill sets that are important both for getting a job and for succeeding in workplace and to develop entrepreneurial skills (OECD 2017: 74).

The need for specialized support services exists primarily to perform the functions of guidance, coordination, quality assurance, and networking of the system. In fact, the set of activities described above constitutes a system integrated with all the functions of teaching, research, and universities' third mission, which requires its own body of strategic planning and management.

6. Conclusion

Transitions to the labour market are also dependent on the recruitment traditions, methods, and tools used by enterprises. The weakness of the systems currently in place is under debate. In 2016, France Stratégie estimated that the cost of inequalities in accessing qualified work is not far off €150 billion, due to wasted talent, unemployment, and idleness, a misallocation of human resources (Bon-Maury *et al.* 2016).

The research is making efforts to define new mechanisms that might reduce the technical inefficiencies and cultural weaknesses of the current ones. The aim is to go beyond the use of CVs, certificates, and the gut instinct of recruiters. To this end, the research has focused on recent applications of machine learning coupled with increased access to data, raising the possibility of improving hiring decisions with the help of algorithms (Danieli *et al.* 2016; Hoffman 2015).

Meanwhile, civil society is making efforts to promote non-governmental initiatives that can bring young people into contact with enterprises.

University research should participate more directly in the study of technologies and organizational forms that could help higher education institutions rid themselves of outdated cultures and ideologies and solve the setbacks that prevent them from fulfilling their role.

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PART II

THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE PEDAGOGICAL COMMUNITY

CHAPTER I

DIDACTICS

THE VOICE OF TEACHERS INVOLVED IN SCHOOL-WORK ALTERNANCE PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT: Data from Censis 2011 highlighted worrying aspects of school dropouts (18%) and a NEET population increase (22.1%); the same elements were also highlighted by data from Cedefop (2014), where the issue of youth unemployment (21.7%) was also mentioned. In addition to this are the disappointing results from OCSE-Pisa surveys demonstrating that Italian educational institutions fail to provide young people with the skills they need to effectively solve real-life problems. In this scenario, at an Italian and European level, the importance of solving these problems is repeatedly underlined, with the creation of instruments to interconnect the world of education and the world of work. Within this process, School-Work Alternance (SWA) programmes can find a place. This study focuses on the strategic action of their key actors in creating effective partnerships with external organizations. Based on this assumption, the research question asked was: what specific functions do teachers play within School-Work Alternance programmes? *Methodology*: a qualitative methodological approach was used; data were collected through semi-structured interviews addressed to 14 high school teachers, and subsequently analysed using Atlas.ti software in order to record the significant core categories that emerged. *Results*: the data collected showed that within the SWA system yet to be defined, SWA teacher/tutors and coordinators in school contexts have played a significant role within School-Work Alternance programmes to date. *Final remarks*: teachers involved in School-Work Alternance programmes have a strategic position. These results have some practical implications at both educational/training and professional levels.

KEYWORDS: school-work alternance programmes, activity theory, boundary crossers, boundary objects, training.

1. Introduction

The Italian and European debate on the importance of creating tools to integrate formal knowledge with informal learning developed in working environments is closely linked to the ongoing economic and social transformations that have been affecting Europe over the last ten years, and to the challenges they have generated. After the worrying results recorded in Italy by Censis (2011) regarding school dropouts (18%) and the increase in the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) population, with a percentage of 22.1% among young people aged between 15 and 29; subsequently, Cedefop (2014) showed how, as well as the dropout (17%) and NEET populations (18-24 years: 29.3%), there was a considerable youth unemployment rate

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of 21.7%, compared to the average of 15.1% in the European Union countries. The results of the OCSE-Pisa (INVALSI 2012) surveys also contributed to reinforcing reflection on the importance of rethinking the education-work relationship, developing methodologies and strategic learning practices that would be useful to integrate formal and informal learning, and theoretical and practical knowledge. The surveys demonstrated that Italian education institutions not only work differently in relation to the territory they belong to, and the type of school (high school, technical or vocational), they also fail to create those conditions that can help young people acquire skills that are useful for real life. This is a scenario that casts doubt on both the isolation and self-centrality of educational institutions and traditional teaching methods which have been dominated by a teacher-centred approach and the subject of study, thus denying students an active role in the process of building knowledge (Tacconi 2015a), as well as the opportunity to exercise power within participatory and active learning contexts (Fedeli 2016). Therefore, an epochal change is needed to create synergic alliances both within the formal contexts of education, with the teacher as facilitator and the learner as responsible for and co-constructor of his own personalized teaching plan (Pastore 2016), and between public and private organizations that can facilitate the relationship between education and work, to create open systems and inter-organizational agreements to cope with the challenges that "liquid modernity" generates (Bauman 2000).

The education-work relationship «[…] questions the historical, and evident institutional difference between the tasks of schools (education only) and the production world (work only), and strongly urges to redefine both the unitary identity profile of this segment of the education and training system (education and, or even through, work), and the human and educational value of production contexts (work and education)» (Tacconi 2015b: 9). From this perspective, a School-Work Alternance (SWA) programme, as a unitary synthesis of the two worlds kept separated for too long, can develop a fresh and more complete way of looking at work, not simply as a professional training tool, but also as personal development. Consequently, SWA probes the internal organizational of the education system, the teaching methods, the role of learners and teachers, but above all it leads to a questioning of the functions carried out by those key teachers who, over the years, and before the recent norm (L. 107/2015), have actively supported the development of SWA pathways and the building of bridges between formal and informal learning contexts, trying to provide students with SWA experiences based as far as possible on the idea of situated learning practice and a strategic partnership between educational and production contexts (Tino, Fedeli 2015).

2. Theoretical framework

School-Work is a system which, to be effective, needs to be built on a strong partnership between schools and workplaces, where the key actors must leave their comfort zones, cross the boundaries of their systems, and enter unfamiliar territory. In this assumption, the role performed by key teachers (tutors and SWA coordinators) during SWA paths is investigated in this study through the «boundary crossing» approach (Engeström, Engeström, Kärkkäinen 1995), whose roots lie within the cultural-historical activity theory of the «third generation» (CHAT) (Engeström 2001). According to this theory, interaction between systems can generate expansive learning through a cycle of collective transformation, when the systems partners act with awareness of the functioning of the organizations involved, considering them as goal-oriented activity systems; as multi-voiced communities inhabited by subjects with different stories, values and cultures, and where division of labour demands processes of explication and negotiation; as organisms with their historicity made from tools, rules and artefacts; as places where differences and contradictions can create conflicts and lack of equilibrium, while at the same time these factors can become sources of innovation, transformation, and learning for the people and systems involved.

The relationship between different systems, required by today's economic and social complexity, recalls the concept of boundaries, since the systems and the people who live within them, in order to overcome their specific specialization and the difficulty of dealing with problems, reach out through social and cultural practices, and through participation and collaboration within different contexts and organizations (Akkerman, Admiraal, Simons 2012; Daniels, Edwards, Engeström, Gallagher, Ludvigsen 2010), in an attempt to transcend the fragmentation (Hermans, Hermans-Konopka 2010),

Within the school-work relationship, the boundary between the two systems of activity is represented by cultural difference and the potential difficulty of interacting. However, this same difficulty is also what Akkerman and Bakker (2011: 139) defined as «the potential value of establishing communication and collaboration». This very process, during *boundary crossing* activities, involves two important components: the people involved or *boundary crossers,* and the artefacts or *boundary objects*, built to realize the process itself. In SWA paths, teacher/tutors and SWA coordinators act as 'crossers' between systems, with the task of creating bridges between the two worlds as well as the contextual connections. This leads them to experience the natural ambiguity that the role implies: on the one hand they can appear as builders of bridges and alliances between the two worlds,

capable of introducing new elements within the practices of the two different contexts (Wenger 1998); on the other, they may risk being seen as peripheral figures (Akkerman, Bakker 2011). Managing this ambiguity requires them to create dialogues with all the actors in the two contexts, to understand the different perspectives, and to develop *boundary crosser leadership* (Morse 2010).

A *boundary crossing* process is not only determined by the ability of the people directly involved in moving to unfamiliar boundaries, but above all by the ability of the system to look at and venture beyond its boundaries, to negotiate within a third space characterized by a new culture as the result of a process of hybridity and dialogue (Gutierrez, Rymes, Larson 1995) between separate organizational systems.

Within a *boundary crossing* process, not only people are involved, but also important *boundary objects* as proof of a real process of negotiation and sharing between schools and workplaces. On the one hand, they represent the strength of the synthesis of two different perspectives, on the other, they are the very image of flexibility, since they are concrete artefacts of a path built jointly by groups and different contexts, in the name of a process of collaboration, communication, reciprocal learning, and simultaneous participation in different domains (school and work), according to the principle of *othering* (Akkerman, Bakker 2011: 142) based on the ability of dialogue and identification.

3. The study

3.1 Objectives and methodology

This study wished to investigate the role of teachers involved in SWA programmes, to answer the following general question: «What are the functions of teacher/tutors and coordinators in SWA programmes?» In order to identify useful guidelines to allow a more detailed data analysis, the general question was then dealt with in two specific questions: i) What are the real tasks of teacher/tutors and SWA coordinators? ii) How do SWA tutors and coordinators support school-work partnerships?

In this specific study, a qualitative approach was adopted whose peculiar aspects were: i) the ability to understand phenomena, through the frameworks by which people experience and interpret reality (Corbin, Strauss 2008); ii) the ability of the researcher to follow a flexible research design (Creswell 2013; Marshall, Rossman 2011); iii) the opportunity to look at the setting and the people as a whole, without reducing them to a mere set of variables (Tracy 2013; Yin 2011).

The survey technique used was the semi-structured interview thanks to its low level of directivity, due both to the presence of a draft on the topics to be treated and without a precise order, thus, only with the indication of a 'perimeter' to move within, and the role of the researcher in conducting the interview. This allowed the researcher to decide which topics to deal with, what sequence to follow, how to formulate the questions, but also to take a closer look at any issues emerging during the interview. In turn, interviewees were left free to express their opinions and ideas, indirectly influencing the communication flow and direction of the interview. In this sense, through the semi-structured interview, the interviewer and the interviewee had similar roles (Sala 2010).

The interview addressed to the key SWA actors included seven dimensions (teachers' functions, relationship with partners, students' learning design, SWA programme implementation, learning, assessment, ideas for SWA improvement), each of them dealt with in questions, with the aim of gathering the necessary information on the various aspects relating to the research goal, but without giving up the flexibility and openness required by the type of interview and the characteristics of conversation.

3.2 Context and participants

The context of the study was seven high schools in the north of Italy. Specifically, it involved four technical institutions, one vocational institution, and two high schools. The teachers involved numbered 14, one teacher/tutor and one SWA coordinator for each educational institution. Both had some SWA experience: this meant that the teacher/tutors had experience in supporting students on SWA paths within production contexts; while SWA coordinators were teachers with an overview of the design and practice of SWAs at the institution they belonged to.

3.3 Data analysis

The interviews were carried out between May and December 2015 at the various educational institutions involved, where the teachers worked, and after approval of their school principals. After receiving the participants' authorization, each one-and-half-hour interview was recorded. Subsequently, all interviews were transferred to an electronic format to allow the researcher a textual analysis using Atlas.ti.07 software. The analysis procedure mainly followed the *top-down* principle, a deductive approach where the content analysis was based on theoretical reference categories, but neither the *bottom-up*

or inductive approach were excluded when emerging and useful categories had been identified to better understand the object of study.

The analyses conducted through Atlas.ti.07 generated 14 *Primary Documents* (*PD*) and 549 codes, and included: a) transcription of the interviews in digital format (*PD*); b) preparation of the *Hermeneutic Unit* (*HU*) as a setting for pre-codes and codes for groups-families and networks; c) identification of the quotations with the definition of labels by function: *add coding* and *open coding*; d) identification of the code families around which to group those codes that could better describe a macro-area or a *core category* (Tarozzi 2008); e) graphic representation of the most significant family *networks*. This last process proved useful as a summary map of the relevant categories identified or emerged.

3.4 Findings

Analysis of the interviews, carried out as described in the previous paragraph, produced significant findings on the object of study. The findings have been presented here as cross-themes on the two specific questions the general research question was split into.

As regards the first specific question, «What are the real tasks of teacher/tutors and SWA coordinators?» five cross-themes emerged:

i) *the concrete development of the school-work partnership*: SWA tutors and coordinators are the only teachers who constantly interface with representatives of production contexts. The possibility of maintaining or strengthening strategic and long-lasting partnerships with external contexts depends on their ability to emphasize the importance of the SWA projects, and to combine the needs of schools with those of external organizational contexts, developing reliable relationships in the name of dialogue, transparency, and mutual respect;
ii) *the appropriate student-production context matching:* in fact, this was considered a key factor by the participants; the effectiveness of the entire SWA experience had by the students depended on this. In order to avoid possible mistakes, it is necessary for SWA tutors and coordinators to know both the interests and potentiality of the students and the work contexts, in terms of professional and relationship practices;
iii) *the organization of students' SWA experiences*; if as a first step, the SWA coordinators have the task of identifying a teacher/tutor for each class or group of students, providing them with the characteristics of external organizations that host students, in a second step, the teacher/tutors, after identifying the students' interests, analysing and excluding logistical problems, have the task of contacting the

working contexts where they can place the students, negotiating the period and, if possible, the activities the students should do;

iv) *preparation of the documents that must support and provide proof of the student's experience*: there are many school contexts where the SWA tutors and coordinators are involved in preparing the necessary documents: students' training design, assessment and monitoring tools, and observation grids. These are *boundary objects* or *mediating artefacts*, which should provide proof of the process of sharing and dialogue between systems, the synthesis of different perspectives and not the fruit of activities carried out by individuals or at most by very few people without any form of internal or external sharing;

v) *the monitoring and assessment of experiences*: tutors and coordinators are also in charge of this complex task. They monitor the experience of every single student under their care, through periodic visits to the host organizations and informal conversations with workplace tutors, by collecting and analysing student logs, when the school requests them; by reading and assessing the student's final SWA report; by preparing an assessment report of students' SWA experience in order to present it to the class committee. This is an organism which, in most cases, can only take note of the assessment process, without playing an active role, because of its minimal participation within the whole SWA process.

The themes relating to the second specific question «How do SWA tutors and coordinators support school-work partnerships?» are two:

i) *the internal and external communication that SWA tutors and coordinators use as 'glue' between the two contexts*. Participants stated how, within the institution they belong to, communication is useful not only to promote the sharing process, to motivate, and involve other colleagues in taking part first in the building of students' learning design, then in the experience itself, but also as a tool for translating and filtering information; while, on the outside, communication becomes the lubricant of the partnership, since it generates trust and good relations between the parties, and facilitates the sharing of various perspectives;

ii) *the effort to combine different perspectives*; it is precisely this theme that highlights the role of SWA tutors and coordinators as *boundary crossers* between systems. Participants showed a willingness to live within the boundary zone (Konkola, Tuomi-Gröhn, Lambert, Ludvigsen 2007), considered as a space free from predetermined rules and activities, and where a real *dialogization* process between school and work (Gutierrez *et al.* 1995: 446) could produce a synthesis of cultures and differences, generating effective learning experiences for the students and systems involved.

4. Final remarks

The findings showed how the relationship between school/work systems requires recognition of both the boundaries between organizations and the activity of boundary crossers, whose role is to create links and bridges between different organizational systems (Aldrich, Herker 1977; Andersson, Andersson 2008), the willingness to inhabit that third space (Frenkel 2008; Gutierrez *et al.* 1995) creatively generating a synthesis of distinct cultures and perspectives. The core elements that emerged showed that SWA tutors and coordinators act as an important cross-system function between systems. In fact, they are those who, together with the students, carry the image of the school they belong to outside; they connect students with local production contexts, and create links between school life and working contexts, attempting to reduce the distance between them, seeking to link content and methods to the needs of the outside environment. They are those teachers who have a clear awareness of the value of the experience and therefore declare themselves ready to sacrifice time and resources to accomplish it. They are the only teachers who are committed to navigating internal and external boundaries, involved in the communicative flows of negotiation and dialogue, influencing the effectiveness of internal and external partnerships, and student SWA experiences. They are the only teachers who work concretely and consistently in the construction of new crossing artefacts as evidence of a possible boundary-crossing process.

The findings highlighted another element on which the educational and work contexts are presumed to reflect: only tutors and coordinators are the 'protagonist-managers' of an SWA system; in fact, they are supporters and promoters of partnerships, organizers and responsible for students' experiences, managers of internal and external communication flows, builders of *boundary objects*, and responsible for SWA experience assessments. All of this means that the two systems are still trapped within their boundaries, struggling to creatively live a third common space, as a common place of innovation, transformation, and mutual learning, as a possibility for change that requires new relationships and new cultures (Akkermann, Bruining 2016).

This scenario has some important implications in practice: SWA is an educational methodology that became mandatory for all study paths and for all students with the introduction of the Italian Law no. 107 of 2015, so that tutors and coordinators, who have been SWA path managers and policy makers so far are required to reflect and gain awareness of the presence of boundary crossing processes in SWA pathways. It demands the full involvement of parties rather than individuals. At the same time, it cannot be denied that tutors and coordinators play a key role within this process and that they should

be formally recognized a new professionalism that can be identified as the figure of an educational middle-management system (Fabbri, Melacarne, Allodola 2015). Additionally, the complexity of the functions given to them implies the recognition of the role of *boundary crossers,* and hence the need to think about appropriate educational and training paths capable of supporting these new professionals in the processes of integrating the objectives of different organizations, in the crossing of different boundaries that require them to know how to enact a dual professional identity (Richter, West, Van Dick, Dawson 2006) and how to enact their boundary crosser leadership in order to promote the overall involvement of systems.

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PROMOTING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH COLLABORATION AND ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT: The paper presents a model of university teaching where students are involved in concrete activities and collaborate while developing key competences for the academic and working future. 52 students of the Degree Course in Psychology at the Sapienza University of Rome participated to the activity. The method of data collection and analysis combines qualitative and quantitative approach. Results show a general perception of skills enhancement and a good appreciation of the course, especially in comparison with traditional learning modes.

KEYWORDS: skills, collaborative learning, project-based learning, technologies.

1. Theoretical introduction

One of the main goals of secondary and higher education is to ensure that students acquire useful skills to achieve success not only in their studies, but also in their future career and in daily life. A comprehensive list of 21st century skills has been provided by Binkley et al. (2012) who identified ten skills grouped into four clusters: ways of thinking (e.g., creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, learning to learn, and metacognition); ways of working (e.g., communication and collaboration – teamwork); tools for working (e.g., information literacy, ICT literacy), and living in the world (e.g., citizenship; life and career; personal & social responsibility). By mastering such skills, tomorrow's citizens should be able to solve complex problems, innovate work knowledge practices, create and support professional networks, and cope with multiculturality and continuous change.

To enhance meaningful and long-lasting learning that can promote knowledge acquisition as well as crucial skills development, more recent literature (Pozzi *et al.* 2012; Schellens *et al.* 2006) asks for educational approaches in which to: fruitfully integrate individual and group activities, structure and guide focused learning discussions, think about specific tasks

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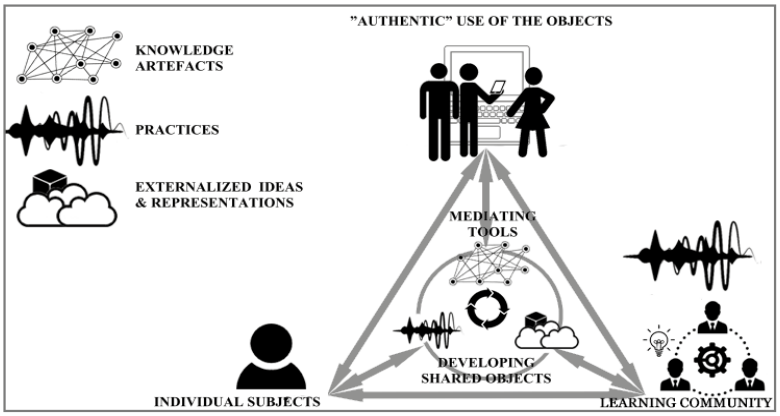
around concrete activities, and finally, provide theoretically-based technological mediation.

Based on these concepts, the authors are presenting their proposal on how to innovate higher education accordingly, by designing a type of course in which students are involved in concrete activities, and collaborate to create knowledge and build significant artefacts while developing key competences for their academic and working lives.

The course is based on the Trialogical Approach to Learning (TLA, Paavola, Engeström, Hakkarainen 2010), so-called because it integrates 'monological' and 'dialogical' approaches to learning with a third element: intentional processes involved in the collaborative creation of knowledge artefacts shared by and useful for the community. The acquisition and participation metaphors of learning (Sfard 1998) are, in this approach, embedded in the knowledge creation metaphor, which, by going beyond the many traditional dichotomies (Paavola, Lipponen, Hakkarainen 2004), focuses on the individual and social processes, conceptual knowledge and social practices needed to foster collaborative creativity (Fig. 1). The trialogical approach demonstrates its strong links with the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström 1987). Starting from Vygotskij's thinking (1981), according to which our experience of the world is always mediated by a tool, whether tangible or intangible, CHAT perceives knowledge as a collaborative construction mediated by cultural and social artefacts, and grounded in practical activities (Cole 1996).

Figure 1 – The trialogical learning approach. [Sansone, Cesareni, Ligorio 2016]



A trialogical approach is applied through six principles, the so-called 'design principles' (Tab. 1: Hakkarainen, Paavola 2009; Paavola, Hakkarainen 2014), which guide the planning of technology-based teaching and learning activities to facilitate shared efforts of working with knowledge artefacts (Paavola, Lakkala, Muukkonen, Kosonen, Karlgren 2011).

Table 1 – The six design principles.

Design Principle	Definition
DP1 Organizing activities around shared 'objects'	Formative action must converge on the realization of shared objects recognized as important and intended for actual use, beyond individual and social dimensions of learning. Shared objects are also represented by shared practices and processes.
DP2 Supporting interaction between personal and social levels	It is necessary to combine individual work with that in a team, considering the diverse needs and "exploiting" inclinations and interests.
DP3 Fostering long-term processes of knowledge advancement	This principle emphasizes the importance of providing enough time for iterative inquiry cycles and of supporting environments to let long-term processes take effect, including the creative re-use of previous practice and knowledge artefacts.
DP4 Emphasizing development through transformation and reflection between various forms of knowledge and practices	Innovative ideas and practices can emerge more easily when learning involves various forms of knowledge and practices: declarative, procedural as well as tacit.
DP5 Cross-fertilization of various knowledge practices across communities and institutions	Creating connections within other contexts intentionally promotes the acquisition of modes of interaction, ways of thinking and languages typical of contexts other than those of training.
DP6 Providing flexible tool mediation	In line with 21st century society, the last principle affirms the importance of providing adequate and diversified technologies, selecting those most suited to mediate collaborative activities and enhance aspects highlighted in the other design principles.

The six principles synthesize the main pillars of the TLA: designing object-based learning activities in which both individual and collaborative work strategies are mobilized, creative processes are triggered, and educational technologies support each stage of the process. In particular, trialogical activities are favoured by the use of environments and tools that allow participants to create and share, elaborate and transform, organize different artefacts, making the related knowledge practices visible, reflecting on them and evolving them.

2. Methodology

2.1 Aims

The study presented here aimed to observe students' acquisition of knowledge and skills, and to gather useful information for improving learning design. Specifically, our research questions were:

1) Do students perceive an evolution in the level of skills they mastered at the beginning and at the end of the course?
2) How do students evaluate the course and its activities?

2.2 Participants

Fifty-two 3rd year students (24 M, 28 F – avg age 21.8) from the Three-Year Degree Course in Psychology

2.3 Context

The course described here was on Experimental Pedagogy, and used blended learning by integrating face-to-face and online lessons hosted by the Sapienza Moodle (<http://elearning2.uniroma1.it>). The course lasted 10 weeks and was subdivided into three modules lasting approximately three weeks each.

Students were divided into six groups of about nine people each; the groups' membership remained unchanged throughout the entire course.

The following table shows the learning design of the course, describing how the design principles were applied to the activities (Table 2).

Table 2 – TLA principles in the course.

Design principle	*Implementation in the case*
DP1: Organizing activities around shared objects	The final object to be built by each group was a pedagogical scenario in which technology-mediated collaborative activities were to be designed. Learning topics and intermediate collaborative products were the basis for the construction of the pedagogical scenario. In particular, the last artefact was a significant and useful object, connecting the group with the broader community. In fact, teachers from different Degree courses can all use these projects.
DP2: Supporting integration of personal and collective work	Learning discussions were organized in which students had to bring their personal ideas as well as re-elaborations of scientific and pedagogical issues. Discussions and the following activities of product building were supported by allotting four specific roles: Social Tutor (task: promoting each group member's participation), Synthesizer (task: writing a weekly summary of the group discussion), Sceptic (task: presenting alternative points of view to 'warm' the discussion), Head of the Collaborative Artefact (task: arranging tools and materials for the collaborative classroom activity of building the artefact). Interaction between the groups was ensured by classroom presentations of the works and peer-review activities aimed at improving the group work. Reflection on students' own participation and responsibility (agency) was solicited by compiling personal Learning Diaries, consisting of different stimuli to allow students to analyse their path more systematically and improve their own participation.

DP3: Emphasizing development and creativity	During the course, the students dealt with various kinds of knowledge, ranging from the theories studied and taught by the teacher to concrete examples of didactic activities illustrated through films, charts, stories, and analyses of scientific articles, till the final phase of constructing their artefacts, which all of these different formats had to become part of. Personal and group reflection was repeatedly stressed in the group discussions around the teachers' evaluations at the end of each module, also by compiling observation forms and reading these in groups, and finally, through the Learning Diaries.
DP4: Fostering long-term processes of knowledge advancement	The learning activities lasted ten weeks and were organized in 3 different modules, thus including many moments of transition in which to reflect upon the previous phase. The course was designed so that theoretical knowledge on the teaching and learning themes was repeatedly taken up and reflected on, in view of its practical application within the planned pedagogical scenario. Moreover, the artefacts were reviewed and improved through advice given: a) by the teacher in the plenary presentation, b) by the pairs through the peer feedback review – based on a specific template, c) by experts (primary, secondary and university teachers) during the final stage of constructing the pedagogical scenario.
DP5: Promoting cross-fertilization of knowledge practices	Students were able to experience the practices and methodologies of learning design in schools and higher education. Each group was supported and advised by an expert in the level of education chosen as the specific topic of their project. Thus, primary or secondary school teachers reviewed and provided feedback on their school-level projects, while a university physics professor provided feedback on a project to do with collaborative work between physics students, designing artefacts in that field.
DP6: Providing flexible tools for developing artefacts and practices	During the activities, several tools were used. Students interacted in small groups within Moodle courses. To perform the various activities, tools such as Padlet (brainstorming in the classroom), Google Drive Design Tool (to create shared conceptual maps), and Shared Google Documents (to collaboratively write the project) were used.

To effectively apply the TLA prescriptions, each module had a specific focus which the corresponding activities and products to be built came from, as shown below (Tab. 3).

Table 3 – Discussions, activities, and artefacts in each module.

	Theoretical Contents	Discussions/Activities	Artefacts
First Module	Teaching/learning theories	'The good teacher': Discussion	Conceptual map on 'The good teacher'
Second Module	School history, learning technologies	Analysis of scientific articles	Draft of the pedagogical scenario stressing the theoretical principles

Third Module	Technologies and collaborative learning	Searching for best practices on technology at school; school; collaborative writing of the project	Final pedagogical scenario

2.4 Tools and procedure

The study presented here is based on the Design-Based Approach (DBA) (Brown, 1992; Collins, 1992; Design-Based Research Collective, 2003) which seeks to plan and implement innovative interventions, to then observe and analyse working elements as well as areas for improvement, and ultimately, re-design further interventions. The method of data collection and analysis combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Specifically, the following data were collected:

1) First research question

Forty-three anonymous pre-post questionnaires, namely, the Contextual Knowledge Practices Questionnaire (Muukkonen *et al.* 2016). This was self-administered using Google Drive modules (<https://drive.google.com>) and consisted of: a) a pre-post section containing 21 items on perceptions relating to studies and abilities; b) a post-section consisting of 27 items examining the perception of any knowledge and skills acquired during the course and its activities. These items were organized in seven scales built around the TLA design principles.

Answers to the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS.

2) Second research question

Three Focus Groups (FGs) were held at the end of the course. Stimuli aimed to detect students' views on: their preferred activity (usefulness in terms of learning and skills); the role taken; pros and cons of group work; the assessment methods (ongoing, self-assessment, peer-observation); and the differences between the course just completed and traditional ones. To favour a critical and diversified discussion, the FGs consisted of students from each group.

The transcripts were analysed using qualitative content analysis, aimed at defining categories to group the key concepts.

2.5 Results

1) Do students perceive an evolution in the level of skills they mastered at the beginning and end of the course?

The results show a general perception of skills enhancement (Table 4), with statistically significant differences, both for the Work Compe-

tence scale (Wc), ($t = -4.48$ (42) $p < .01$), and for the Self-efficacy scale (Se) ($t = -2.955$ (42) $p < .01$). At the end of the activity, the students felt that they had more collaborative work skills and felt greater confidence in their skills.

Table 4 – Differences in perception of incoming and outgoing skills.

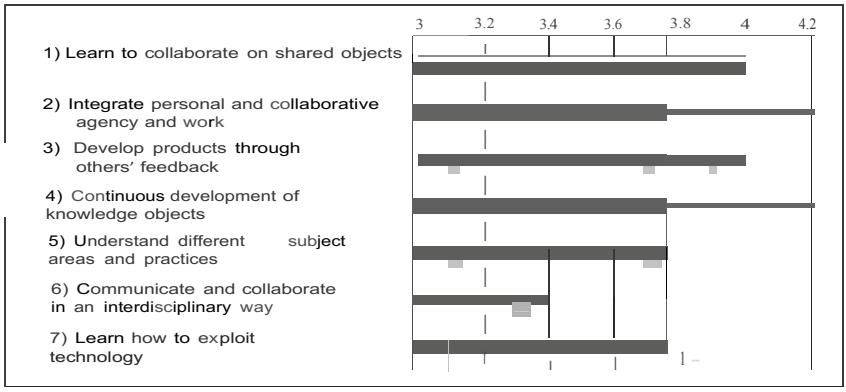
N = 43 (24F.; 19 M.)	Entry	Exit
Work competence	3.60	3.95
Work engagement	3.53	3.53
Self efficacy	3.86	4.03
Total	3.63	3.79

No significant differences were found for the gender variable either in entry or in exit for Wc and Se. Instead, the Work Engagement scale, presented statistically significant differences in exit (One-Way ANOVA $f = 6.343$ (42) $p = .016$). It seems that the course led the girls to feel more involved ($M = 3.69$) than the boys did ($M = 3.23$).

Specifically, students believed that the course had allowed them to improve their skills in each of the areas investigated, the average score being above 3 in all seven scales (Fig. 2). In particular, they believed they had learnt to collaboratively build knowledge objects (scales 1 and 2, Average 4 and 3.91) and make these artefacts iteratively better (scale 4, 3.90), also thanks to the feedback received from their peers and the experts (scale 3, Average 4).

Furthermore, they perceived that they had learnt new ways to use technologies (Average 3.88). However, they believed that they had only partially learned to collaborate and communicate in an interdisciplinary way (scale 6, Average 3.34).

Figure 2 – Perception of skills development after the course (Likert scale 1-5)



As for possible gender differences, female students generally expressed a higher perception, but no significant differences were found in any items or scale.

2) How do students evaluate the course and its activities?

Generally, students showed appreciation for the course, especially when comparing it to traditional ones. Compared to the latter, the course was recognized as exciting and engaging, capable of generating «interest in a pedagogical subject and a desire to go deeper into the topic» and made attractive by the idea of «working together towards a common goal», even if this was considered as requiring a greater commitment and effort «than having to just study from a book» because, on this course, «you have to attend the class and engage all through the course».

In the following table (Tab. 5), we have highlighted the pros and cons the students saw in the different aspects of the course which they themselves pointed out as most relevant.

Table 5 – Pros and cons of individual aspects of the course from a student perspective.

	Pro	Cons
Group-work	– a real innovation, not existing in other courses – a stimulus for individual participation, as well as supporting real interdependence	– issues relating to a non-homogeneous participation by some group members
Online discussions	– the possibility to really get to know many points of view – engaging material and content (e.g. articles and project)	– the tendency of some peers to write lengthy notes on web forums, without having read others' – limited time dedicated to both the second discussion and the project
Role Taking	– the Synthesizer role promoting a higher focus on the discussion – the Tutor role connecting online and offline activities	– the up-down role distribution not considering personal inclinations and availability – tutor's stimuli seen as critical and therefore not implemented
Evaluation and self-evaluation	– ongoing evaluation seen as useful for self-monitoring – self-assessment considered as triggering good reflection	– structure of the Learning Diary perceived as too binding or repetitive – also, its lack of anonymity as impacting authenticity
Peer review	– a possibility to improve, both by receiving and providing feedback	– feedback given not always constructive
Online environment	– the chance to be connected at any time, even via smartphones	– web forum not supporting proper discussions because of its structure

In detail, we can see how group work was the real added value of the course, as claimed in the following excerpt: «This course was the most

pleasant of all my three years, because it was based on exchanging ideas, thinking all together; the opposite of the usual boring frontal lessons». Probably, the group work had this impact on the students' perception since it worked well (as already mentioned, the designers paid great attention to integrating individual and collaborative agencies as stated in DP2): «For me it was reassuring that it was not a thing like, "as a group we decide what to do and then a single person does the job", but that everyone had to and could participate».

Among the activities of the course, however, some were considered more able to promote useful skills for future profession, such as the Learning Diaries, considered «useful also for the profession we will choose. Putting into writing and finding out what's going on, what I feel, somehow helped me to recognize it right when it was happening and to adjust my behaviour».

Weaknesses and limits were also pointed out by the students, starting from the online discussions of the first module (see Tab. 4): «At a certain point I said to my group-mates, "listen, please, could you stop doing thirty-line monologues? Could we start and have a discussion? Because in my opinion that's what you have to do […] do you really think I'm going to go read ten posts of thirty lines that have nothing to do with each other? […]". This complaint, however, ended with a possible solution: "maybe you should present it a bit more like a debate"».

In other cases, suggestions referred to more practical aspects, such as the timeframes: «In my opinion, the problem was that in the second module we discussed the added value technologies for too long (...) and then, suddenly, on the day, we were told to design a project … so […] I would redefine the timeframe, giving a whole third module to the drafting of the project […] or I would have put in a fourth module».

3. Final remarks

In this contribution we have described a university course based on the Trialogical Learning Approach and the study we performed to detect its impact on students' appreciation of the learning activities and perceptions relating to their skills development.

Collaborative activities, continuous development of knowledge objects, active use of technology, and the possibility to learn different disciplines and practices, were recognized and appreciated by the students as key factors of the course, after which they perceived that they had reinforced some skills crucial for their future career.

According to the DBA method that inspired our work, and to further enhance the overall student experience, in future courses we will be paying attention to the critical areas reported by the students: participation in work groups, certain tools and materials, and the timeframes.

Finally, we will focus on improving interdisciplinary collaboration and communication, perceived as the most underdeveloped skill.

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A STUDENT VOICE APPROACH IN WORK-RELATED LEARNING. FROM LESSON-LEARNED IN SECONDARY SCHOOL TO SUGGESTIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: This paper presents a research on work-related learning through School-work Alternance in Secondary Education that involved researchers of University of Florence, ten secondary Schools, public and private entities in the Province of Arezzo and La Spezia. From the analysis of three case studies, it elicits criteria for an educational model that integrates work-related learning with student voice perspective.

Keywords: skill mismatch, learner-centred teaching, experiential learning, career guidance.

1. A challenging context: from the category of crisis to that of transition

A European and Italian reasoned geography of crisis suggests that we risk answering to the many challenges originated from 2008 international crisis, and continuously changed since then, with 'outdated' responses if we stick to the category of crisis, although quite developed and diversified in literature (Serres 2009; Bauman 2014). In fact, after almost ten years of profound transformation not only in the labour market and economics, but regarding overall citizens' living styles, it might be time to shift to the transition approach (Hopkins 2012). The latter indicates that not only we are not going to leap back to the pre-2008 crisis for structural reasons, but, turned into positive terms, we face the opportunity to build something completely new, that is ecologically sound and sustainable both for human beings and the Planet Earth. Thanks to digital technology, we should work toward the construction of a resilient and empathic society (Rifkins 2010) where all citizens can contribute to new political and economic forms of societies that are more inclusive and fair. In such a trip from what is no longer and something which is still underway, what is the contribution that transformative education (Mezirow 1991) can offer in shaping citizens of the future, as individual and as communities, starting from the phase of their life when they prepare themselves to assume their roles in human society?

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In this paper, we focus on how transformative education and educational models that integrate work-related learning and a student voice approach can contribute to build a diffused human and social capital that can lead transition toward new scenarios, in a framework of open networks and value chains going back and forth from the private to the public spheres of society.

But where are we? How does the panorama appear to be today with such long-term vision? There are definitely plenty of clouds in the sky. Skill mismatch in national and European labour markets is one of them since it hinders young people to develop and thrive while creating stagnation in economies: it originates from insufficient correspondence between workers' competences and the transforming demand of the labour market. Evidences show there is not an acceptable correspondence between workers' skills and the need of the labour market (ILO 2014). European Bank indicates skill mismatch for stressed and non-stressed countries, calculated as the difference in skills between the labour force and employment. Focusing on the more recent evolution, skill mismatches remained at high levels in most euro area countries, especially in the stressed euro area countries, such as Spain, Greece, Ireland and Portugal, where increases already occurred in the first phase of the crisis. In other stressed countries– Italy, Cyprus and Slovenia – skill mismatch has recently significantly increased (ECB 2015).

In such context workers are either:

- Over-skilled i.e. too qualified for available jobs. This leads to brain drain and youth migration toward more solid economics as is the case for Italy as demonstrated in the Fondazione Migrantes Report *Italiani nel Mondo* for 2016.
- Under-skilled i.e. not properly trained to insert into contemporary jobs, putting investors in the conditions to search for human resources abroad, often without a clear governance, or migrants and local unskilled workers compete in the same under-protected market, worsening societal disintegration.

We can highlight another aspect: in a globalized rapidly changing competitive society cross-country mobility flows in the EU are still much lower than those recorded in other highly integrated economic areas, notably the United States, and well below mobility within countries (EC 2015). Migrations and mobility have different social and symbolic weight in general public opinion: the first is connected to poverty and exclusion while the second to the fulfilment of life project, self-improvement and increased wealth. Nevertheless, they both represent ways to foster economies and inclusion, by matching supply and demand in an everyday more globalized labour market.

The phenomenon of over-skilled is significantly increasing in some European countries (3.6% from 2002 to 2012), especially for young people and women. In Italy (ISFOL, PIAAC-OECD 2014) indicates the following data:

- Under-skilled rate is 7.5%, while OECD average is 3.6%
- Over-skilled rate is 12%, while the OECD average is 10%

CEDEFOP (2015, 2010) records indicated that the phenomenon is still rising in Italy compared with previous surveys. In fact, hindering EU and national growth, such phenomenon turned into a challenge especially in Italy, where the percentage of under-qualified workers has become worryingly higher than European average. A wealth of explanations is available: workers' poor digital and technological literacy within a national framework of still fragile lifelong and work-based education and training together with new complex requirements in work organization, job design, career development that have not been met.

Another compelling factor in the analysis is the impact of digital technologies on labour markets that has boosted part of the population, especially the most innovative niche, but at the same time disoriented the majority of workers, especially elder ones. According to the EU there may be a lack of up to 500 thousands ICT professionals in 2020 (EU 2016). In fact, in an everyday more digital society developing a digital talent pool is crucial for the EU labour Market, both in terms of competitiveness but also for inclusion. According to the same study today, around 45% of Europeans have only basic digital skills. While all sectors of the economy are becoming digital 36% of the labour force has insufficient digital skills. Despite high unemployment rates, Europe also lacks digitally skilled persons to fill job vacancies.

It is arguable then that EU challenge is not just to improve skill levels, but to match people with the right skills to the right jobs It is an European and national priority that requires policies to increase education and training responsiveness to labour market needs. Mitigating skill mismatch in an era of fast-paced digitalisation and automation requires a well-developed skills anticipation infrastructure in countries and an integrative approach to skills governance that should be supported at the central level (CEDEFOP 2010). Among the best strategies that have been experimented to contain and progressively reduce such mismatch, available literature shows that strengthening relations among formal and no-formal education Agencies on one side and employers and the labour market on the other is a priority, in order to strengthen value chains from education, training and the labour market for future workers and prevent skill obsolescence or, even worse, their absence

from the market for those who are already employed (CEDEFOP 2015). Another field of experimentation is to overcome disciplinary borders in education and training and develop workers' soft skills as strategic gear to enter and remain in the labour market, no matter how diverse are the features of each sector (CEDEFOP 2016).

At the euro area level, skill mismatch could also be reduced by encouraging greater labour market mobility – both within national labour markets and across the euro area countries. There is a need to improve the governance of such processes that are indeed already in place and can deliver great benefits not only for autochthonous citizens, but also for migrants and asylum seekers, as stated in the EU Agenda for Migration (EU 2015).

In Italy we have a great opportunity with the model of School Work Alternance that is contained in the Law 107/2015, known as 'La buona scuola'. The law represents a contribution, and have great potential, to transform and improve transition paths from school to work in Italy.

In Europe, different types of transitions from formal education to training and employment make a great difference in youth employment rates as well as in gender equity (Shoon-Silbereisen 2009). In particular, the authors indicate four main approaches that match with as much welfare systems:

- Continental/Central Europe with dual systems that interconnect education, vocational training and labour from early stage of life and put the labour system at the centre.
- Scandinavian universalistic systems with a strong investment on inclusive education and training and open access for all, embedded in the idea of collective social responsiveness that should not leave anyone left behind.
- Anglo-Saxon liberal regimes, that liberalize training opportunities, do not protect youth from risks but bet on competitiveness of individual and market.
- Lastly Mediterranean countries where there is a lack of investment in creating stronger links between vocational training, labour and innovation. Vocational training is culturally seen as a second choice compared to University and there are strong unbalances of high quality courses in different territories.

What is then the vision we can inspire from in facing the challenges? According to the New skills Agenda for Europe 2020 EU aims to:

- Improve the quality and relevance of skills formation
- Make skills more visible and comparable

The Agenda also offers some suggestions on how to proceed that are taken into consideration in this paper, as:

- improve skills intelligence and information for better career choices;
- making Vocational Education and Training (VET) a first choice by enhancing opportunities for VET learners to undertake a work based learning experience and promoting greater visibility of good labour market outcomes of VET;
- a review of the Recommendation on Key Competences to help more people acquire the core set of skills necessary to work and live in the 21st century with a special focus on promoting entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented mind-sets and skills.

In our research, we put the accent on the reflection on how to go beyond not only discipline-based competence, but also on key competences (EU 2006) that have been partly made obsolete by social and economical change. We assume that investing in the development of soft skills as a strategic element to enter and remain in the labour market (CEDEFOP 2016).

Soft skills in our model complement hard skills related to a particular job or task and can be defined as a combination of transversal competences and attitudes that valuing already existing people' capabilities improve their performance at work, while boosting their social and emotional intelligence (Goleman 1996). School Work Alternance should be based on a clear statement of educational goals to be attained, in terms of soft skills. Intended to be an innovative educational experience that combines knowledge and know-how, School Work Alternance, and all stakeholders involved, should guide students in reckoning their aspirations while opening the guided and evaluated learning to the outside world.

From the results of our research, we see at least three clear advantages in School Work Alternance:

- It starts to fill a gap of communication, mutual understanding and interrelation between school and the world of work. As mentioned above the Mediterranean transition model is still too characterized by a clear cut between the time to learn and the time to work that urgently needs to be overcome.
- It has an inter-generational approach: in Schools the teacher are the only adults that students interact with, while in alternation they are exposed to decision makers, managers, professional, workers and a wealth of stakeholders.
- It fosters local networks and alliances for change among actors who are not so used of keen to working together, especially since their organizational systems are so diverse. The firm work so distinctively from a secondary school: the power relations are different, are expectations in terms of commitment and results. However, after only two years of implementation, there are many open questions that still need a response.

2. Methodology

When confronted with the poor attainment in school to work cooperation, seizing the opportunity of 'La Buona Scuola' (Italian Law 107/2015), we investigate on how to foster the development of soft skills through work-based learning, putting students at the centre in their local communities. The research object is to identify criteria to design a pattern of work-related learning in a student voice perspective, through drawing from lesson-learned in three empirical researches in Secondary Education that involved the University of Firenze and ten Secondary schools in the Province of Arezzo and La Spezia (Galeotti 2016; Esposito 2016). These were School Work Alternance projects realized through action-research and here presented as three case studies.

The method adopted in this qualitative research (Silverman 2002) is the case study, which is «a research strategy comprising an all-encompassing method» (Yin 2009: 14; Yin 2011), rather than a real and proper methodology, able to deal with particular situations within their own functioning, characteristic complexity (Stake 1995). This is an analysis of phenomenon in the real context in which they occur and, as such, uses multiple sources of evidence, with an exploratory purpose and preliminary to future studies, also in a comparative perspective (Yin 2009).

The stages of investigation developed as follows:

- Building the conceptual framework and identifying the variables of analysis
- Collection and analysis of documents, materials and products in the three Schools
- Comparative analysis of the data collected in the three case studies.

As mentioned, case studies refer to three school-work Alternance projects activated between 2015 and 2016 by schools in collaboration with the University of Florence and with a wealth of stakeholders of the territories involved. The first case study called 'Heritage Lab' is linked to the project *Market of Cultural Heritage and the New Generations*, financed by the Tuscany Region and the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio of Firenze. The aim of the project was to identify strategic actions for the development of the cultural sector in terms of strengthening the skills of the various players involved, including those of young people engaged in vocational education and training. Launched in 2011, the project was structured in a first round of research on the cultural sector in the Arezzo area in terms of system characteristics, service offerings, training demand (FCRF 2013) and a second phase (2014-2015) with a research-intervention with several local stakeholders (cultural sector companies, schools, museums,

public agencies, training agencies, etc.). Research-Action on Work School Alternance was developed in the second phase of the project.

Peoplefusion is a complex digital platform (<http://www.peoplefusion.it>) that has been designed by the Municipality of La Spezia in collaboration with UNIFI and the firm INFOPORTO in order to facilitate the access of foreign residents to the network of social services available in the local community. Financed by Fondazione TIM in 2014, the project involved in the modality of school-work alternance around 75 young students of secondary school. Their role was not only to collect information on existing services but also to support professionals in making those information available and usable for different sectors of the population. The platform in fact proved useful not only for foreigners (it is translated into English, Spanish, Albanian, Arabic and Bangli) but also to native Italians.

Young Lab is part of the wider project of *Observatory of Social Change* realized by the Municipality of La Spezia with the Scientific support of UNIFI. Its aims are to promote a culture of data and evidence among the social workers of the Service network, through embedded learning and action research. The Observatory yearly collects quantitative and qualitative data on the diverse aspects of social change elaborate them and provide decision makers with recommendations for policy and practices. Young Lab was meant to be a social innovation in previous experience of Observatories: it elicits students' perspectives and ideas on social issues, putting them in the condition of acting as 'junior researchers' accompanied both in training and in action by seniors. Forty-five students in fact were trained, designed and submitted questionnaires, realized interviews and participated to focus groups in order to research the challenges of volunteer associations in facing new needs of the population. The Table 1 briefly summarizes the main features of each project.

The analysis of the three case studies was based on a set of variables derived from two concepts: 'work-related learning' and 'student voice approach'.

The term 'work-related learning' describes a complex educational phenomenon that includes a series of educational missions, a set of activities, a collection of topics and a repertoire of teaching and learning styles (Huddleston, Stanley 2012). In literature there are also other definitions that refer to functional educational strategies for achieving career and career goals, which include times in workplaces, alternating with more conventional learning instances within school institutions (Coll *et al.* 2008); or formal education and training programs for job creation, formal and informal learning in the workplace, continuing vocational training for professional development offered outside the workplace (Dirkx 2011). While carrying a focus on work or

education, these definitions share a bottom line: integrating a practical experience (such as work) with an educational experience (such as upper secondary education) that creates synergies and significant benefits for students and other stakeholders (Gardner, Bartkus 2014).

Table 1 – The three projects of School Work Alternance, Schools, classes and students involved. [Source: Author's own]

Project	Secondary schools	Classes	N. students involved
Heritage Lab	ISIS Buonarroti-Fossombroni, Arezzo IIS "Città di Piero", Sansepolcro IIS "Signorelli", Cortona	3 Technical Institutes 1 Lyceum (Classic) Two class groups and two mixed groups coming from 4 classes	70 with a majority of female students
People fusion	Liceo Scientifico "Pacinotti" Istituto Tecnico Commerciale "Fossati-Da Passano" Istituto Tecnico "Capellini-Sauro" Istituto Professionale Alberghiero "Casini"	1 Professional Institute 2 Technical Institutes 1 Lyceum (Scientific) They were organized in 5 mixed groups coming from 9 classes	75 with a substantial gender balance
Young Lab	Istituto Tecnico Commerciale "Fossati-Da Passano" Liceo Classico "Costa" Istituto Professionale "Einaudi-Chiodo"	1 Professional Institute 1 Technical Institute 1 Lyceum (Classic) They were organized in 2 mixed groups coming from 7 classes	45 students with a majority of female students

The 'student voice' approach (Flechter 2017, 2014; Seal, Gibson, Haynes, Potter 2015; Grion, Manca, 2015; Grion, Dettori 2015; Cook-Sather, Grion 2013), now widely disseminated abroad but still little known in Italy, emphasizes the importance of collecting «any expression of any learner about anything related to education» (Fletcher 2014: 2), or the perspective of students about educational activities and school life in general. Students in fact can offer information and reflections to which teachers and others should listen to in relation to their actions (Cook-Sather 2009). The recognition and legitimacy of the contribution of the concerned stakeholders open up to the possibility of making students more involved and responsible in their school contexts while at the same time improving the quality of training (Cook-Sather 2002; Angus 2006). A literature review of 'student voice' perspective shows different ways to practice it, which were considered in the construction of criteria for case analysis. Specifically, we identified four main areas:

- Learning process: when students plan educational activities and carry out student-led research, for increasing their investment,

ownership, and consequent learning (Flutter, Rudduck, 2004; Fletcher 2004; Bragg, Fielding 2003).
- School culture: involving students as partner to transform the attitudes and systems that underlay the culture of organizations, schools and communities (Young, Sazama 2006; Rudduck 2007).
- Diversity: engaging students to promote diversity of perspectives and the acceptance of cultural, racial, economic, and social diversity (Rubin, Silva 2003; Cushman 2003).
- Civic engagement: students as change agents can lead to the development of skills and abilities to be active citizenship and effective members of their communities (Young, Sazama 2006; Hooks 2004; Freire 1987).

As a qualitative research, data collection and analysis were carried out using the content analysis method (Semeraro 2011), applied to the empirical materials produced during the implementation of the three projects (interviews, analysis reports, self-report of the researcher, activity monitoring cards, student products, etc.), which describe problematic moments and knowledge building at individual and group level (Denzin, Lincoln 2005).

In order to reach a better and deeper understanding of the reality investigated (Coggi, Ricchiardi 2005), the analysis of the collected data was carried out using the interpretative approach (Trinchero 2004), which provided for the aggregation of evidence on the aspects that characterize the work-related learning, based on our reworking of Cooper, Orrell and Bowden proposal (2010). The collected data was then elaborated, combining the work-related learning and student voice approaches, starting with the different declinations of the two concepts in the literature and the theoretical framework of the study to highlight the relationships between them. Subsequently, collected data were analysed in a comparative key to highlight common elements and differences in order to identify research criteria and define an educational model that could combine work-related learning with the student voice approach in the alternance of school and work.

3. Research results

Beyond the different specific objectives of the three projects (cultural heritage, access to services for foreigners, understanding social change and policy design) and the output of the involved teams, the didactic activities carried out within the job alternation became and indoor and/or outdoor labs, where students 'as researchers' were engaged in planning and implementing their ideas and proposals which

could only materialize through their full participation. The methodologies used in the workshops followed the logic and principles of problem-based learning (Barrows, Tamblyn 1980, Barrows, 1988; Woods, 1994) and project-based learning (Krajcik, Blumenfeld, 2006). These two approaches, in some respects superimposable, are both attributable to constructivism (Brandon & All, 2010; Fox, 2001) and in particular to located learning (Lave, 1988; Lave, Wenger, 1990; Brown, Collins, Duguid 1989), active knowledge building (Dewey 1959, 1973), social interactions (Vygotskij, 1980; Wertsch, 1985) and experiential learning (Kolb 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, Mainemelis, 1999). Both are among the methods of learner-centered teaching (Weimer 2013), and move from a problem that constitutes the starting point of the learning process, which develops through the design and application of a resolution hypothesis of the same. What differentiates them is the greater or lesser attention to the design momentum, namely the search for effective and operational solutions that aim, whenever possible, to produce concrete applications or the production of products consistent with the analysis carried out.

In the three study cases, training goals have been declined in terms of strengthening soft skills with reference to some of the ten areas of expertise deemed necessary by 2020 by the Institute for the Future of Palo Alto (2010).

One aspect that has characterized all the experiences was active involvement in various forms of stakeholders in the territory, i.e. public and private actors other than University involved actively in the realization of laboratory activities. The Table 2 shows the different characteristics of the three educational proposals from their key elements in a comparative way.

Table 2 – Main results of comparative analysis of three case studies. [Source: author's own]

	Heritage Lab	People Fusion	Young Lab
Overall Objectives	Innovate the relationship between higher education and labour market, with a focus on valuing local cultural heritage. To develop soft skills together with disciplinary contents	To capitalize students' perspective in facilitating foreign citizens' access to the Local Service Network through a multi-lingual interactive web platform. Students were asked to collect information, develop relations and create a user-friendly approach, valuing their experience and networks.	To include youth's perspective and experiential living in the analysis of social challenges and needs within the framework of the *Observatory of Social Change* of Distretto Socio-Sanitario 18 of La Spezia

	Heritage Lab	People Fusion	Young Lab
Working/ Learning methodology	project-based learning and problem-based learning	Involve-share common objectives among different stakeholders. – train-apply-reflect-solve problems. The strongest results developed OUTSIDE the School. – experiment meaningful school to work (and back) transitions	Share objectives, value student own experiences, train in basic research methodology, 'know where you live', observe, collect and reflect, cultivate informed citizenship
Output	Design of an E-commerce website for local and traditional artisans A project on territorial marketing to improve youth tourism A project of cultural heritage valorisation to participate in National call of Ministry of Education Co-design of School Work Alternance projects in cultural institutions and organizations	A web-based platform connected to social media whose contents have been collected and selected by students.	A 2016 profile of social change that mainstreams student perspective, particularly in analysing the Civil Society role. Valuing youth perspective on main contemporary social issues, in particular active citizenship and solidarity and intergenerational dialogue
Learning outcomes	Strengthened soft skills: Social intelligence; sense-making, Novel And Adaptive Thinking; Cognitive Load Management. Promoted the transition to Career Management Skills	Strengthened soft skills and citizenship A more informed and active local community especially among youth De-construction of prejudice and prevention of hate speech based on ignorance	Strengthened soft skills, especially 'get to know your environment' and protagonism in promoting change. Understood the best use of participatory research and activation tools as world café, questionnaires, interviews
Specific features	In each activities phases submission of a self-assessment and evaluation questionnaire for reflecting on soft skills 'stimulated' during the activities	Digital skills enhanced through coding Focus on 'digital democracy'	Students see themselves as 'junior researchers' Intergenerational education and learning
Partners	Local and regional entrepreneurs in Cultural Heritage sector	Around 30 public and private service providers with hundreds of professionals involved	Distretto Socio-Sanitario 18 of La Spezia; Volunteer Service Centre "Vivere Insieme" ANTEAS; More than 50 Associations and Cooperatives informed

By analysing how the concepts of work-related learning and student voice have been declined in the three study cases, it is important to note that while Heritage Lab has been included in the curricular activity and has been a pre-requisite for students to enter the selected company, People Fusion Labs and Young Lab laboratories have developed first within the organization hosting the alternation, i.e. the Municipality of La Spezia, supported by UNIFI. Going back the work-related classification previously illustrated, Heritage Lab is a *Learn for work* (QCA 2003) experience that engages and integrates with the curriculum of studies in order to develop skills in a prospect of employability. People Fusion and Young Lab are experiences of *Learn through work* typical of the alternative training device. Considering the student voice perspective, all three cases have adopted it in the planning of educational activities and in civil engagement even if in different ways (i.e. Heritage Lab has focused on the export of cultural heritage for social development – the economics of their communities, while People fusion and Young Lab deepened the aspects of social inclusion and the new social needs of communities. The Table 3 below shows the fertile convergence the two approaches.

Table 3 – Connection between work-related activities carried out by the three project with student voice prospective. [Source: author's own]

Work-related / Student voice	Learn for work	Learn through work	Learn about work
SV for learning.	Heritage Lab	People Fusion; Young Lab	
SV for school culture	Heritage Lab		
SV for diversity		People Fusion	
SV for civic engagement	Heritage Lab	People Fusion; Young Lab	

If we consider the classification of the range of student-voice-oriented activities proposed by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), the tree case studies are between 'activism' and 'leadership'. While the 'activism' typology includes identifying problems, generating solutions, organizing responses, agitating and/or educating for change both in and outside of school contexts, leadership typology previews co-planning, making decisions and accepting significant responsibility for outcomes, co-guiding group processes, co-conducting activities youth are understood as leaders. Programs that prepare students to

lead tend to view youth as problem solvers, with the skills and insights communities require in order to move forward (Mitra 2009; Osberg, Pope, Galloway 2006).

4. Final remarks and lessons learnt

To conclude, we would like to focus on lessons learnt and suggestions for implementing work-related activities with a student voice approach, even scaling up to higher education. Integrating and fostering synergies between formal and non-formal agencies and practice results in significant advantages not only for students but also for the rest of the actors involved.

By pursuing a measurable impact of developed and diversified skills for employability, a contemporary learner-centered perspective emerges: students learn through work while teachers, trainers and experts enrich content and didactic through action learning; they are all engaged to build employability paths.

Resuming the definition of work-related learning proposed by Huddleston and Stanley, the presented experiences can be described as the result of the integration between:

- an educational mission directed at the development of professional pathways starting from the valuing of knowledge and disciplinary skills held by students and the resources of a specific territory;
- a set of activities characterized by the integration of active and reflective methods directed at strengthening soft skills;
- a collection of topics that revolve around specific content but which by their nature have an interdisciplinary character and are therefore adaptable to different study paths and economic sectors;
- a repertoire of learning and learning styles that develop through the connection of problem-based learning approach to project-based learning, both of which are related to learner-centered teaching methodologies.

Based on the findings of case study analysis, the main criteria for implementing a work-related learning experience in a student voice perspective are:

- Co-design paths of school work alternance in a participatory way, involving students, teachers and local stakeholders
- Stimulate collaborative research networks between social, educational, economic and cultural organizations and stakeholders within the private and public sector
- Consolidate and build students' soft skills starting from valuing from their previous knowledge and disciplinary skills.

- Develop expert assessment/evaluation tools for traineeship 'as learning experiences' and of the soft skills acquired

The educational model proposed integrates learner-centered teaching, 'learn through work' and 'learn for work' by evaluating students' voices in negotiating *curricula*, in order to develop skills in a perspective of employability. Overall, the model aims at shaping new relationships between School, Enterprises and the Labor Market while integrating knowledge and disciplinary skills with soft skills. It can contribute to:

- Design school-work Alternance with the direct involvement of students and the local community (Fletcher 2014; Seale *et al.* 2015).
- Develop training pathways that offer students the opportunity to explore employment opportunities and career development (Subramaniam, Freudenberg 2007), within the framework of Cultural and Social Economy.
- Give more visibility to the development of soft skills *in curricula* beyond disciplinary skills (Freudenberg, Brimble, Cameron 2011).
- Connect between theory and practice, with positive learning effects.
- Foster motivation through valuing incoming experiences, knowledge and aspirations for further learning.

There is ample room for further research on potentialities and scaling up opportunities of the same model in higher Tertiary Education, especially vocational training. Some have already emerged:

- Promote and disseminate a culture of mutual understanding between Universities, Schools and other key stakeholders of the local community.
- Experiment entrepreneurship and innovation labs for the development of new profiles, product and services of the Transition Society.

Finally, for the Department of Education and Psychology, the model can be exploited to train future teachers, educators, professionals, entrepreneurs and other facilitators on the methods and potentialities of work-related approaches, through models genuinely based on experimentation and evidence.

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PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHERS AND PROBLEMATIZATION PROCESSES*

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Abstract: This article presents the path and the results of research aimed at developing innovative teaching approaches in the context of academic courses for in-service teachers as regards their professional training.

Keywords: teacher education, professional training, didactic models.

1. Introduction

This article presents the lines and findings of a research study whose aim is the fine-tuning of an innovative, didactic training model within a 1st level professional Master's degree programme in *Didactics and Educational Psychology for Specific Learning Disorders* introduced by the Department of Philosophy and Education Sciences at the University of Turin, in collaboration with the MIUR (*Ministero dell'Università e Ricerca Scientifica* – Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research) - USR (*Ufficio Scolastico Regionale* – The Regional Schools Office) of Piedmont (A/Y 2011-12; 2012-13), addressed to teachers of any type and level of school. The author, in her capacity as director of the Master's degree programme, assumes responsibility for the didactic planning of the Course, seen as a crossroads between the practical and professional knowledge areas of teachers, and the scientific and subject-specific knowledge areas offered by the formal-type teaching provided by the Master's degree, a potentially strategic learning lever in professionalization management. In relation to restrictions of a general nature, University-related, and available resources) the research study lines began from the problem: *how do we respond, via education and vocational training of a university nature – with specific reference to traineeship activities – to the needs of the professional development of teachers in service in relation to action planning and management, contexts and didactic and educational actions such as to promote integration of all students, with specific focus on those with SLD? In this context, which areas of profes-*

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sional action are most critical from the standpoint of teachers in schools and need to be monitored in the planning of university professional in-service training?

2. Theoretical framework

From the standpoint of primary theoretical and methodological assumptions, one of the main tasks of research in the pedagogic and didactic field pivots arounds the processing of knowledge supporting the professionalization of teachers and educators in managing the definition of models, mechanisms, and training-based professional practices in line with the complex, fixed and dynamic nature of didactic and educational actions (Van der Maren 2014; Furlong, Oancea 2008). Taking this context of a general nature to define a didactic case model structuring the traineeship path of the Master's degree programme, exploration was undertaken of academic works that gathered elements to answer the question: *given the resources and actual restrictions, in relation to the identified training objectives, what operational criteria need to be adopted in the development of a traineeship path directed towards supporting the professional development of teachers*? Several aspects which need to be monitored came to light. *These points will be briefly illustrated*. Within the debate on the applicability of the concepts of 'profession' or 'professional development' to a teacher's job, in the most recent academic papers, the position is commonly adopted attributing to teaching the nature of a professional activity, albeit with distinctive characteristics (Damiano 2004). Generally speaking, it is held that teachers may be considered professionals in that their job essentially consists of the creation of non-routine intellectual actions with a view to pursuing objectives in the complex situations in which they operate, with a significant degree of autonomy and responsibility, starting with a personal and study background built on multiple 'resources' and forms of theoretical and scientific and practical and experience-based forms of knowledge (also involving the ethical and value-related sphere) (Paquay, Altet, Charlier, Perrenoud 2006; Perrenoud 1999a). From this perspective, theoretical knowledge in the education area – 'for teaching' – may be resources to develop professional 'action potential', if acquired in a spendable form, in response to teachers' need for professional training. Reference to the 'Reflective Practitioner' paradigm (Schön 1983) provides the foundation for proposing a criterion of didactic transposition of 'educating and teaching' knowledge areas as theoretical and conceptual frames helpful to teachers for carrying out and analysing their (own and that of others) didactic and educational practices and the assumptions underpinning them (Altet 2010). To

carry out their job, professional teachers would need to be able to tap into an integrated multiplicity of references in a rational way, both of a theoretical and general nature and derived from experience, to be able to contextualize, thanks to a personal effort of interpretation, the issues to be dealt with and the possible strategies for solutions, in a kind of dialogue with the situation which passes via the action – 'reflection-in-action' – and entails recognizing, reviewing, and developing one's own theoretical, conceptual and operational methods. Research contributions of an anthropological origin, based on analysing the forms of knowledge that teachers activate in doing their job, make the learning potential of theoretical and scientific knowledge areas 'for teaching' particularly problematic, since they are conditioned by the possibility of linking them to tangible, operational situations and detailed tasks (Tardif, Lessard 2004). A generic reference to experience is not being called into question but rather the setting up of training mechanisms which can enhance the job as an authentic 'mediator' in the building of professional knowledge. Other indications in favour of professional training, experience-based approaches, can be recognised in the theory of adult learning from a 'transformative' perspective, in the theoretical reasoning supporting competency-based approaches in professional training and in the research branch attributed to professional didactics of French-speaking origin. Amongst the methodological and operational implications of the transformative learning theory to be taken into consideration in training programmes, one criterion recommended in the offering of additional content/knowledge concerns the active building of relations between new cognitive factors and previous knowledge areas, so as to promote the evolution of personal, interpretative frameworks (Mezirow 2003). Elements which are also essentially aligned with implications for factors concerning curriculum planning in the development of training sequences, originate from the generation of professional training, competency-based theories. In this case, also starting by recovering experience-based learning theories, we can trace 'spiral-shaped' development paths, coming from lived experience (action, creation of an activity, etc.), followed by a first phase of performance-reflective practice, directed towards rebuilding events, reinterpreting them and transforming then via narration to render them intelligible; followed by conceptualization and modelling, via decontextualization, which aims at identifying more general and stable strategies and models, to be reinvested at a later stage, on returning to practice in other more or less similar contexts (Le Boterf 2000). Professional Didactics has thematized the issue of the relation between practical and theoretical knowledge areas, in terms of a divi-

sion between 'cognitive models' and 'operational models' (Pastré 2007). Professional learning would primarily consist of the acquisition of pragmatic concepts or action organisers – 'operational models', learned directly in context and referring to a class of professional situations within the ambit of a practice community. Alongside concepts that reference a pragmatic model, other conceptualization methods or 'cognitive models' come into play which concern the characteristics of the action 'beyond' the transformative tension felt immediately while the action is in progress. In professional learning, the operational models learned in practice refer to cognitive models that may be explicit and formalized when they are based on scientific knowledge areas or, more often, are largely implicit and informal, as can occur in the case of professional activities with a high rate of complexity, such as teaching. It is important to consider the type of division which may be established in learning between cognitive and operational models. A professional learning course, to allow a certain autonomy and efficacy at an operational level, in addition to a detailed reference to specific situations, requires cognitive and operational models to be clearly separate and recognizable, while at the same time succeeding in creating a reciprocal dialogue, a dynamic that allows both to evolve and also allows practice to evolve. It is desirable that cognitive models, to represent a useful basis for the building of operational models, are attributable to clearly identifiable knowledge areas validated 'through testing in the field', in practice and by practices, and which are offered in relation to problematic situations, i.e. ill-defined problems that need to be framed, defined, and handled in a partially innovative manner. In the field of theories concerning possible didactic training models, at least in relation to the reference context (Damiano 2014), we find evidence of 'practice didactics', based on the alternation of direct experience – according to standard strategies, such as, for example, observation and imitation of model actions and co-operation, followed by recording them as encoding of observation and rendering imitation explicit, complements to the execution and occasions for carrying out the actions, invaluable for promoting abstraction, i.e. for identifying the core of the didactic action in context, to examine it from a decontextualized and generalizing perspective, also thanks to comparison with formal teaching knowledge areas, via forms of representation and analysis of the aspects that form them; this, as a function of a more complete conceptualization by the teacher undergoing professional, action-based training and possibly formalization in modelling terms and the appropriation/building of teaching theories that are capable of directing operational choices which are intentionally well-founded.

2. Educational instrument

Planning restrictions provide for division of the 60 academic credits (in Italian CFU – university academic credits) attributed to the Master's degree (following an overall modular system: 3 modules, each worth 20 CFUs, at 'foundation', 'intermediate' and 'advanced' levels), in 41 CFUs to be allocated to subject-related teaching, and in 14 CFUs (350 hours) for professional training placement. A traineeship pathway unfolds that is essentially addressed towards promoting the fine-tuning/development of professional competence, understood as identification and analysis of practical and operational problems linked to integration in the class of students with SLD, with review, as a pro-active and relaunching function, in relation to conceptual and theoretical frameworks offered by the subject-related knowledge areas taught during lectures. To promote interconnectedness with the teaching of subjects, the traineeship activities have been developed in three stages, I, II and III, respectively, according to a scheme alternating workshop traineeship at the academic location and activities in schools. As far as traineeship instructors are concerned, since we can only count on the limited involvement in mentoring tasks of staff in schools, due to organizational and management restrictions, instructors appointed by the University have been given this responsibility (according to an instructor-course student ratio of 1:10), selected from amongst teachers in service, based on their educational and professional curriculum in the field of teaching students with SLD. The action of the traineeship tutor is supported by a brief, initial training course, ongoing co-ordination meetings, and the setting up of a structured working guide. The tutor action consists in preparing the traineeship activity in the school and in promoting integrated activation of the 'practical' and formal knowledge areas acquired, through analysis and discussion of the cases observed (Altet, 2000) thanks to inter-professional discussion and exchange within the small group and one-on-one tutoring actions (Wenger 1998). The subject of observation-analysis-problematization and development within the ambit of the traineeship and the didactic action of the teacher understood as «mediation action», refers to «what the teacher does in relation to what the student does for learning cultural subjects» (Damiano 2013: 133). In the first module, work delivery includes the observation and reconstruction of a didactic action (lesson or cycle of lessons characterised by didactic and training consistency), according to a structured schedule. Followed, also thanks to group discussion mediated by the traineeship tutor, by analysis of the actions observed, strengths and critical points, commencing

from professional experience and theoretical elements offered in the subject-relating teaching of the Master's programme, to be formalized in a project work assignment, to be developed throughout the entire traineeship study path and the subject of a final assessment at the end of the Master's degree). In the second module, in relation to the situation observed, the course student is asked to identify situations-problems of a professional nature (Pastré 2007; Perrenoud 1999b) arising from teaching in cases of students with SLD, prior to sharing the operational definition of the concept (situations presenting obstacles, challenges and problematic cases that raise issues – also of an ethical nature – reflection – also at a metacognitive level – in relation to the planning and management of didactic sequences, learning assessment, management of the relationship with students and relations with colleagues and families). Active involvement in class with a debriefing interview by the teacher (Vermesch, 2011) and subsequent description and analysis also in relation to conceptual and theoretical elements during the Master's degree lessons. Work delivery within the third module provides – given the situation-problem previously identified and also in the light of learning acquired of a conceptual and theoretical nature regarding teaching in mixed classes with students with SLD – for the definition, whenever possible, via discussion and exchange with class teachers – of possible objectives for improvement, identifying cases for innovative action regarding methods to monitor impact.

3. Methodology

The research originated from the need to obtain elements providing empirical confirmation of the theoretical premise, according to which a didactic professional programme based on the rationale of 'immersion-decontextualization' and focussing on promoting problematization processes linked to the action of teaching, based on the synergic activation of areas of knowledge of a scientific and discipline-oriented and teaching area-related nature, linked to the practice of working as a teacher, may represent a path that is potentially effective in the professional training of teachers in an academic environment. The research also set out to gather – from an exploratory standpoint and from the perspective of teachers– items of knowledge that could prove useful for identifying particularly critical areas in managing teaching practices in mixed classes. Contexts which need to be taken into consideration when planning teacher training courses and which are the focus of in-depth study as part of the research in the pedagogic and didactic field. The study re-

fers to the system tested during the second edition of the Master's programme in the A/Y 2012-2013 (pre-tested and fine-tuned over the first year of the course in A/Y 2011-12: sample of 71 Master's programme students). The research sample consisted of 52 teachers in service in Piedmont schools (6 pre-school teachers, 32 primary school teachers and 14 middle school teachers), enrolled in the professional Master's programme. Survey of the impact of professional placement was conducted by means of project work required from Master's students. The observation context was represented by schools within the Piedmont region with agreements in place with the University of Turin, as venues for professional placement (in pre-schools, primary, middle, and high schools). To extend the experience of professional knowledge areas, the Master's students were able to choose their placement also at school levels which were not their habitual teaching level. The training instrument was thus "tested" with a random sample of graduating students, in any case, held to be significant for a first validation, as was the choice of the observation environments. The unit of analysis of the textual material obtained was represented by identifying situations/problems – SP – of a typical and recurring professional nature arising from teaching in classes with the inclusion of students with SLD, from the standpoint of Master's students or a set of teaching actions habitually used by teachers, with the aim of creating conditions to favour learning in their students, which could be improved according to the reasoned and critically-based analysis of the Master's course students. To render the construct operational, the survey took the SPs described by course students into account in terms of 'action flows' observed in context and identified/explained by the actors, analysed with specific reference to theoretical and conceptual elements progressively consolidated/learned during the Master's programme. All written work produced regarding the second session of project work was subjected, by the author, to analysis of the subject matter, adopting a post-encoding process and a subsequent grouping into categories (with the support of N-Vivo 10 software), with frequency calculation (Trinchero 2007; Miles, Huberman, Saldaña 2014).

4. Results

A first finding of the analysis concerns the nature of problematization processes regarding professional practices, to which the learning system gave rise. A positive impact was found, with a high rate of SP identification 'in the strict sense', attributable to precisely described professional practices (Tab. 1: 0.1).

Table 1

0.	Analysis of professional practices and problematization processes	Pre-school f.	Primary. school f.	Middle. school f.	High. school f.	Total f.	Total f.%
0.1	Problems focussing on professional action in context (SP)	15	37	38	37	127	93
0.2	Problems focussing on the student			1	1	2	1
0.3	Problems focussing on context conditions		2	2	1	5	4
0.4	Problems focussing on teacher	1	1	1		3	2
	Total	16	40	42	39	137	100

The analysis of surveyed SPs highlighted three areas identified as critical D: defining and managing learning strategies (Tab. 1:1.1), classroom management (Tab. 1: 1.2.); problems associated with identifying and taking charge of cases of children with SLD.

Table 2

1.	Problematization focussing on professional action in context (SP): environments	Pre-school f.	Primary. school f.	Middle. school f.	High. school f.	Total f.	Total f.%
1.1	Managing didactic progression and mediation	4	15	23	23	65	51
1.2	Classroom management	5	14	13	10	42	33
1.3	Diagnostic practices and taking charge of students with SLD	6	8	2	4	20	16
	Total	15	37	38	37	127	100

Within the context of SPs attributable to managing didactic progression (Rey 1999) and mediation, a stage indicated as highly problematic is the continuation of teaching practices which are largely transmissive and abstract; a point reported concerns the limited appreciation of the potential of multi-modal and multi-media communication using teaching technologies (Calvani 2011) (Tab. 3: 1.1.1.; 1.1.2.). Of note is the finding that there is scarce contextualized awareness of the ways for using compensatory tools and the exemptive measures provided under legislation supporting learning by

students with SLD[1] (Tab. 3: 1.1.3.) and methods for managing assessment practices, at times scarcely perceived at a docimological level, with limited appreciation of the learning support potential and for the teaching action (Tab. 3: 1.1.4) (Maccario 2012). The subject of foreign language teaching reveals its own critical areas, (especially in high school), associated with the offering of learning activities heavily based on decoding the written language (Tab. 3: 1.1.5). At times, the source of the problems in managing teaching in class can be identified in the excessively standardized/formalized planning practices adopted by schools that are ill-adapted to the actual, contextual conditions of classes and individual students (Tab. 3: 1.1.6).

Table 3

1.1	Management of didactic progression and mediation						
		Pre-school f.	Primary. school f.	Middle. school f.	High. school f.	Total f.	Total f.%
1.1.1	Prevalence of classroom-taught lessons (deductive-abstract evolution, dominance of oral mediation and uniformity of requests to students from the standpoint of performance).	1	6	6	9	22	34
1.1.2.	Limited use of the communication potential of technologies.	1	1	4	4	10	15
1.1.3.	Formal/scarcely personalized use of compensatory tools and exemptive measures.		3	5	5	13	20
1.1.4	Limited explanation of assessment and judgement criteria; focus on results from a summative standpoint.		4	5	4	13	20
1.1.5.	Scarcely personalized teaching of foreign languages.			2	1	3	5
1.1.6.	Formalized/lack of planning practices.	2	1	1		4	6
	Total	4	15	23	23	65	100

In classroom management, the research identified that maintaining class discipline is a problem, as are suitable conditions for involving students with scholastic vulnerabilities (Tab. 4: 1.2.1). Noteworthy,

[1] Compensatory tools are teaching and technological tools that replace or facilitate required performance in deficient learning ability.

and a recurring factor, is the management of didactic communication following a method which effectively selects the more prepared students, marginalizing those in difficulty (following a phenomenology already noted in the literature (Perrenoud 1997; Kahan 2010) (Tab. 4: 1.2.2) and scarce attention to building motivating relations with students (Charles 2002) and promoting in students, respect for diversity and co-operation (Tab. 4: 1.2.3). It can be seen, in several cases, that organizational conditions supporting learning are unsuitable for encouraging the involvement of students with SLD (Tab. 4: 1.2.4) (Tomlinson 2006; Vio, Toso 2007; Cornoldi 2007). As for taking charge of students with SLD, it can be seen that, at times, there is limited investment in communication/co-operation with their families (Tab. 5: 1.3.1) (Vio, Toso 2007; Epstein 2009).

Table 4

1.2	Classroom management						
		Pre-school f.	Primary. school f.	Middle. school f.	High. school f.	Total f.	Total f.%
1.2.1	Difficult classroom management, discipline/involvement	2	4	1	3	10	24
1.2.2	Selective dialogue and limited reciprocal communication		3	5	1	9	21
1.2.3	Limited attention to relations with and amongst students as a function of learning success	1	3	3	4	11	26
1.2.4	Organizational/management conditions and non-differentiated learning support actions	2	4	4	2	12	29
	Total	5	14	13	10	42	100

Table 5

1.3	Diagnostic practices and taking charge of SLD students						
		Pre-school f.	Primary. school f.	Middle. school f.	High. school f.	Total f.	Total f.%
1.3.1	Limited communication strategies and educational alliances with families	2	3	2	2	9	45
1.3.2	Late/uncertain identification of problems at school attributable to SLD	4	3			7	35

1.3.2.	Interpretation/application difficulties regarding SLD diagnoses issued by social and healthcare services.		2		2	4	20
	Total	6	8	2	4	20	100

4. Final remarks

The research conducted, although limited, confirms the possibility of offering university courses focused on the professional placement of teachers to enhance their professionalization, based on a dialogue between practical/experience-based areas of knowledge and an alternation of didactic occasions/settings, within a framework of training synergies between university and school that provide for an adequate assumption of responsibility and the training of teachers to take on mentoring functions (possibly also in context). The study also appears to indicate that the possibilities for creating inclusive and personalized teaching to the advantage of students with SLD – but not only limited to these – are particularly linked to a full review of teaching methods and development/fine-tuning of the competences required of teachers for 'creating a class' (Rey 1999) as a community for student learning.

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INTEREURISLAND: FROM FIELD RESEARCH TO A POSSIBLE MODEL FOR INTERNATIONALIZING UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EXPERIENCES

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Abstract: The research aims to analyse and justifiably develop an innovative model for the internationalization of University social responsibility experiences through the international mobility of undergraduate students, with a combination of study and internships.

Keywords: university internationalization, university social responsibility (third mission), internship abroad, service learning.

1. Introduction

The research presented in this article originates from the desire to share a series of speculations relating to the experience of study and internship abroad of 12 Undergraduate students of the University of Padua[1] (UNIPD), Italy. Between 2012 and 2015, these students participated in the *BEA Project*[2] in the city of Petrolina, in the State of Pernambuco, Brazil.

One of the peculiarities of the *BEA Project* is the combination of studying abroad with an internship that Italian university students do when participating in *Extensão* projects developed by local universities and communities.

The FORPROEX – Pro-Rectors National Forum of Extension in Brazilian Public Universities (2010), defines *Extensão* as an educational, cultural, scientific, and political interdisciplinary process which promotes transformative interaction between universities and other sectors of society.

According to Prof. Pedro Nuno Teixeira (2015), Vice Rector of Academic Affairs at the University of Porto in Portugal, *Extensão Universitaria* is becoming increasingly important both in Latin America, where the main objective is to influence social actions and interventions promot-

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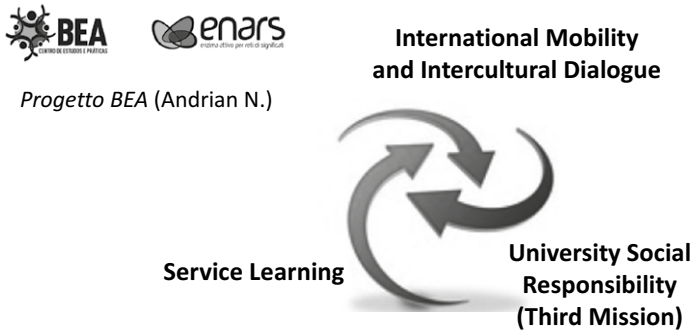
[1] Degree Courses at the former Faculty of Education Sciences and at the FISPPA.

[2] A social and cultural exchange project promoted by the Social Promotion Association En.A.R.S. – Padua, Italia. <http://www.enars.it> (03/2018).

ing citizenship and local leadership, and in developed economies where services and technology transfer receive greater attention. In Continental Europe, the most common term for *Extensão* is 'Third Mission', which is sub-divided into three areas: Further Education, Technology Transfer and Innovation, and Social Engagement.

Between 2012 and 2014, in Petrolina the combination of the international mobility of students for internships, their participation in social responsibility projects of local universities, and the learning through solidarity services in the community, created a highly challenging context from different standpoints.

Figure 1 – The *BEA Project Cycle*. [http://www.enars.it>]



The positive evaluations of all the people involved in the experiences[3] and the protagonism experienced, perceived, and reported by the university students involved prompted further analyses on the meaning and value of the BEA approach, both regarding the innovative educative practices, and to the University's pathways and processes of Internationalization and Social Responsibility.

Numerous studies, from the 1980s onwards, have analysed the impact (in terms of value, significance, benefits, etc.) of the experiences of undergraduate students abroad. For instance, the Study Abroad Evaluation Project (SAEP), carried out in 1982 under the overall coordination of the European Institute of Education and Social Policy, analysed 116 different study programmes abroad (Oxford Studies in Comparative Education, vol. 5, 1995, *Aspects of Education and the European Union*, David Phillips). Currently there are several results that have documented the contributions of mobility programmes on students and their educational growth.

[3] University students, academic tutors, supervisors of the internships, and *BEA Project* coordinator. Data sources: Internship evaluations and Final Reports on Internship Abroad experiences.

Regarding the specific BEA experience, the level of students' reports on their practice and perception of their learning through the experience constantly prompted further analysis, with community referents, academics, and tutors.

It was additionally confirmed, as suggested by Milan (2007, 2009), that from the point of view of intercultural dialogue, the project approach stimulated students, through the participatory-solidary travel in other cultural contexts, «a true and profitable 360-degree identity opening, that expands the mind and the existential experience, promoting the authentic recovery of the community dimension and the building of a world-mind, of earthly identity». «Before focusing on interculturality as a "social" – "political" – "cultural" construction, the objective of the educational perspective is the 'intercultural person', capable of dialogue and reciprocity».

> DECENTRALIZATION: The fact of finding myself in the situation of a foreigner, made me think a lot about the ability to get out of my world, of my way of thinking, the ability to 'move away from me'. As a team, we worked a lot on the importance of expressing ourselves while omitting any judgment; we paid more attention to identifying our own interpretations and opinions, linked to our culture and experiences, trying to keep them separate from the descriptions of what we saw or heard[4].

In 2015, the development of BEA's architecture led to a collaboration with the Department of Human Sciences (DCH), Campus III of the University of the State of Bahia in the nearby city of Juazeiro, Brazil. The existence of a bilateral agreement between UNIPD and UNEB and the signing of a Joint PhD Supervision agreement between the Pedagogical and Educational Sciences Course, FISPPA, UNIPD, and the Education and Contemporaneity Course, UNEB, created the conditions to implement research that would be able to systematize these activities and promote further investigation.

1. INTEREURISLAND[5] *– The Research*

Under the supervision of Professors Giuseppe Milan and Luca Agostinetto, FISPPA, UNIPD[6] and Augusto César Leiro, PPGEduC

[4] Equipe BEA 2015: Final report on an internship abroad by a graduate student in Educational Sciences, FISPPA, UNIPD, Padua, Italy.

[5] *INTEREURISLAND: INTERsectoral, Extensão Universitária, Research, Interculture, and Service-Learning. Approaching a New Development.*

[6] Social and Intercultural Pedagogy Research Group-GRIPSI-FISPPA, UNIPD.

Program, UNEB, the research focused on analysing the development of an innovative model to internationalize university social responsibility experiences (Public/Social Engagement, Third Mission), through the mobility of undergraduate students, combining study and internships.

The interest in summarizing the experience of the *BEA Project* and the possibility of replicating this experience within the Bilateral Agreement between the Department FISPPA, UNIPD and the DCH, UNEB, led to considering Multiple Case Studies as the most appropriate research methodology, since this was an empirical inquiry into contemporary phenomenon (i.e. a 'case'), set within a real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin 2009).

The research design included a Pilot Case Study and a Multiple Case Study, as follows:

- Pilot Case Study: Petrolina, Brazil (March to June 2016).
- Case Study 1: Rovigo, Padua, Italy (October to December 2016).
- Case Study 2: Juazeiro, Brazil (March to July 2017).

As suggested by Yin (2005), the research involved the use of multiple data sources, which made it possible to refer to a wider range of issues, and a data triangulation to develop converging lines of inquiry. Tools and data collection sources were the following: documents (diaries, internal and/or administrative documents, E-mail correspondence, etc.), interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, direct and participant observations.

Due to the restrictions of the current paper, an overview of the different Case Studies is provided first. Secondly, the Process Model created from the Pilot Case study data analysis is illustrated, as implemented at FISPPA, UNIPD and DCH, Campus III, UNEB and analysed through Multiple Study Cases 1 (Rovigo, Italy) and 2 (Juazeiro, Brazil).

1.1 Pilot Case Study

Context: City of Petrolina, State of Pernambuco, Brazil.
Period: from March 1 to June 30, 2016

Research Object: The *BEA Project*

Hypothesis:

- The *BEA Project* proposal is significant from the point of view of the University's Internationalization and Social Responsibility and from the educational point of view for the undergraduate students involved.

- This proposal is replicable, with proper adjustments, in the contexts of Rovigo, Italy and Juazeiro, Brazil, as poles of a bilateral agreement between the FISPPA Department, UNIPD and DCH, UNEB.

Partners:

- Social Promotion Association En.A.R.S. Padua, Italy: *BEA Project* promoter and internship institution, through an Agreement with UNIPD;
- UNIPD, University of Padua, Italy: promoter of international mobility of undergraduate students for internships abroad;
- UPE, University of Pernambuco, Campus of Petrolina, Brazil: promoter of the *Extensão* project *Communication and educational relationships in extracurricular educational contexts*;
- FUNASE[7], Petrolina-PE: *Progetto BEA* Partner hosting degree students for internship.
- UNIVASF, Federal University, Petrolina: En.A.R.S. Partner and promoter of intercultural and peer education activities with local and foreign students.
- APAE; Association dealing with people with disabilities.

University students involved: 2 students from the Educational Sciences Course FISPPA, UNIPD in Rovigo, Italy; 45 students from the 8th grade of the Degree Course in Pedagogy, UPE, Petrolina-PE Campus; 30 students from different UNIVASF graduate courses.

Analysis Sub-unit:

1) The sequence of activities envisaged by the *BEA Project*
2) University Social Engagement project established under the coordination of the *BEA Project* and through the collaboration of the UPE with FUNASE CASEM Petrolina
3) Undergraduate students' perception of their learning through the experience;

Analysis of the data collected from the various inquiries confirmed the initial hypothesis that the BEA proposal is significant from the point of view of University Internationalization and Social Responsibility and from the educational point of view for the students involved.

> I am convinced that the BEA Project proposal is extremely significant from this point of view. I could see how important every moment I lived

[7] Social Educational Assistance Foundation for adolescents in conflict with the law – State of Pernambuco, Brazil.

> was. Daily sharing, team meetings, reflection on certain issues and on practice, the university course, the stimulus to keep me questioning. All this was essential for a continuous growth and an educational process lasting four months[8].

Definition of a cyclical sequence of *BEA Project* activities and reflections on the possibility of replicating the experience analysed at the other poles of the agreement between FISPPA, UNIPD and DCH, UNEB, led to development of a possible process model which was implemented and analysed in Case Studies 1 and 2.

1.2 Multiple Case Study

Case Study 1: October to December 2016.

Context: City of Rovigo, Italy.

Partners: DCH, Campus III, UNEB; FISPPA, UNIPD; Social Cooperatives Porto Alegre (Immigration) and Peter Pan (Children with Specific Learning Disorders), Department of Culture and University, Rovigo.

Case Study 2: March to July 2017.

Context: City of Juazeiro, State of Bahia, Brazil.

Partners: FISPPA, UNIPD; DCH, Campus III, UNEB; NAENDA, FUNDAC (adolescents in conflict with the law), *Pastoral da Mulher* (Women in prostitution) and *Lar São Vicente de Paulo* (Senior citizens).

For both Cases:

Unit of Analyses: The INTEREURISLAND Process Model

Theoretical postulate:

The INTEREURISLAND Process Model can be implemented in the two poles of the bilateral agreement between the FISPPA Department, UNIPD (Italy) and the DCH Department, Campus III, UNEB (Brazil) and the study of the two different cases will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

Sub - unit of analysis:

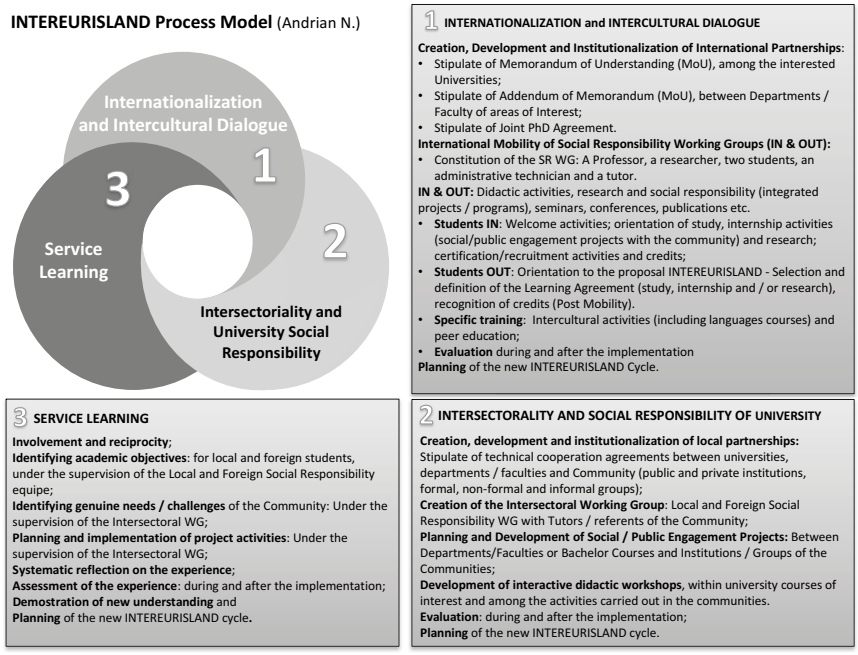
1) The sequence of practices implemented through the INTEREURISLAND Process Model;
2) The Social Responsibility project of the University;
3) The degree students' perception of their learning through the experience;

[8] Data source: final semi – structured questionnaire to Italian undergraduate students on mobility programmes in Petrolina (March-June 2016).

2. INTEREURISLAND – The Possible Process Model

Following analysis of the data collected during Study Cases 1 and 2 and an in-depth investigation of the studies on the University's Internationalization and Social Responsibility, Figures 2, 3, and 4 summarize the 'current situation' as regards the justified development of the possible model for the Internationalization of University Social Responsibility experiences, INTEREURISLAND.

Figure 2 – INTEREURISLAND Process Model.



The Model presents the practices divided into three major areas that have been separated, both in the scheme presented and in the management of the proposed practices and processes. Areas which develop in close reciprocity and permeability, following a concentric sequence, each starting and developing through the other.

2.1 Starting from 'Internationalization and Intercultural Dialogue'

Nowadays, universities face significant challenges due to major changes in international scenarios, (Knight 2009):

- innovations in information and communication technologies are providing alternative and virtual ways to provide higher education;
- new types of providers are emerging, such as international companies, for-profit institutions, corporate universities, and IT and media companies;
- providers – public and private, modern and traditional – have begun delivering education across national borders to meet the demand in other countries.
- alternative types of cross-border programme delivery, such as branch campuses and franchising and twinning arrangements, are being developed.

In 2014, Knight remarked that 'isolated' student mobility is considered the first generation of Cross Border Education. The latest frontiers identify, among the key features of the third generation, the Education Hub, the birth and development of International Branch Campuses and Excellence Research Centres and the development of specific mobility programmes, which are primarily addressed to: students, HE providers, research centres, and the knowledge industries.

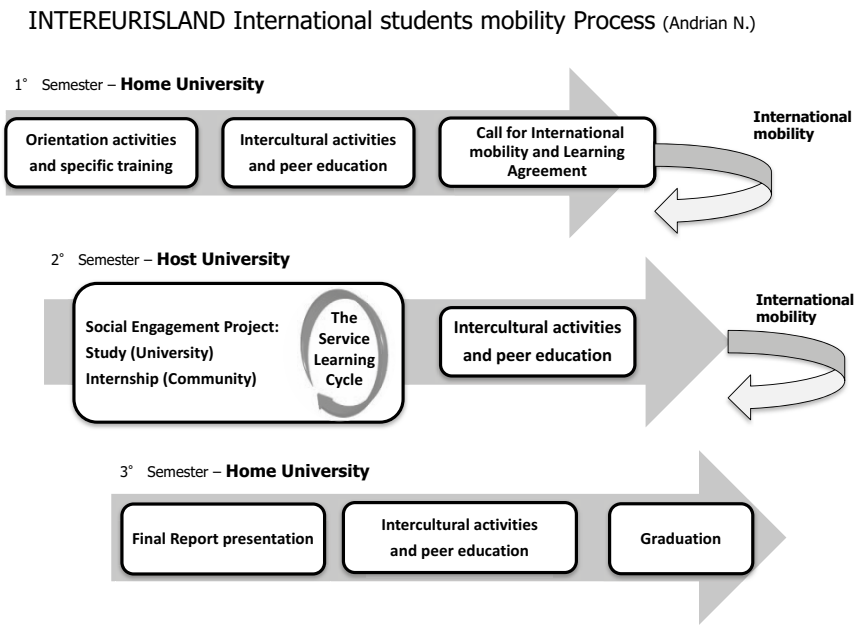
Within this complex framework, the INTEREURISLAND model proposes a synergy between university/community local relations and international relations between different contexts and social responsibility projects/programmes.

As indicated also by the Committee on International Relations of FORPROEX (2013), the proposal foresees the international mobility of a Social Responsibility Working Group (WG) composed, at the academic level, by a reference professor, a researcher (also a PhD student as joint supervision), two students, an administrative assistant, and a tutor.

In university/community interactions, exchanges of social responsibility WG should be based on community approval and support for potential projects and programmes to be implemented, through the creation of an inter-sectoral team. In addition, this condition opens up the possibility for communities in different countries to develop their forms of exchange through international technical cooperation agreements and/or programmes.

Figure 3 illustrates the complete cycle of activities that students are required to follow in synergy with the academic Social Responsibility WG and the Intersectoral WG. The plan considers the activities of the semester prior to the mobility period, carried out at the home university, the activities of the mobility semester at the host university, and those of the semester after the mobility.

Figure 3 – INTEREURISLAND international student mobility process.



2.2 Developing 'Intersectorality and the Social Responsibility of the University'

The most significant ideas contributing to the creation of a reference framework for the University's Social Responsibility projects (Fig. 4), originated from evaluation of the data collected from analysis subunits on social responsibility projects, developed in each of the 3 different Study Cases.

An example is provided below, based on information about the *Extensão* project *Communication and educational relationships in extra-schooling educational contexts* of the Pilot Case Study. A project to teach *Interpersonal Relationships and Group Dynamics* of the 8th Degree Course in Pedagogy, UPE, Campus of Petrolina, according to the following *Extensão* – PROEC, UPE[9] actions:

Knowledge Area: No. 7 – Human Sciences;
Main thematic area: No. VI – Education;
Secondary subject area: No. II – Education and Citizenship;
Extension Line: No. 26 – Vulnerable Social Groups.

[9] UPE Pro-Rectorate of Extension and Culture, <http://www.upe.br/modalidades-de-acoes> (01/2018).

For the implementation of the project, an intersectional WG was created, consisting of the General Coordinator and the socio-psycho-pedagogical WG of FUNASE, local students (Pedagogy Degree Course, UPE) and foreign students (Educational Sciences Degree Course, Rovigo FISPPA, UNIPD) and a deputy professor of the related issues, as researcher. A WG that planned and developed the entire intervention, which turned out to be the focus of the given case study and of the entire INTEREURISLAND proposal.

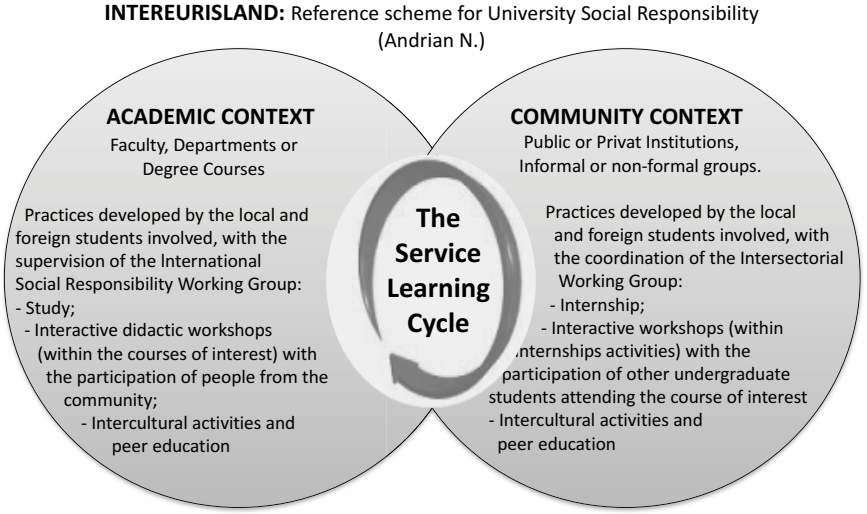
Academic/Educational Goals (shared and chosen by the professor and students involved: UPE and UNIPD): Acquiring/developing knowledge and skills regarding group dynamics, assertive communication, and educational relationships.

Community needs (expressed and shared by the FUNASE WG): creating moments of integration and developing positive relationships among adolescents in conflict with the law welcomed by the institution, among teenagers and the staff of the institution itself and among teenagers and other reference people (adult) from the community.

Implemented activities:

- interactive didactic laboratory on group dynamics and educational relationship, planned and managed by 45 students of the 8th Pedagogical Period, UPE, at the UPE Headquarters and during the curricular lessons with the active participation of the same students and 10 teenagers, welcomed by FUNASE. The workshop also provid-

Figure 4 – INTEREURISLAND reference scheme for University Social Responsibility.



ed opportunities for sharing and dialogue between the students, the coordination of the department of Pedagogy and the socio-psycho-pedagogical WG of FUNASE, regarding the professional profile of the pedagogical coordinator in institutions dealing with minors in conflict with the law.
- Encounters on assertive communication and active listening, held weekly at the FUNASE institution and in the city park. Nine internship mornings planned and conducted by local and foreign students, with the active participation of teenagers and the socio-psycho-pedagogical WG of the Institution.

2.3 'Service Learning'

Service Learning (S.L.) is a pedagogical proposal that originated in the United States and has spread rapidly to different regions of the world. Many trials have been carried out in several countries over the last twenty years, accompanied by many definitions, recognized benefits, and scientific reference literature on it.

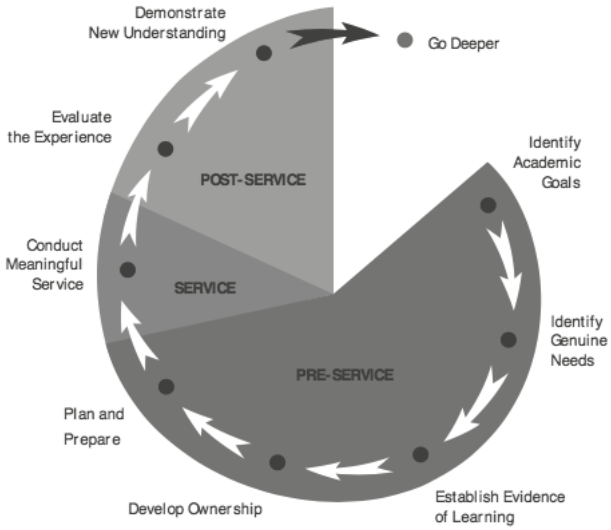
As indicated by Maria Nieves Tapia (2006), and from a 'Didactic Identity Card' (Fiorin 2016), S.L. lets students (schools and/or institutions of every level) be actors in the planning and implementation of activities combining school learning (with precise curricular goals) and solidary service (identifying real needs together with subjects from the community).

> Service Learning seeks to engage students in activities that both combine community service and academic learning. Because service learning programs are typically rooted in formal courses (core academic, elective, or vocational), the service activities are usually based on particular curricular concepts that are being taught (FURCO 1996).

The Practical Guide, *The Nature of Learning, Using Research to Inspire Practice* from the OECD, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (2010), includes S.L. among the eight different proposals for building innovative learning environments. In Italy, the Ministry of University and Research (MIUR) has been promoting specific S.L. training for students and teachers with the Ministerial Decree No.663 of September 1, 2016, and the project 'Introduction of methodologies of participation in the Italian school system'.

The INTEREURISLAND model envisages that the planning and implementing of project activities follow the S.L. Cycle proposed by the National Youth Leadership Council (2009) as shown below (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – The Service Learning Cycle (National Youth Leadership Council 2009).



3. Final remarks

International mobility and intercultural dialogue between players from different countries, intersectorality between Universities and communities, Alternance between study, internships, and service learning proved fertile ground for exchange and enrichment, the basis of the INTEREURISLAND model.

The research highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of this possible model that promotes the development of relationships at two levels.

At the international level, by creating a network of partnerships as a privileged line of exchange, mobility, intercultural dialogue, innovative didactics, specific training, internships, and research.

At the local level, by creating intersectoral social responsibility WGs that facilitate peer-to-peer interaction between academia and their communities, building shared knowledge through innovative teaching and research activities, pro-social activities, sustainable development, and the practice of active citizenship.

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CHAPTER II

TRAINEESHIP

THE ROLE MODEL WITHIN PROFESSIONAL TRAINING. THE COMPLEXITY AND FLEXIBILITY OF EDUCATION PROFESSIONS

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1. The training of professionals in the third millennium

Nowadays, it is commonly agreed that the remarkable changes in social and labour organizations over the last decades have resulted in an increasing demand for professionals with high cognitive flexibility, able to constantly re-align their skills and upgrade their competences (Bauman 1999; Beck 2000a, 2000b; Forti, Varchetta 2001; Rullani, Vicari, 1999; Weick 1995).

In this context, training – especially the training of professionals – has started to question its own meaning and nature, dramatically rethinking them. In fact, the training of professionals can no longer give practical competence a professional dimension, relying on systematic and scientific knowledge to provide an instrumental solution to the problems: professionals must be able to reflect and act within ever-changing and unpredictable contexts, using their knowledge and skills in a flexible and effective way.

From a mere pedagogical and cultural point of view, it is necessary to analyse the most suitable training-didactic models for the development of reference prospects and schemes, as well as appropriate methods and tools for the training of 'reflective professionals' capable of developing the 'artistic skill' increasingly required to manage the 'ever-changing' work contexts.

Despite the knowledge of the scenario where the future organizational players are going to be acting, the academic world still struggles to regard the academic path as the ideal place for the accomplishment of tailor-made professional projects, thereby slowing down the entry of young graduates into employment (Zucchermaglio 2007).

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This scenario has led the reflection on training to believe that apprenticeships organized during studies might offer an opportunity to experience the future profession chosen by the students. Basically, an apprenticeship can be considered a shift from learning to doing/acting, the moment when the knowledge accumulated turns into the specific skills of that activity. However, this kind of apprenticeship is not an actual step towards employment – indeed, this is not its aim: it should instead trigger a transformational learning process where students begin to perceive themselves as future professionals, turning the knowledge gained into crucial skills for their profession. Therefore, learning still plays a key role at this stage, even though it is intended for the construction of a professional role, instead of acquisition of the theories underlying a certain profession. Apprenticeship allows students to become familiar with a professional role, under the guidance of a tutor (situational factor/social support), whether formal or informal (business/in the work context/application). In fact, during this learning process, students should ideally become acquainted with the work practices of their profession under careful supervision. Thus, practitioners should benefit from specific training (Lave, Wenger 1991; Alastra, Kaneklin, Scaratti 2012) being personally involved in the activities of a practice community (Wenger 1999) and have direct experience of the constant evolution and unpredictability of the world of work within a simplified and controlled professional context, through preliminary planning and scrupulous supervision (Schön 1987). This would help them apply the knowledge acquired to practical professional situations with an evolving (Mezirow 1991) and reflective (Schön 1987) perspective.

Consequently, the achievement of professionalism is very complex. It requires the identification of effective teaching strategies no longer based exclusively on traditional content transmission models. As already stressed, most professional behaviours are learned through practical experience (Kenny, Mann, MacLeod 2003.) Professionals build their professional background on the job, taking inspiration from and interacting with more experienced colleagues and tackling their work experience day by day: in point of fact, successes and failures teach us 'the way' (Bourdieu 1980; Vino 2001). The role-modelling process begins precisely during the academic educational path as well as within didactic experiences and apprenticeships through observation of the practices typical of that specific educational/work environment and the behaviour of experienced professionals. However, reflection on academic education lacks the study of role modelling in the sense of a process which dramatically influences the construction of a professional identity through observation and reflective imitation, while offering some interesting opportunities (i.e. apprenticeships, and tutoring and mentoring services).

2. *The professional identity of educators and the importance of role models*

Nowadays, the stratification of the meanings underlying the concept of education is found in the common assumption that education has a procedural dimension covering the whole of life and all ages, including the various growth steps and difficult moments that characterize the construction of our personal identity. The onset of new individual needs and the resulting expansion of social policies and educational services have widened educators' scope for action. Furthermore, the educational context can be regarded as a highly complex and dynamic system featuring a series of relational processes only partially predictable and operationalizable (Mortari 2009).

Therefore, education professions, in particular, mostly act within unique, ever-changing and unpredictable working contexts. The large variety of professional contexts requiring the presence of educators leads to an extensive branching of its operational features, which vary according to the recipients of the educational activity, their age, and specific needs, as well as to the preventive, promotional or rehabilitation purpose of the same action.

Education professions involve various skills connected to their multidisciplinary profile, which help shape the operational representations and models underlying the professional activity but cannot enclose all the pedagogical knowledge required by these professions. *Knowledge, the knowledge of how to do* and *the knowledge of how to act* – intended as the box containing the necessary technical-professional tools – must complement and integrate the *knowledge of how to stay* within contexts and relations with a hermeneutic-transformative perspective.

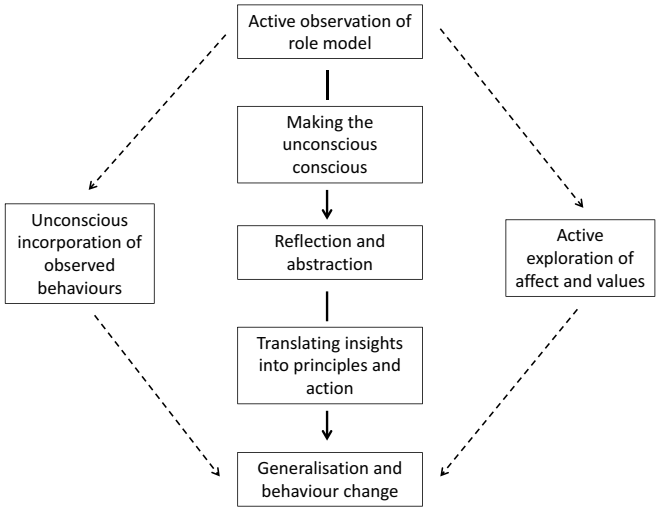
In this dimension, the Role Model acquires immense importance, since it is considered an example and a guide to give shape and meaning to the process leading to the construction of our professional identity.

From a sociocultural point of view (Mclnerney, Roche, Mclnerney, Marsh 1997; Kerka 1998), in fact, role models are applied by those professionals who – mostly unintentionally – help the student understand the many facets of their profession within specific education and work situations through observation, imitation, reflection and abstraction, thus promoting the construction of their professional identity (Cruess, Cruess, Steinert 2008).

In this scenario, role-modelling acts as an important educational and training strategy, as largely underestimated as it is (Kenny, Mann, MacLeod 2003; Cruess, Cruess, Steinert 2008). The role modelling process (Fig. 1) shows how the establishment of professional behaviours largely depends on the relation between a greater or lesser degree of voluntary imitation and a reflective elaboration of the behaviours observed. It is a social and critical process leading to the assessment

and co-construction of content, which urges students to interpret an experience and assign a meaning to it. Any reflection on the behaviours observed alters (processes, creates, rejects, confirms, questions) the meaning schemes currently used in relation to the integrated role model and, through the generalization of the conclusions, changes the meaning perspectives and the behaviours enacted (Mezirow 1991).

Figure 1 – Role-modelling process. [Cruess, Cruess, Steinert 2008]



In this learning framework, the professional reference (business or academic tutors, teachers, etc.) chosen by the students is a crucial element for at least two reasons: on the one hand, he/she represents the role model who acts as an example during the students' approach to the professional role; on the other, he/she triggers the reflection process and raises awareness of the experience, thus favouring ascent of the incorporation of the behaviours observed from the subconscious to the conscious level, in addition to the resulting transformation of intuitions into principles and actions.

The ability to become aware of the behaviours observed and to reflect upon them is fundamental for the efficacy of role modelling. In fact, the reflection *in the action, on the action, and for the action* (Schön 1987) allows future professionals to turn implicit contents into explicit ones (Cruess, Cruess, Steinert 2008), thus redefining their personal, social, and professional world (Brookfield 1986). Reflection on the past experiences and behaviours observed is also important for the transformation of observations into concepts through a generalization process (Kolb 1984).

Consequently, learning through role models relies on a complex combination of conscious and unconscious actions, involving both observation and reflection. The active reflection on the process allows learners to turn unconscious acquisitions into conscious thoughts and transform the latter into principles and actions (Cruess, Cruess, Steinert 2008; Benbassat 2014).

3. Exploratory research

The research introduced below was carried out in 2014 during the BSc and MSc courses in Educational and Training Sciences at The Sapienza University of Rome to investigate the characteristics of the role models chosen by the future educators, either in the academic context or during apprenticeships.

The sample consisted of 34 students and graduates from The Sapienza University of Rome – 31 women and 3 men – of whom 12 were attending the 2nd and 3rd year of the three-year Degree Course in Educational and Training Sciences, while 16 were students on the Master's Degree Course in Pedagogy and Educational and Training Sciences, who had already taken their BSc while 6 had taken both their BSc and MSc and were working in the educational field.

Internship is mandatory during these courses. Consequently, all the individuals involved in the research had done one or more apprenticeships. The most widespread sector was in services for early childhood, chosen by 12 people for their apprenticeships. The others were distributed among group homes (6), universities (5), museums and educational institutions (5), residential, semi-residential or day-care facilities for people with mental or physical disabilities (4), prisons (1) or hospitals (1).

Out of the 34 subjects involved in the research, 14 were working on an occasional or ongoing basis. In particular, 5 people were tenured or substitute teachers at early childhood education institutes, 2 were baby-sitters, 1 was a swimming instructor, 1 an elderly caretaker, 1 a part-time waitress, 1 a shop assistant and 1 a support teacher. Thus, 12 out of the 14 workers were operating in educational areas.

Students and graduates were divided into 5 focus groups made up of 6-8 participants each. The focuses were presented by two experts and lasted about 3 hours.

The focus group was used as an exploratory tool, since it helped understand the unconscious aspects of motivation and behaviours with reference to a specific issue (Krueger 1994; Morgan 1998); furthermore, the flexible, interactive, and dialogic nature of this tool allowed the individuals to express ideas and feelings which would not have emerged otherwise during an interview (Stagi 2000).

More specifically, the focus groups were intended to redefine the students' convictions about the characteristics of a good educator, as well as helping them identify any 'reference' people during their educational path or apprenticeship experience who acted as a model to construct their own professional identity, thus recognizing the characteristics necessary to become a role model.

The outcome of the focus groups was written down word for word, and examined using a conventional analysis approach.

The issues the students faced during these focuses included a definition of 'efficient' educators as well as a description of the reference subjects met during their educational path or apprenticeship.

The first question was: «What comes to your mind when I say, "efficient educator?"». This question proposes to redefine the convictions of the Education Sciences students regarding the characteristics of an efficient educator.

The second question was: «Try to recall your academic and apprenticeship experience. Now try to remember the people who had a major impact on your personal and professional growth path». The general stimulation and the specific stimulating questions (*Who is he/she? What are his/her personal features and professional skills? What was the most important lesson that you learned from this relationship?*) aimed to analyse the kinds of professional who acted as reference models helping the students construct their professional identity during their educational path or apprenticeship.

4. Representations of the professional identity of educators

Analysis of the first issue discussed within the focuses shows the complexity of the professional role of socio-cultural educators. In fact, this kind of profession has ill-defined boundaries and opposes any attempt to stabilize and systematize it, more readily acting as a prototype and example of the uncertainty and unpredictability of the current employment market.

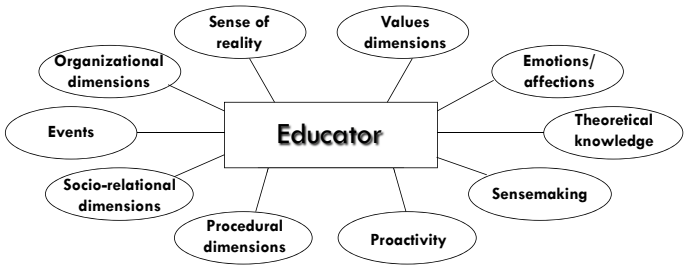
The factors that undermine the profession of educator – thus weakening its social and legal recognition, as well as its perception of the construction of identity – are several and act at various levels. The diffusion of the educational needs of modern society, the various kinds of subjects expressing these needs, the expansion of the intervention scope of education professionals, their growing tasks, the quantitative and qualitative complexification of the interpersonal relations to be managed in the work context (organization, customer, multi-professional team, users, families), the lack of a specific and well-defined scientific background lead to the definition of an ever-

changing constant professional profile (Szpunar, Renda 2015; Tramma 2008; Maccario 2009).

All these aspects have been stressed by the reflections and accounts of students and graduates. The professional contexts of their work or apprenticeship experiences are very different, since they range from early childhood services –the most widespread field – to group homes, schools, prisons, hospitals, residential, semi-residential and day-care facilities. The subjects looked after by the professionals varied greatly in terms of age and educational needs. The students and graduates were aware of this, and they believed that educators' skills and competences must take this complexity and unpredictability into account in the contexts and among the addressees of the service. The importance given to *creativity*, *the ability to adapt, face and manage different situations,* to *communicate and interact with various subjects, schedule and organize*, *plan and improvise* at the same time, *change action plans* and successfully *solve problems* are a clear sign of this awareness.

Generally speaking, the 'efficient' educator outlined by the analysis of the focuses is one who can rely on a theoretical training that must remain up-to-date (the educator is *experienced, informed, and conducts researches*), while knowledge is not regarded as a priority. According to the students and graduates, the construction of meaning referring to education professionals (Fig. 2) mainly includes personal aspects and transverse skills, precisely due to the remarkable variability of contexts, subjects and assigned tasks.

Figure 2 – Dimensions of an educator's figure.



Knowledge is backed up by the *knowledge of how to make* and *how to be*. The accounts show educators able to *train, take care, listen, support, accompany, help learn and understand*, *guide, stimulate, promote growth, provide tools, lead towards a target, foster autonomy, enhance* the *qualities and potential* of each person. This involves some personal features that turn education professions into a *mission* or *vocation* requiring a special *passion* as well as an *ability to see what others cannot notice*.

… I intend education professions as a vocation requiring a certain attitude. Those who choose this profession must be able to help others…

… In my opinion, efficient educators are able to combine scientific and academic knowledge with an art, the art of teaching. Unquestionably, they cannot rely exclusively on formalized requirements, but must prove to be aware of their mission…

Consistently, the skills and main characteristics of efficient educators are *empathy* as well as the ability to *understand others*, *actively listen to interlocutors, wait and see, reject prejudices, accept others' ideas while also reformulating their own assumptions, be self-critical, work with others and cooperate positively, be calm, patient, serene, sympathetic, kind, and respectful with others, authoritative* (and not authoritarian), *possess leadership skills, strength, resolution and impartiality.*

In view of the above, it is easy to understand the key role played by a role model for the construction of such a complex kind of profession, with special regard to the various stresses associated with it (individual, relational, professional and organizational).

5. The choice of role models

All the participants identified at least one reference figure met during their academic studies (professor) or apprenticeship (business tutor.) Basically, their accounts confirmed the literature dealing with students' assessment of the characteristics observed in positive models (Wright 1996; Cruess, Crues, Steinert 2008; Fromme *et al.* 2010; Jochemsen-vander Leeuw *et al.* 2013). Moreover, the focus analysis showed that the meaning dimensions assigned by the future educators correspond to those attributed to recognizing the prototype educator (Fig. 2).

The first dimension, concerns *technical knowledge associated with the education professions* (*theoretical knowledge, value dimension, meaning dimension, socio-relational dimension*).

The result of this analysis is a skilful professional endowed with knowledge, great problem-solving and decision-making skills, and the ability to adapt his/her competence to the various contexts (*RM can manage time and different situations, solve problems, keep everything under control and overcome any obstacles and is open-minded*). However, special emphasis was given to the ability to guide and orient: basically, positive role models can orient, support, and promote critical reflection on practical actions. They are a *reference.*

… The RM is a guide who identifies your talent and potential…

… directs your choices on the most appropriate path then allows you to gain experience…

… He told me how to tackle some challenges… and helped me overcome my fear… of interacting with others…

… He provided me with theoretical tools […] we studied many books and other things. But at the same time, at a practical level, he showed me the meaning, tasks, and missions of educators …

Therefore, Role Models give confidence and credit and strengthen responsibility, are able to listen, accept others, interact with others as an equal intellectual partner but, at the same time, can maintain a distinction between roles, are always authoritative, are humble and make room for others, are passionate and are able to communicate their passion, can mediate and negotiate, inspire confidence because they keep everything under control and are able to overcome any obstacle and solve any problem.

The second dimension of Role Models as evidenced by the literature (Wright 1996; Wright, Wong, Newill 1997; Wright *et al.* 1998; Elzubeir, Rizk 2001; Wright, Carrese, 2002; Cruess, Crues, Steinert, 2008; Fromme *et al.* 2010; Jochemsen-Van der Leeuw *et al.* 2013) deals with the profession-related knowledge of 'how to be' (value dimension, meaning dimension, socio-relational dimension, affectivity, design intentionality.)

The outcome of the focuses can be summarized by the account of one of the participants, which mentions most of the features highlighted by the interviewees, in different words, but with the same content:

(The RM) *is authoritative, empathic, passionate. Passion is necessary…*

Role Models act as a true example of education professional, *since they help understand, stimulate, enhance our potential, explain, and guide us along our path.* Therefore, as educators, they *are respectful, enthusiastic, pleasant, easy, calm, straightforward, helpful, self-confident – but without being dogmatic – sensitive, human, empathic, cheerful, strong, resolute, charismatic, steadfast, able to find positive characteristics, let go, and motivate.*

… (RM) has dramatically changed my life […]. I was guided by her example and was encouraged by the strength that she gave me. During the apprenticeship she came to the facility only once, but she was always there for me. I could see her everywhere, with her attitude and ability to involve me in the activities. […] Her behaviour, teachings, competence and expectations and the texts that she suggested were always mirrored in my experience […]. She could find a potential in me of which I was not aware…

… (RM) guided me by showing me how he was able to construct his professionalism and career. Somehow, this cooperation enhanced my creativity and my ability to develop an idea.

… I spent a lot of time with this person, who helped me make my own decisions. He did not supplant me, but taught me how to manage my choices for my career and future.

The third dimension of role modelling includes the physical and symbolic places of the educational process (organizational or procedural dimension, events, reality elements and value dimension.)

The context and the place are crucial aspects for the focus participants. It is possible to assume that the role model would act in a different way in another context. The place is described as a *home*, a *familiar location* (both well-known and cosy), *quiet, tidy, and protected.*

Thus, the place is the privileged context where the role model urges to *reflect in the action, on the action, and for the action,* thus allowing the future professionals to reinterpret their experience, promoting the transformation of experience into professional skills. The places are the framework within which the organization, process management, teamwork, complexity, and unpredictability of this profession are experienced.

6. Final remarks

In line with the literature on role modelling, the focus analysis stresses that positive role models and the places intended for learning are key throughout the whole educational process, thus influencing the personal and professional growth of future professionals. Students, in fact, select and choose the characteristics of their reference models, by internalizing a mix of values, behaviours, attitudes and competences consistent with the ideal image of the profession. Sometimes the model chosen does not carry out the specific professional role assigned to the future educators. Teachers are often regarded as reference models thanks to their personal and professional qualities, which are identified, internalized, and then projected by students onto their future profession.

The accounts of the participants show the important support function played by role models for the students at various levels.

First, the role model stimulates the ability to interact with action-related knowledge, thus promoting the learning processes associated with space and the willingness to reflect on concrete professional practices.

Then, the role model helps the students recognize and reinterpret the unconscious processes underlying the construction of their own professional identity, manifesting motivations, skills, implicit aptitudes and fostering orientation and professional choices.

In order to promote and support positive modelling processes, the institution must be characterised by an organizational culture oriented towards the development of reflective practices, the definition of spaces and times intended for the re-elaboration of the stu-

dents' educational and didactic experiences, intended as a relevant moment for the construction of their professional and individual career (Zucchermaglio 2007; Salerni, Sposetti, Szpunar 2013) and the 'growth' of interpersonal relations (Cruess, Cruess, Steinert 2008). In other words – being a multidimensional instrument applied to the place where theory and practice meet – the educational and training potential of role modelling could be promoted, developed, and enriched by reflective dimensions and personal elaborations, as well as by the activation of some pedagogical models and patterns sharing some significant aspects with it, such as cognitive apprenticeship, situated learning, and reflective practice (Kenny, Mann, MacLeod 2003).

Eventually, for role modelling to be used as an effective teaching strategy and to reduce the impact of negative models, it would be necessary to identify and, if necessary, to train professions featuring those characteristics that students tend to seek in their reference models. This would promote an informed support to the modelling process, thus enhancing the positive results (Wright 1996; Jochemsen-Van der Leeuw *et al*. 2013).

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THE 'SECOND LEVEL' EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL: A TRAINEESHIP PROGRAMME FOSTERING A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO EMPLOYABILITY

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Abstract: In this chapter, we outline the process that led to the development of the current traineeship programme – *Tirocinio Formativo e di Orientamento (TFO)* related to the Master's Degree Course in Education at the University of Milan-Bicocca. We focus particularly on the interconnection between developing professional competences and addressing the issue of employability.

Keywords: 'second level' education professionals, traineeship, employability, professional skills.

1. Introduction

On the introduction of the Master's Degree Course in Education at the University of Milan-Bicocca in the 2008-2009 academic year, its regulations already included a practical training component. This initial provision was based on feedback received from the students of the former Master's Degree Course in Educational Counseling and Research, who had forcefully emphasized the importance of including a component which up to that point had not been part of the academic programme, and whose function was to give students insight into the role and functions of the 'second-level' education professional in real-life educational settings and allow them to compare their academic learning with the educational practices encountered in specific workplaces. By 'second-level' education professional we mean

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a professional who is trained to act as a supervisor, trainer, evaluator, coordinator, or counsellor in the field of education, and who has therefore acquired a 'second-level' perspective on educational work.

A time of 150 hours was allotted for practical training activities during the Degree Course, and the academic staff with responsibility for this component immediately began to reflect on how to structure and present the training placement, initially opting for a focus on educational research.

The theoretical and epistemological view underlying this initial strategy was that research is an instrument that fosters a heuristic, critical, and transformative approach to educational work and the way it is thought about, organized, conducted and evaluated in education services (Ground 1992; Schön 1993; Mortari 2007; Fook, Gardner 2007). The first edition of the traineeship, labelled "research-training activity", was initially the responsibility of individual lecturers teaching on the Degree Course and was tied in with the undergraduate thesis that the students were required to produce under the regulations of the Degree Course.

After some years, the Degree Programme Noard and the Review Board concluded that this model was no longer satisfactory, among other reasons because the students were finding it difficult to complete their research activities and theses on schedule. Thus, in the 2013-2014 academic year, a pilot tutoring service was introduced. The students who opted to avail themselves of this service were assigned to a training group, with a tutor whose role was to support them and monitor their progress through the research-placement programme (via face-to-face meetings on campus and on a virtual platform, following a blended-learning approach). The experimental service was constructed from a set of assumptions regarding the students' characteristics. The students were expected to be able to identify their research questions and strategies and to draw on their academic knowledge to inform their decisions and analyse the data collected. Students were also assumed to be:

- accessible: present on campus, or available virtually;
- appropriately active: self-sufficient; not merely passively following instructions and absorbing contents;
- responsible for their own course of studies: able to make their own decisions;
- professionally oriented: aware of their professional and personal aspirations, and interested in the world of educational work.

Subsequent monitoring of the pilot service suggested that this representation was over-idealistic and continually challenged by the students' actual characteristics.

From April 2014 to July 2015, the pilot service was used by 85 students, who were divided into six groups and supervised by three tutors. One of the tutors coordinated the entire service and had responsibility for setting up and managing its online component.

Continuous monitoring of the pilot service by the group of tutors and the representative of the Degree Programme Board with responsibility for the traineeship component, showed that it had had a disorienting and "displacing" effect on both the students and the tutors.

It was deemed necessary to conduct a critical review of the description of the student that had informed the design of the experimental service: in the context of research carried out by two students for their theses, data was gathered on the thoughts and reflections of both students and tutors, and accordingly the traineeship programme was once more revisited and redesigned. In the 2015-2016 academic year, a new programme was launched, labelled *Tirocinio Formativo e di Orientamento (TFO)* or *Traineeship and Guidance Programme* which was no longer optional but compulsory for all students, and was informed by the experience and observations of the preceding years.

Under this new programme, students were to be divided into work groups, each with a dedicated support tutor, and invited to orient themselves in the world of professional educational work by first studying the figure of the second-level education professional, before then going on to conduct research and documentation activities in an educational service setting with a view to exploring the professional education roles being implemented there. Subsequent participation in seminars delivered by experienced education professionals would allow them to further explore key aspects of educational work. Finally, in the light of these experiences, the tutors would guide the students to reflect on their own professional identity with a view to producing a self-assessment of the skills acquired to date, areas for improvement, and potential future actions, on the basis of which to define their personal professional development plans for entering the workplace.

The path, implemented for the first time in the 2015-2016 academic year, has been further refined in the current academic year, including focus group discussions conducted with the students at the end of the full year of operating the TFO.

Given this background, we now focus on the interconnection between identifying and developing professional competences on the one hand and dealing with employability issues on the other, since these factors come into play in the TFO Traineeship and Guidance Programme.

2. Traineeship programme and employability

In the learning society, it is becoming increasingly vital to preside over the transition from academic training to the learning that takes place in work settings (Stokes 2015). The relationship between university training and learning on the job poses a key challenge for all higher education and implies that there is a constant and continuous relationship between knowledge and knowledge in action (Cambi 2004), such that any structured experience may become a source of learning (Mortari 2003).

The market seems to require flexibility and entrepreneurship (OECD 2015) for everyone taking their first steps outside the university towards professional contexts. Individuals are increasingly considered responsible for their professional projects and are requested to imagine, project, and realize their career autonomously.

Universities are requested by policy makers to take a stance in relation to these issues by implementing educational processes with clear pedagogical theoretical frameworks and coherent actions. This means not only focusing on the relation between competences and knowledge (Dozza 2012) but also developing a general approach, critical and productive at the same time, in relation to issues such as employability, entrepreneurship, flexibility: namely all those competences considered key factors for future (OECD 2015).

Flexibility, for example, can be considered on the one hand as a fundamental disposition to acquire but, on the other, as a concept that is questionable. Various critical voices have highlighted the risk of a passive adaptation to the market's rules and requests (Sennett 1999).

Flexibility is often connected to employability, a concept that represents one of the principal areas in which the difficulty of academic institutions and professional sectors in engaging in constructive dialogue is most visible. The underlying cause of this is their contrasting views of what it means to combine academic knowledge, critical thinking, and professional action (Stokes 2015).

The current mainstream interpretation of the concept of employability emphasizes individual responsibility for constructing the 'right' competences to enjoy a satisfactory professional career (Field 2006). This is what we might term a merely 'adaptive' interpretation of employability, according to which, once an appropriate profile has been developed, the careers market will automatically respond positively. This social representation is still very widespread and should be borne in mind since it frequently implicitly informs the attitudes and expectations of university students. Alongside or overlapping with this adaptive perspective, we increasingly find a representation of *employability* as more proactive. This more recent interpretation is

being promoted by leading international organizations (OECD 2015) that dictate the education agenda and policies of their member countries; it calls for an active approach to employability and *self-placement*, so that not only is it necessary to adapt but also to construct suitable spaces for the exercising of one's profession.

While on the one hand this way of looking at employability helps to overcome the illusion of an academic curriculum that can provide automatic access to the job market, on the other it shares one of the greatest risks of the *lifelong learning* paradigm, that of an increasing trend towards individualism (Dozza 2012; Biesta 2006). But what do we mean when we refer to new professional possibilities? Does proactivity still risk being interpreted merely as an updated adaptation to market needs? Different researches (Yorke 2006; Boffo *et al.* 2017) show the possibility of interpreting the notion of employability not in an instrumental and reductionist way but enhancing its learning potential. If we do not consider employability only as an individual ability to be promoted among students it could, in fact, become a category able to activate reflection on the educational setting activated (e.g. classroom didactics, fieldwork, etc.). In this sense, it could also represent an interesting lens through which to activate reflections about how universities create relationships and dialogues with external stakeholders (for example, the organizations that host students during traineeship programmes).

The notion of employability can be described, within this framework, as a meta-competence that emerges from a specific context in relation to the ability of the academic actors (professors, traineeship tutors, students) to contribute, on the basis of their own role and their own characteristics, in enhancing reflexivity about the professional world.

At the same time, the notion of entrepreneurship can be interpreted through the representation of an 'entrepreneur-student' – as suggested by a much-criticized utilitarian strand (Fairclough 1993) – but also with the meaning of critical thinker, able to analyse the professional scenario and take a stance. This entails avoiding some illusions that the word 'entrepreneurship' fosters (e.g. the focus only on individual abilities to meet market needs) in order to structure aptitudes and practices that can deal with what really takes place in professional contexts, and particularly in educational ones.

In designing the TFO, therefore, we strove to achieve a middle ground by encouraging a constructive and creative approach that seeks to transform the notion of flexibility (a term currently grossly abused in the work context), redefining it as moving from merely adapting to the requirements of the context to cultivating a receptive and attentive outlook that is also critical-reflective and proactive. This has meant re-

jecting a pure 'apprenticeship' model and no longer offering training placements that almost exclusively involve shadowing qualified education professionals, as has typically been the case on undergraduate internship schemes in the past. Students tend to remain firmly anchored to the earlier model. The new model is underpinned by the conviction that the sensitivity and skills required by an educator to be constructively employed in an educational service, particularly, in a 'second-level' capacity, go beyond the transverse skills usually labelled as 'soft skills', such as group work or communication skills (Alberici 1999).

The tutors' various interventions and their positioning with respect to the learning path of the students were thus designed with the aim of drawing out the link between the undergraduates' future employability and their ability to identify, using the knowledge they have acquired, their own specific field of action, clearly define it, and communicate it to other professionals. In redesigning the training placement, we have also sought to bring to light the cooperative dimension of this programme: it is a truly collective enterprise that involves not only the students but also the tutors and the coordinator of the service in managing the relationship with the outside organizations that receive the students on placement. Implementing the new edition of the traineeship programme has often meant increasing the level of dialogue between the university and the host institutions and revisiting the partners' mutual expectations. Indeed, the implicit expectation of the partner institutions is usually that they are taking on an 'apprentice' to be initiated in working in the field. Hence, they are generally taken aback by the proposed new format: a relatively small proportion of hours in the field (at least 55), a research perspective that questions functions rather than specific situations, an in-depth exploration of educational issues that in some cases have never been identified or addressed by those running the education service.

3. In the field: from disorientation to learning

Our experience with various groups of students over the past number of years suggest that very few students are capable of fully and consciously bringing to bear a truly 'second-level' educational perspective, or of seeing themselves as the active protagonists of their own training placement (Palmieri *et al.* 2015; Galimberti *et al.* 2016).

To address this issue, it is therefore desirable that the tutoring function comprises *ad hoc* individual and group training activities, delivered both face-to-face and via distance modes.

The decision to precede field work with a preparatory phase has proved to be particularly effective in this regard.

Prior to being sent on placement, each group of students, under the guidance of their tutor, is invited to reconstruct the figure of the second-level education professional (functions, role, knowledge base, training etc.). They do this by sharing their own previous professional experience (where present), reworking the knowledge acquired during their studies and engaging in exploratory, narrative, imaginative, and analogical activities designed to bring to light the many facets of the figure of the educator, as it has been formed in individual and collective imaginaries.

A blended learning approach is implemented, in that the work initiated in face-to-face sessions with the tutor is continued on the virtual platform *Moodle*, facilitating continuous interaction among the participants in the work groups and the collection of a large volume of documentary material that is then reworked and interpreted from an educational perspective. The examination of the material produced, reflecting on it, and seeking to identify its explicit and implicit educational meanings has proved to be a key learning moment during the TFO programme.

This phase of the programme has helped students stand back from the urgency of being in the thick of educational action, encouraging them to shift their perspective onto a more critical and thoughtful plane. This in turn allows them to call into question the image of the educator, deconstructing stereotypes, and ideas that are naive or over-idealized or merely consist of a list of duties.

In many groups, an interesting outcome was the students' newfound awareness of a significant difference between the figure of the educator portrayed in academic discourses, and echoed in the new draft education bill, or that emerges from one's personal imagery, and the concrete figure encountered in real life.

Becoming aware of this gap, and the group discussions that it elicited, impacted the students' perceptions of *employability*, encouraging an attitude of readiness to familiarize themselves with the educational services they will work with in the future and to offer an active contribution in terms of conducting enquiries and facilitating improvements, rather than expecting to consolidate the skills demanded by the different services by gaining experience in the field. In other words, a process of displacement was underway, whereby they had begun to abandon a concept of employability as passive adaptation to *one* particular work setting, to employability as a fertile and proactive presence in a given context.

Furthermore, choosing to give the students a mandate to conduct research, and not only to shadow the on-the-job activities of a professional educator bore the specific educational purpose of reinforcing this new stance; a courageous decision, not without its dangers

and rich with the potential for learning on the part of the students firstly, but also for the partner institutions and the tutor.

The delicate phase of beginning the placement proper, although carefully planned, and carefully negotiated with the host services and supported by the tutors, has often required the students to deal with complex situations that are sometimes difficult, but potentially transformational.

Emblematic, for example, is the initial encounter between the student and their contact in the host organization, since this is when the trainee has the opportunity or obligation to reiterate the need for the presence of a second-level function in an educational service. This passage often bears the characteristics of an initiatory experience, in which trainees find themselves in a disorienting situation and must go through a series of tests: from the need to justify their mission within the host organization, by negotiating their research aims, to avoiding collusion with frequent requests on the part of the host organizations to carry out first-level placement activities. This is a process under construction, currently offering students interesting 'incidents' that can however, if well thematized, offer valuable opportunities for learning. The students, who expect to be 'accepted' by the placement organization often find themselves having to cope with scepticism about the possible value of their training assignment: «We have no second-level professionals here», «We have no educators here, what are you coming to observe?»; «We don't do educational work here, just entertainment». This is a moment that can be daunting, however, the cooperative bases of the traineeship module are designed to transform it – with the help of the tutor and the group – into a moment of reflection that allows the student to see beyond the immediate difficulty, and to lay the foundations for a meaningful experience within this particular service and for this particular service. The presence of a tutor who can receive and contain the students' discouragement, allowing them, nonetheless, to fully live out this experience of disorientation, and to draw on their own resources is especially important. It is hoped that one of the main outcomes for the students will be precisely that of acquiring the ability to identify, articulate and defend their knowledge, even in settings that do not immediately appear 'suited' to their professional profile.

3. Final remarks

In our experience, the TFO traineeship programme is increasingly proving to be a key space in which students can identify and experiment with applying the skills of 'second level' education professionals.

As we move forward with the programme, we plan to continue exploring the interrelationships between guidance, skills development, and employability. To this end, we are introducing a self-reflexive approach into the training placement experience on an increasingly systematic basis, and are also designing a cooperative enquiry project, with the participation of the students, to enrich our theorizing with the perspectives of those who experience first-hand the constraints and the opportunities inherent in the programme.

We interpret the construct of employability as a meta-competence to be developed, a framework within which to locate different possible kinds of professional activity. For trainee educators, seeking out the peculiarly educational dimension of the professional settings analysed on the placement programme means, at a different level, actively seeking to identify and legitimate a professional identity of their own. The challenge has been to encourage proactive approaches, given that trainee educators' future employability will depend on their capacity to identify, using the knowledge they have acquired, their own specific field of action, clearly define it, and communicate it to other professionals. At the same time, we aim to create a context that can enrich all the various stakeholders involved in the programme. In fact, while on the one hand, we aim to help students in approaching a future professional identity, on the other, and at the same time, we believe in the potential to enrich also the professional contexts that offer their contribution in this effort. This stance is based on the idea that promoting employability, entrepreneurship, and flexibility in students' curricula is not an effort related only to university: it is a process that can be activated by all the actors (students, university professors, traineeship tutors, educational services) involved in the programme. If students have the opportunity to explore their competences in relation to professional contexts, observing existing practices and processes, on the contrary, hosting organizations have the possibility to receive student researches: an analysis of part of their educational functions. We believe that this encounter can be generative: students do not only 'receive' training but play an active role, representing a fundamental opportunity to observe the existing practices and processes from another point of view, less experienced but, at the same time, potentially able to generate reflections. Professional contexts, in fact, are always at risk of fixing their practices in procedures and reducing the education complexity in linear organizational thinking: for them, the possibility to open up and listen to different point of views is fundamental.

All this learning potential is not assumed, sometimes it represents an ideal, and needs to be continuously monitored and interrogated through the feedback that emerges during the programme's various stages. This is not a painless process to trigger: a real interest from

professional contexts, as well students' ability to realize interesting and effective research cannot be taken for granted. Traineeship tutors have a key role in creating 'good-enough' conditions that can foster a constructive dialogue, attempting to deal with the feeling of not being recognized as interesting and valuable interlocutors that has occurred to both students and hosting educational services.

Adopting the stance described in this chapter has allowed us to construct and manage a traineeship that offers the opportunity to experience a wide reflection about what adult educators are, their functions, their employability in real situations, inviting students to adopt a critical and proactive stance, sharing their ideas with the larger systems (university, professional contexts) they will have to connect with in order to start or develop their career.

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TUTORING: COMPARING ITALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL MODELS

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ABSTRACT: The paper presents the first outcomes of a comparative research of the incoming, on-going and outgoing practices of tutorship. The purposeful sample of universities extracted consisted of 18 Italian universities and 18 US universities. A tutorship concept in line with the transversal cross-curricular skills required for undergraduate and graduate students (Green Paper 2016, Dublin descriptors 2004) exceeds the vision of assistential tutorship and student tutoring practices, exercised by teachers and/or offered by services devoted to different types of intervention. The tutorship can be conceived as systemic and organizational action coherent in all phases with professionalising approach, starting from the earliest initiatives between school and university classrooms.

KEYWORDS: tutorship, soft-skills, work-oriented approach, comparative study, best practices.

1. Introduction

Universities are making efforts to build and strengthen close ties with businesses, and country's productive sectors, to catch up with emerging and challenging learning needs with respect to current job scenarios and dialogue with stakeholders (Fabbri, Melacarne 2016: 320).

The Department of Education, Humanities and Intercultural Communication at the University of Siena promoted profound transformations in the last decade (Fabbri, Melacarne 2016). The diffused instances of innovation in university teaching testify the crisis of a teaching model lesson-centered. The training of professionals who have skills not only tied to knowing, but also to knowing how to do and how to stay in contexts, are recognized as paradigms that are now located in the university mission. The ongoing changes privileged multidisciplinary approaches to research and teaching, paying close attention to relationships with multi-stakeholder belonging to the enterprises and business labor market by involving them from the beginning in the redesign of more and more professional graduate courses.

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2. The context of the research

In this institutional framework, the Department of Education, Humanities and Intercultural Communication needs to face a challenging problem: the data on the latest cohorts of students enrolled in the three-year Bachelor degree programs in Education and Training Sciences (cohorts 2013-14, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016) showed a percentage of around 20% of formal study abandonment and drop-out, a percentage of 48% of regularly graduated students, about 10% of students being suspended for non-paying university fees, and a percentage of around 20% of students registered but that didn't pass all the exams.

2.1 The actions of the Tutorship Committee

An elective group of teachers meets forming the Department's Tutorship Commission. The framework of community of practice building (Wenger, McDermott, Snyder 2007) helps to conceptualize and offers interpretative lens to read the processes of the aggregation and management of the Commission. The members of the community of the Department Commission share patterns, protocols, languages and follow a common purpose. The common interest is to address the problem of the abandonments and of the so-called 'suspensions' of university careers to counteract the delays in the university success and the phenomena of drop-out. The numbers provided represented a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow 2003) for the department, so the commission has been questioning how to make the Degree in Education Sciences more attractive and more distinguished from the viewpoint of the profession practices and actions, in order to support the academic careers and perfomances of students. In addition to this, there is a question of methodological order: how to study actions in transformative practice systems and trajectories that involve and engage key stakeholders (students, faculty, departmental governance)?

Faced with these problems, the community of teachers, as researchers interested in the educational issues, chooses to start an *inquiry* process aimed at making decisions, solving problems and supporting transformative trajectories.

The recurrence of the phenomenon in the three cohorts examined elicited some reflections: it was not possible to consider the problem as an individual question, but it was understandable under the socially distributed, collective and organizational dimensions of the department as educational organization. How to themathize the issue of students' drop-out in terms of organizational learning? Paparella at this regard (2009) writes:

> An organization that learns creates proactively, acquires and transfers knowledge and changes its behavior on the basis of new knowledge and new suggestions. Learning organizations actively try to infuse new ideas and information. To do this, they look closely at the outdoor environments, take on the new talents and experts they need and invest important resources in the training and development of their collaborators. Subsequently, the new knowledge created must be transmitted to the whole organization. Learning organizations are committed to reducing structural, procedural and interpersonal factors that hinder the sharing of information, ideas and knowledge among members of the organization. Behavior must also change as a result of a new way of learning (Paparella 2009: 176).

The first mandate of the research resulted in the activation of an exploratory-euristic route designed to accompany expert systems of teachers-tutors, carriers of implicit and explicit knowledge, in a process of co-production and sharing of knowledge.

The research group accepts the task to search and to collect examples and extracts of tutoring practices (a) to create a literature of examples that could also encode mainstream trends, (b) to accompany a professional community towards the construction and sharing of a common repertoire of good tutorship practices.

The need to bring new elements to the scripts shared between tutors and students in the community of the department, the need to improve the tutoring services offered, and to unpack tutorship practices in more differentiated segments and specific, has pushed the commission in the field of new investigative trails. How to deal with good practice in national and international universities? How to deal with diverging, challenging, non-familiar models to open to the issue of students' drop-out? How to develop systems action to face students' careers abandonment?

The comparative research on the tutorship practices draws out from these research questions.

3. Comparing good practices and non-family models

In the first step of the comparative study, in-coming, on-going and outgoing tutorship practices are investigated through documental analysis using online information and documentation sources. The first bottom-up categorization of the tutorship practices distinguishes six different branchs:

1. tutoring between peers, organizational actors and stakeholders/ mentors;
2. peer-tutoring practices;

3. didactic tutorship;
4. tutorship for specific services (disability, information);
5. professional/vocational tutoring;
6. information tutoring.

18 Italian universities and 18 European and US universities were selected. The selection criteria for universities were:
a. geopolitics (North, Center, South Italy)[1]
b. greatness (small, medium and large universities)[2]
c. state, public and private
d. traditional and telematic (online and blended tutoring systems)

The focus was on tutorship practices which the universities have put in place the policies for promoting the employability and acquisition of soft-skills (Boffo 2017). The data analysis allows to craete an ad hoc modeling on the Rahin model to explore customization and personalization of diversified tutoring practices according to the categorizations indicated.

The goal was not to develop a theory of tutorship systems, the 'winning formula' for the most attractive university, but to describe tutorship practices in academic communities. The choice of researchers was to contribute to highlighting some aspects of 'family resemblance' (Fabbri 2007) between various tutorship activity systems. The purpose was to define a formal modeling that enables to capture the processuality and the potential impact of the tutorship in the academic training path, especially in preventing drop-out phenomena.

3.1 Comparative analysis of the existing: the normative references

The tutorship system is part of the Student Support Services at the University (Law No. 19, 1990, No. 341, Article 13). The Tutor is an effective means to support university teaching as can act as (a) mediator between students and the university demanding tasks, (b) supervisor and (c) facilitator in communication and learning (Article 13 of Law 341/1990).

[1] About the geopolitic division, the reader may see the ISTAT protocols: <http://www3.istat.it/strumenti/definizioni/comuni/ripartizioni_regioni_province.csv> (01/2018).

[2] the division of the universities according to their greatness was developed on the basis of the statistic data released by MIUR, about the students registrations with the update of the last academic year (2014/2015). The data are available at <http://statistica.miur.it/scripts/IU/vIU0_bis.asp> (03/2018). Based on the available data, a categorization has been performed on the basis of the absolute number of students enrolled, dividing the sample: the first third has been highlighted as BIG (B), the second third has been highlighted as Medium size (M), the last Third has been highlighted as Small (S).

There are different ratings for tutorship practices. Lázaro (1997) formalizes four types of university tutoring (bureaucratic functional, academic, personal consultant and didactic). Zabalza (2003) speaks of three different levels of tutorship in the light of the objectives pursued:

1. the level of teacher function;
2. the level where tutorship provides advice on study skills or work systems;
3. the level where distance learning is provided, with job monitoring and job experience, etc. Álvarez and González (2008) proposed three major models of university tutoring (academic tutoring, didactic tutoring and service tutoring). According to this latter classification, academic tutoring is done in the classroom or in groups for each of the subjects taught by the faculty. It takes place at the classroom level and aims to improve students learning. The didactic tutoring is aimed at students from the enrollement to the end of the course. The Services tutorship is generally carried out by university service technicians who provide technical advice to students on issues related to their training (scholarships, mobility, transportation, housing, legal advice, etc.).

The tutorship model follows the prospect of holistic and continuous training, as proposed by the European Convergence Model (Álvarez, González 2008; Coriat, Sanz 2005). The tutorship course consists of transversal activity, it is not tied to a single subject. It is programmed and longitudinal, throughout all the course of the study, and aims to provide students with support for decision making and organizing their own "Training and professional project".

4. 'The rector who greets families': comparing models and practices of tutoring in comparison

The comparative analysis of tutorship practices requires first of all a work of disambiguation: often similar tutorship practices have many contact points but different denominations.

Sometimes the same label is used in different contexts to describe different services. Orientation services aimed at attracting new students at their university, showed the educational and organizational structures of the university, underlining why potential clients-students had to choose that university.

The in-coming tutorship is commonly performed in those ways (present in 32/36 universities):

- Open Day: In these 'open doors' days, the university shows its own structures and training plans of all the degrees programs. The tutors

often are required to work in front office and accompanying potential students through guided tours. Most universities repeat the presence of teachers at the presentation of the courses and oft he degree programs.
- Test Lesson: Potential students are involved in lesson for showing the most concrete aspects of university education through open lessons and laboratory sessions.
- Connections with high schools: universities hold contact with local schools in two ways, (a) proposing open workshops where university activities are presented and (b) hosting high school students in conferences and activities ad hoc.

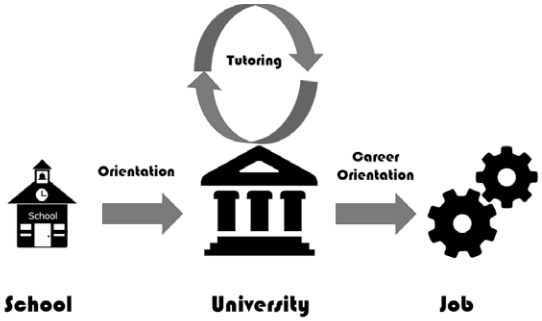
The most emerging promising practices are:
- Online platforms and self-evaluating questionnaires: With these tools, the potential students are able to navigate and learn about university activities and make a self-assessment of their attitudes by addressing university choice.
- Operative consultancy: special tutors (often tutor and guidance staff personnel) develop an orientation profile for the future students in the degree course most adhering to their knowledge and skills.
- Presentation of current students: this activity, which is frequent in the case of private universities, involves tutor students considered experts who have their own university experience.
- Skills balance and students competences portfolio.

In private universities, the families of the matriculates take part into the open days and the inauguration day of the academic year. The example of Ivy League American universities is paradigmatic: rectors meet matriculates' parents personally, welcoming them as participating members of the academic community. The rite is repeated at the graduation ceremony when the rector hosts the families of graduates and thank them and congratulate them on the achievement. These are marketing strategies that promote the development of sense of participation in students and families. In the contexts of American campuses, where students space out of the home, parental guidance becomes a supportive practice in the experience of transition that involves the entire family system.

5. First emerging results

The activities of the various levels of tutorship (incoming, on-going and out-going) are managed autonomously and decentralized by departments in universities sized as large and medium (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 – Diagram of tutoring path from School to Job. [Source: author's own]



In the case of the ongoing tutorship, the major sections are three:
1. Didactic tutoring (support, individual, group),
2. Disability Services,
3. Counseling and Psychological Assistance.

The first activity is generally assigned to the support tutor, which is a continuation of the incoming tutoring (orientation) and helps students to orient themselves in the organizational didactic plans and in the creation of individual study plans. The support tutor helps also students in the logistics organization and in the retrieval of information and materials necessary for access to courses.

Didactic tutoring services used to manage students' requests individually, through appointments (often organized online) or in groups.

In all universities examined (36/36), the student tutoring is always attributed to the availability of teaching support services for students with disabilities and/or specific learning disabilities. In this case, the activities are mostly related to the logistic issues and are finalized to make the campus and its spaces 'accessible'. Through this service, the conditions of equal opportunities needed to enhance the autonomy of students with disabilities and to ensure their active participation in university life are promoted. Psychological counseling coincides with teaching tutoring and is designed to ensure students' well-being and prevent drop-out by providing tangible support. Psychological Counseling services have a higher percentage presence in public universities, less in private ones. In telematic universities, counseling meetings, of individual nature, have the task of intercepting those troublesome moments during university careers to prevent students' drop out.

Career counseling takes place in the last period of academic career, creating a link between student and job market. The people who manage these tasks are in most cases centers for job placement.

The services are:

- Career Day: Days in which companies are presented to graduates and at the same time they can interact with stakeholders and business actors by proposing themselves as candidates and understanding the profiles required by companies. In these events, the participation of former students is marginal while the administrative offices manage the organization.
- Job Guidance Services: this service is offered in different branchs: CV and resume writing assistance, teaching strategies for interview management, specific consultations to determine the winning profile for hiring. In highly professional services, personalized consulting is proposed and human resource stakeholders are involved. The aim is to match the job offer with the job requests.
- Placement Office and Platforms for Job Vacancies and CVs building: These online services have virtual desks in which both those who are looking for new graduates and those who have completed a degree and aspire to a job can publish.

The Career Orientation Trails are divided into two moments:

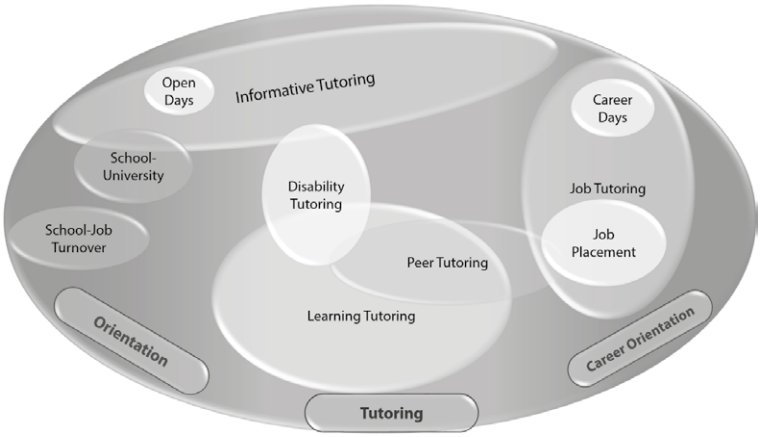
- a group work in which the participants collaborate for decision making
- an individual interview with the facilitators to explore some aspects related to attitudes in order to trigger more informed professional choices.

Lastly, business presentations are organized to have the specific time to meet the actors of the industry companies, such as Investment Bank Weekends and Recruiting Dates. The tutoring is stimulated through the participation of peer tutors (such as brilliant alumni and neo-graduates), as in the American model. We can itemize: technical-administrative services in specific offices, services involving ex-students, and counseling coaching. In particular, there are tutorings that work both in groups and through interviews with the tutors, experiential methods are adopted in presence and in virtual environments by working on real case studies or simulation architectures.

Informative tutoring is a type of cross-service across the all the fields, as it is provided at all levels by the offices of the various universities. Obviously it has a more pronounced feature in the case of the orientation where the request for information orients the inclusion of students in the university.

In the following picture they were represented by the diagrams of Eulero-Venn's own semantics, the mingling of the tutoring practices in the three bands: 1) orientation and in-coming tutorship, 2) on-going tutoring, 3) outgoing tutoring (career counseling) (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Eulero-Venn Diagram for a mapping of Tutoring practices. [Source: author's own]



Regarding digitization of student and didactic services, tutoring with E-Learning platforms is widespread in both public universities and private universities. The massive use of MOOC and MOODLE platforms facilitates familiarization of students with technological devices through access to the information via video meeting or skype. This kind of service is typical of universities with great dimension or otherwise with a telematics nature. In telematic universities, the tutor, often called E-Tutor, has the task of supporting the student, fluidifying the learning process and assisting students.

Less used is the Summer Week, imported by the American model, which represents events in which future students can immerse themselves in culture and university mechanisms. Compared to the geographic location, the Northern Universities seem to have well structured tutoring systems based on peer tutoring, with extensive student attendance, while Southern Universities centralize this task on Orientation and Tutor Offices.

Regarding to internationalization and welcoming to foreign students, the analysed universities have services to facilitate the inclusion of international students. In most cases these services are provided by specific university offices, through technical-administrative staff.

6. Modelling the tutoring practices

Based on this comparative study I propose a conceptual model for describing tutoring practices. The conceptual model is borrowed from Rahim's model for negotiation and leadership profiles.

The two parameters identified for the categorization of tutoring practices are:

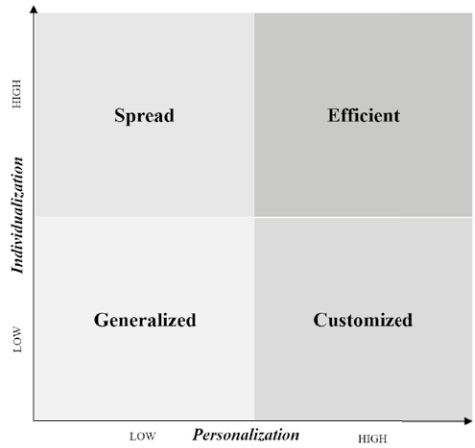
1. Customization, which expresses the property of being designed according to the characteristics of the single user;
2. Individualization, which expresses the property of being designed to be available to all applicants.

The two dimensions are related to the characterization of tutoring practices. If a service is both personalized, and then perfectly tailored to meet the needs of the individual student and at the same time is highly individualized, that is, it is provided to all students as individuals, we talk about efficient service.

In the case of a little personalized and little individualized service we call it as a generalized service.

If the service or the practice is highly personalized, but weakly individualized is defined as customized service. If it is in the opposite quarter, it has a high degree of individualization and is therefore spread (Fig. 3).

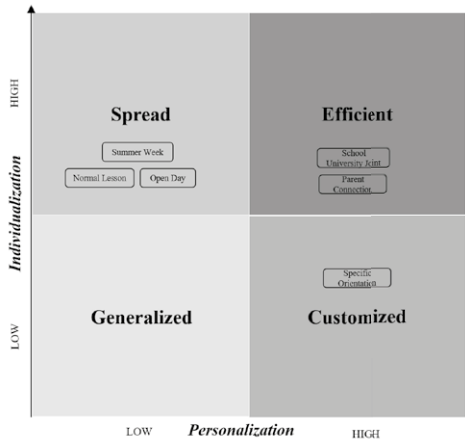
Figure 3 – Model of tutoring practices. [Source: author's own]



The proposed model allows to identify the most effective problem-based tutoring practices.

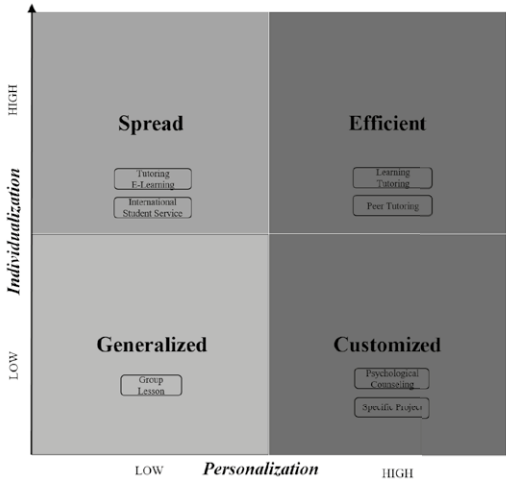
For the orientation services: the School-University Joint services and the active connections with the parents are highly customized and individualized practices, while activities such as Summer Week and door-to-door services even with the use of unregistered lessons are not customized and then spreaded. Orientation as a counseling service is classified as Customized because it is particularly personalized (Fig. 4).

Figure 4 – Orientation tutoring practices in the Individualization/Personalization Model. [Source: author's own]



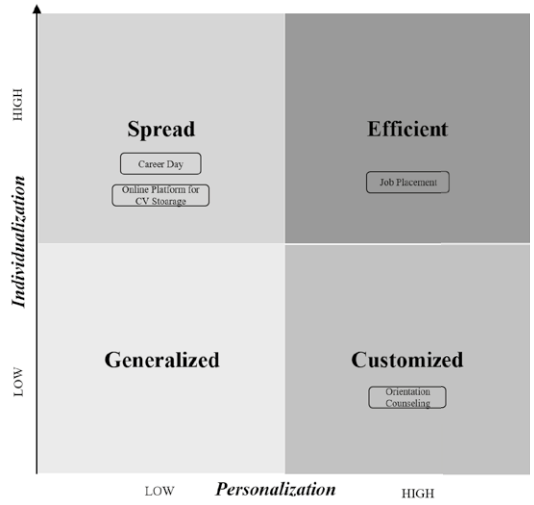
Regarding the tutoring services Group lessons are services that we could rank as Generalized, which are neither personalized nor individualized. On the opposite side, we have peer-tutoring practices and dedicated tutoring. Practices such as tutoring with e-learning and international student services are individualized for the reference category but do not have a particularly relevant personalization nature. Personalization is decisive in services such as psychological counseling and university-specific projects for students with special needs (disabled students, DSA, student workers) (Fig. 5).

Figure 5 – Tutoring practices in the Individualization/Personalization Model. [Source: author's own]



Regarding the outgoing tutoring (career counseling), services such as Job Placement are categorized as Efficient, while Career Day services and Online Platforms for CVs collection having a low relation with single and / or newly graduated students are classified as widespread. Finally, the counseling service aimed at specific professional profiles is a very personalized service, which is therefore defined as Customized (Fig. 6).

Figure 6 – Job Orientation tutoring practices in the Individualization/Personalization Model. [Source: author's own]



6.1 Differential peer-tutoring

Starting from the American university model, a formal distinction is being made between the personal tutor and the professional tutor who accompanies the internship of the students and advises them on choices regarding their professional future and the most effective insertion into workplaces.

Beside the institutional figure of the lecturer there are three figures related to the teaching-learning activity: the 'resident tutor', the 'senior tutor' and the 'junior tutor'.

The Resident tutor is a research specialist or PhD directly involved in teaching and coordinating the course activities, especially supporting the doctoral and master dissertations.

The senior tutor, graduate and expert in the subject, has the role of managing the integrative teaching and co-ordination of the junior tutor's study assistance services.

The junior tutor was a degree student able to assist younger students in their learning path during study sessions, exercise activities and labs.

The interesting news is that the training course is articulated from the entrance of the student enrolled as a succession of tutorial relationships (teacher-tutor, resident tutor, senior tutor and junior tutor) in which each intermediate figure is simultaneously the object and subject of the tutorial relationship in a training responsibility that comes to involve the students themselves. The students actively co-operate in the learning of the younger students, in the extent and within the limits of their specific skills.

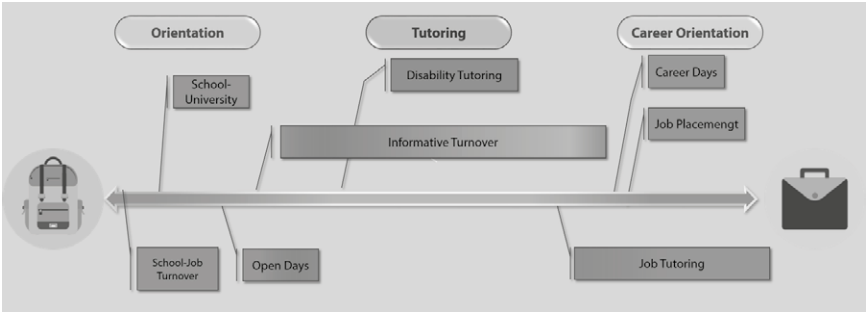
The peer-tutoring practices are present in 7 of 18 universities. In this field, some of the services of excellence are evident: among them the presence of tutor students (with annual contracts), the 'Pact with the Student', systematic practices of peer-tutoring both in presence and online, the group-tutor in peer tutoring practices; the excellence-oriented tutor and the formalization of the presence of the Junior Tutor, both a research fellow or a PhD student.

Following the American university analysed-for-the-research model, the tutoring center for excellence is a tutoring course aimed at the development of cross-disciplinary and transversal skills. Its activity resides in particular in:

- linguistic tutoring
- coupled linguistic tutoring
- informatic tutoring

Below is the timeline of the services offered to students since their entrance in the university (Fig. 7).

Figure 7 – Timeline of Tutoring practices from school to job. [Source: author's own]



7. Final remarks

Starting from a real problem, perceived as an organizational problem, the comparative analysis of tutoring practices described aimed at differentiating practices depending on the training moment in which

they are located. The analysis allowed to distinguish between supportive and empowering approach. Based on the practices of excellence identified in the analysis of national and international models, proposals for professional tutoring practices are advanced for both tools and procedures, such as tutoring practices through badge and e-portfolio, longitudinal tutoring practices, coupled tutoring and work-oriented tutoring practices.

Practice-based practices are mostly focused on individual student's needs, are individual-based practices aimed at filling in formative and informational gaps, reducing student learning load, or facilitating access to university bureaucratic maze. What is and what does a supportive tutor is still overly a heteronomous concept, while the empowering tutoring is aimed at creating learning platforms for soft-skills and for the professional skills that are useful and attractive in the labor market.

The need to tie more and more what is being studied with what is going to make in the work market, presents the need to bring students into the employability criteria that are validated in the professional worlds. For this reason, comparison with the models of didactic innovation and the practices of foreing universities allows the openness to forms of tutoring of excellence where the interest is in supporting the learner in the process of acquiring entrepreneurial and managerial connotations.

Tandem tutoring also allows conceptualizing students participation in university life and their progression of academic careers as collaborative relationships that characterize potential development areas and collaborative research.

The modeling proposal did not drive to the transformation-implementation of new teaching practices, but was more connected with the purpose of understanding tutorship impact on the negotiation of change processes.

Tutoring practices become objects that are being constructed, negotiated and shared, which can not be defined from beginning because their plausibility and applicability criteria are right in the ability to be able to converse with situations and to be situated in local organizational contexts.

The tutoring becomes one of the 'didactic management' activities (Paparella 2009: 23), towards students, particularly in the following areas:

a. Promotion and Incoming Information […]
b. Ongoing consulting for the university careers […]
c. Integrative business management […]
d. Detection of levels of satisfaction […]
e. Cultivating employability and outgoing job orientation […]
f. Managing special educational needs […] (Paparella 2009: 23-24).

Instead of attempting to implement action models extracted from other realities and imposed, a process of negotiation between two objects – the tutoring practices situated in place and the tutoring practices of other universities – has been opened up. This process could result in a transformative path whose goal is to define shared repositories to assume them as common commitments by a part of the department community.

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INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELDS: THE ROLE OF REFLECTION IN 'LEARNING HOW TO LEARN'*

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*Silvia Zanazzi (Sapienza University of Rome)***

ABSTRACT: In experiential learning, on-field experience needs to be processed consciously in order for learning to take place. Reflection plays a crucial role by providing a bridge between practical experience and conceptualization. Despite being a protected environment, university traineeship is a form of experiential learning that offers students a chance to learn from the fields and reflect on a possible future profession. In this paper we present and discuss a research project whose goal is the development of a methodology to educate trainees' reflective thinking and writing.

KEYWORDS: university traineeship, experiential learning, reflective thinking, reflective writing, reflective practitioner.

1. Introduction

> No one is born fully-formed: it is
> through self-experience in the world
> that we become what we are.
> (Paulo Freire)

In experiential learning, personal experience is the focal point for learning, bringing «life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts» and providing «a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process» (Kolb 1984: 21). Experience alone, however, is not sufficient for learning. For learning to take place, any in-the-field experience needs to be processed consciously.

Reflection plays a crucial role by providing a bridge between practical experience and theoretical conceptualization (Schön 1983). It helps to activate a circular process between thought and action, essential to avoid acting in a mechanical way based on habit or merely applying theories and procedures (Dewey 1933).

In the Education Science courses at the Sapienza University of Rome, traineeship is considered an essential formative step for stu-

* The present article is the result of joint work and reflection. However, Anna Salerni is specifically responsible for Paragraphs 1, 3 and Silvia Zanazzi for Paragraphs 2, 4, 5.

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dents' personal and professional growth, as well as a valuable chance to integrate knowledge acquired in formal contexts at a theoretical level with skills developed in professional settings (Salerni, Sposetti, Szpunar 2014). Despite being a somehow 'protected' environment, university traineeship is a form of experiential learning that offers students a chance to learn from the fields and think about a potential future profession. Trainees participate in concrete projects and learn, along with the help of tutors, to reflect critically, developing the necessary competence to enter the world of work and professionals.

We all acknowledge the importance of reflection. However, we should not assume that individuals are naturally born with the ability to reflect. More realistically, reflection requires adequate knowledge and skills, as well as practice and exercise (Harris *et al.* 2010) to analyse facts in depth and adopt new perspectives. As Mortari (2003) emphasizes, we really learn only when we can attribute meaning to our experience.

A final traineeship report is required in our Education Science courses to obtain academic credit. Beyond the formal requirement, we ask students to produce a report because writing about experiences is recognized in the literature as a useful tool to enhance reflective practice. In fact, writing the report obliges trainees to re-elaborate their experience, hopefully activating a process of «reflection on action, from a distance» (Schön 1983) that fosters a growth of understanding and knowledge (Salerni, Sposetti, Szpunar 2014). Along the way, academic tutors recommend that trainees regularly keep logbooks[1] during their field experience, since these increase learners' awareness and provide material upon which to reflect afterwards (Gibbs 2013).

As we said, writing can be a way to fuel reflective practice by reprocessing and interpreting experience. According to Moon (2006), there are three types of writing with respect to the level of reflection displayed. Based on her classification and on other contributions (Kember *at al.* 2000; Mezirow 1991), we developed our own definition to use for the analysis of final reports:

- *Descriptive writing* is merely centred on 'what happened' and contains few reflective elements. There is little attempt to focus on some selected issues, giving similar 'weight' to all topics. Generally, stories are told from only one point of view. Ideas are linked by a sequence of facts rather than by meaning; there might be references to emotional reactions, but they are not explored in depth.

[1] Logbooks need to be kept daily. The trainees should briefly note what happens and what catches their attention every day, so as to have material for reflection later on. Therefore, logbooks are different from learning journals, which are usually a weekly requirement.

The students do not seem to have any doubts or critical incidents that they want to bring up for discussion, nor do they seem to question their behaviour and actions in any way.

- *Descriptive writings with some reflections* tend to be more focused and signal points for further reflection: beyond an account of 'what happened', there are doubts, questions and issues to be discussed. However, this type of writing still shows little analysis of the events: the reflection is not deep enough to let learning happen. There are statements showing awareness about learning, but they are very generic and often sound rhetorical. The students do not show sufficient ability to 'distance' themselves from the concrete situations and look at them critically.
- *Reflective writing* contains some descriptions, but it focuses on some relevant aspects to be analysed in depth. In this type of writing, one might be able to appreciate the existence of several alternative points of view on the same facts. There is a certain 'distance' from the events, a willingness to be critical and to question one's own actions and those of others. Emotions are recognized, and so is their significance and impact on behaviour. The students reflect on their learning referring to theoretical knowledge (to know), practical knowledge (to know how) and behaviour (how to be). Connections between formal and informal learning are established and explained. There are comments and reflections on how field experience might impact future career choices and why.
- *Critical reflection*. This type of writing contains reflections that might lead to a change in one's basic assumptions and 'frames of reference'. Mezirow (1991) defined this as «premise reflection». This is a very deep and 'transformative' re-elaboration work that implies a revision of premises deriving from previous learning and its 'consequences', both in terms of meanings and behaviour. This type of reflection might also be related to the concept of «deutero-learning» (Bateson 1972), which challenges one's existing learning framework as well as one's mental assumptions. This is a superior level of learning, a meta-cognition process that concerns 'learning to learn' rather than simply learning an object or a specific skill. We are fully aware that critical reflection might be very rare in students' reports, since we deal with very young people (around 20 years old) who are in many cases experiencing the work environment for the first time. Despite this, we know from our class discussions that some students have the ability to reflect critically on the purpose and meaning of education in society, raising philosophical issues that might be 'challenged' and investigated through experience. Therefore, we consider that there is the possibility of finding pieces of critical reflection in their reports.

We strongly believe that a traineeship model based on reflection contributes to preparing reflective practitioners, able to engage in a process of continuous learning. Since reflective practice can be a very effective source of personal and professional development (Schön 1983, 1987), and given that writing on experience fosters reflection on it, we think it is important to invest time and energy in improving the final traineeship reports in terms of 'reflective content'. In fact, in this paper, we present and discuss a research project carried out during the academic year of 2015-2016 in a research lab on the theme of traineeship. In our Education Science courses at Sapienza, in fact, first-year students are required to take an Educational Research Lab class, while traineeship involvement begins in the second year. The goal of our work was, initially, to have an assessment of the trainees' capability to evaluate and report their traineeship experience in written form, going beyond a mere description of 'what happened'. Then, when we realized that reflective writing was so lacking in most of the reports, we started discussing a strategy to improve them. We began a journey whose destination is the development of a 'methodology' to educate reflective thinking and train reflective writing. Like any research process, this is a cycle where provisional results generate further questions, becoming new material for subsequent steps.

2. Theory

In traditional 'teacher-directed' approaches based on lessons, learning takes place mainly at an intellectual level. The students are passive recipients of information, often unaware of their own emotional responses to the objects of learning. According to more recent theories of learning, this 'sterile' approach can lead to an inadequate application of knowledge in authentic real-life occasions and work contexts. A very clear example is provided by Hobbs (1992) in the nursing sphere:

> If student nurses or doctors are taught about how to encounter dying patients or their relatives and the information is imparted to them in a 'teacher-directed' mode, they do not have the necessary opportunity to reflect on their own thoughts and possible fears of death and examine such deep feelings together with their peers in the first place. In such cases they do not learn how their own fears of death might affect the quality of their work with such people (Hobbs 1992: XIV).

In fact, experts in learning have argued that theoretical concepts will become part of an individual's knowledge only after he/she has experienced them meaningfully at an emotional level.

The theoretical framework of our project is the vast corpus of works on experiential learning, from which emerges a new perspective on work-based learning and the creation of knowledge in general. While more traditional approaches give primary emphasis to the acquisition of knowledge, brick after brick as if a wall were being built, the experiential learning viewpoint sees knowledge as a flexible network of ideas and feelings (Kolb 1984). Based on this assumption, learning is not the mere accumulation of knowledge, but entails changing assumptions and conceptions, transforming oneself in the process (Mezirow 1991). A fundamental proposition in the experiential learning theory is that learning is a holistic process which fully involves human beings: thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving are all integrated functions (Kolb 1984). In this view, learning becomes the major process of human adaptation to the world, occurring in all settings, from school to the workplace, as well as in personal relationships and everyday activities: it is a continuous, lifelong process that involves transactions between the person and the environment. As Dewey (1938) wrote, experience influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose, since every experience changes to some extent the objective conditions under which subsequent experiences takes place. In this respect, he made a distinction between educative and miseducative experiences, the latter having «the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience» (Dewey 1938: 25).

If we critically analyse the three most influential theories on experiential learning (Dewey 1938; Lewin 1946; Piaget 1971) we can easily find similarities between them. The three models[2] taken together form a unique perspective on learning (Kolb 1984), conceived as a process rather than in terms of outcome: «ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience» (Kolb 1984: 26). Consequently, knowledge continuously emerges from experience, implying that «all learning is relearning» (Kolb 1984: 26), since everyone faces new experiences drawing on ideas and knowledge stemming from previous ones. According to Kolb, to be effective, learners need four kinds of abilities: concrete experience («involving themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences»), reflective observation («reflecting on and observing their experiences from many perspectives»), abstract conceptualization («creating concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories») and active experimentation («using these theories to make decisions

[2] Lewin's model of Action Research and Laboratory Training; Dewey's model of Developmental Learning; Piaget's model of Learning and Cognitive Development (Kolb 1984).

and solve problems») (Kolb 1984: 30). Thus, the learner can alternate between being an actor or an observer, going from active involvement to analytical detachment: he/she needs to act and reflect, and to be concrete and theoretical at the same time. This model shows very clearly the relationship between experiential learning and reflection, a pillar concept in the literature that frames our work. Reflection plays a key role in the experiential learning cycle by providing a 'bridge' between experience and theoretical conceptualization.

Learning, especially in work contexts, requires an introduction to theory, together with the opportunity to apply theory to real situations in the field. Professional situations are often complex and multifaceted, meaning that «they possess multiple solutions and contain uncertainty» (Harris *et al.* 2010: 4). Reflection, then, represents a fundamental process for the practitioner who must draw on theoretical knowledge, previous experience, and knowledge of the current situation to determine the most appropriate solution. In fact, John Dewey defined reflection as a process aimed to «transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort, into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious» (Dewey 1933: 101-102). He saw reflection as a process of inquiry that leads to a more thoughtful consideration of facts. Many years later, Schön recognized reflection as an essential method of acquiring professional knowledge. He introduced the concepts of *reflection-in-action*, spontaneous and immediate, and *reflection-on-action*, consisting in an analysis of the circumstances of the event, from a distance, and planning of future actions, based on careful consideration of all information (Schön 1983). Later on, other scholars added the proactive aspect of *reflection-for-action* (Killion, Todnem 1991; van Manen 1991, 2008), that implies planning future actions based on one's experience and previous learning.

In sum, the experiential learning theory is an educational perspective that aims at integrating theoretical and practical elements of learning using reflection as a 'bridge', adopting a holistic approach and emphasizing the meaning attributed to experience. This theory of learning is well known in various informal settings, such as curricular traineeships in service organizations. Experiential learning techniques include a rich variety of interactive practices whereby the participants have opportunities to contribute actively to their own learning, rather than being passive recipients in a hetero-directed process.

3. Methodology

In our work we have adopted a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Phenomenology is a philosophical orientation

that emphasises people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world. It is based on a strong belief in the «importance of subjective consciousness» and on «an understanding of consciousness as meaning-bestowing» (Cohen, Manion, Morrison 2011). From a methodological viewpoint, in the project presented in this paper, we have used the grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to build theory, «an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon» (Creswell 1998) from data «systematically gathered and analysed» (Strauss, Corbin 1994: 273). A grounded theory is a theory that emerges from data rather than being predefined and tested: theory generation originates from systematic data collection and analysis; patterns and theories are implicit in data, waiting to be discovered (Cohen, Manion, Morrison 2011). A grounded study begins with the raising of generative questions, which help to guide the research but are not intended to be either static or curbing. As the researcher begins to gather data, theoretical categories are identified, and, through open coding and constant comparison, tentative connections are developed between the categories and the data. As stated by its founders, grounded theory is a complex iterative process where data collection and analysis go hand in hand, continually informing one another (Glaser, Strauss 1967). The researcher can use several different methods to collect data, both quantitative and qualitative: from in-depth interviews, to participant observation, analysis of documents, collection of artefacts and texts, and questionnaires. A very important aspect of the grounded theory approach, as of most qualitative research, is the researcher's direct involvement in the social environment being studied, which often requires extensive fieldwork.

Our project began when we acknowledged a problematic situation: while reading students' traineeship reports, we wondered why the writings were so limited in terms of reflection despite the variety and 'richness' of the field experiences. At first, we thought of analysing a number of final reports, to verify whether our impression corresponded to reality. While we gathered and read more than 30 final reports written by trainees in many different fields, we built, step by step, and using an iterative process, our framework for content analysis, identifying core concepts and, consequently, substantive codes to summarize empirical evidence.

The second phase of the projects, partially overlapping with the first, consisted of the administration of semi-structured interviews to students in the final phase of their traineeship, as a strategy to foster reflective thinking. In line with the grounded theory approach, which requires a context to be studied from different perspectives and using different methods, these interviews can also be seen as a tool to collect data on reflective processes. As far as our own partici-

pation is concerned, while it was not possible to observe traineeships directly in the organizations where they took place, our involvement as researchers came from long-standing experience as academic tutors, a deep knowledge of the programme's educational goals and the practice of supervising students' experiences closely and thoroughly. Interviews and informal meetings with students were a way for us researchers to further 'immerse' ourselves in the reality of traineeships.

4. Research project

To begin, we delved into the analysis of 32 final traineeship reports. Since the goal of our traineeship programme was to enhance students' learning through field experience, we wanted trainees to reflect mainly on their learning outcomes. Final reports should, in our opinion, contain reflections about learning at various levels. Which is why we used the following 5 criteria during the analysis process:

- *Knowing*: content referring to theoretical knowledge and 'theoretical know-how' learned simply by observing others. For example, learning about methods to teach children foreign languages builds theoretical knowledge; observing how English language teachers apply one specific method during daily activities in a nursery school leads to developing 'theoretical know-how';
- *Knowing how to do*: content referring to growth in practical abilities developed through active participation. An example of this category is learning how to approach a student with Down syndrome simply by doing it;
- *Knowing how to be:* content referring to growth in terms of behaviour and attitudes relating to a professional role. Learning how to be gentle and authoritative at the same time with children is an example of this category;
- *Theory and practice*: content referring to the student's ability to create linkages between formal and informal education, between academic and work-based learning. An example could be observing the Montessori method applied to children and being able to discuss a child's daily activities of referring to an authoritative theoretical framework;
- *Vocational guidance*: content referring to the educational value of the traineeship experience, in terms of understanding of personal aptitudes and aspirations and their concrete applicability in a work field or specific profession. As an example, a student wrote that the traineeship in a nursery school taught her how infant education was not her primary goal for a professional future and explained why, based on her field experience. In addition to this, she imagined a

different placement for her future and motivated her choice based on expected work characteristics that were 'in contrast' with her experience at the nursery school.

Going back to our objective assessing the level of reflective writing in the students' final reports, an analysis of the first 32 pieces confirmed that they were basically lacking in terms of 'reflection on action': most of them could have been defined, using Moon's categorization, as merely *descriptive*, while a minority of them could have been named *descriptive writings with some reflections* (Moon 2006). Therefore, we decided to test a strategy to help students re-elaborate their experience. In the second phase of our project, we created a protocol for semi-structured interviews and subsequently administered 13 interviews to students who had just finished their traineeship and were about to write their final report. The interviews were designed to ensure that the trainees could take a critical look at themselves and their actions and explain the results of this reflection. The interview protocol was based mainly on the four-stage model of experiential learning, where the four stages are: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation (Kolb 1984). Some questions were inspired by the Behavioural Event Interview (BEI) model (McClelland 1973). This technique, which originates from the critical-incident method (Flanagan 1954) enriched with the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) of aspects concerning the person, his/her motivation, learning style, and ways of thinking (Murray 1943), is used mainly in human resource management for the selection of personnel, because it helps in evaluating behaviour activated by critical situations, discovering what people do concretely and how they face work-related challenges. Although we are not working in human resources, we believe that starting from behavioural events can be useful to help students reflect on concrete experience and on the learning derived from it. In the end, these were the inputs used for the interview:

- Can you briefly describe your traineeship experience?
- Do you remember a situation during your traineeship when you encountered a problem? Can you describe it and explain what you did and how you felt, what others did, and how in the end the problem was approached and eventually solved?
- Can you recall a moment during your traineeship experience when you felt particularly useful? Can you describe the circumstances, what you did, how you felt and the reasons why you felt that way?
- Thinking about three 'areas of competence', that is, 'knowing', 'knowing how to do' and 'knowing how to be', can you bring examples from your field experience that show your personal growth and skill development?

- At the end of your traineeship experience, what do you think about your professional future after university? Did the traineeship help you reflect on this and if so, how?

Trainees responded positively to the interviews, sharing a great deal about their experiences and, in general, demonstrating that they possessed some, albeit limited, reflective abilities. Afterwards, they were invited to write their final report within 15 days, or, for those who had already written it, to review it, so as to include the reflections that emerged during the interview.

The third and last phase of our work was a comparison between the reports produced without any 'support strategy' and those produced after an interview, to assess whether there had been an improvement in terms of the ability to think reflectively about experience. In some cases (3 out of 13), we realized that the traineeship reports written before the interview had not been modified in any way: an arbitrary choice of the students, going against our suggestion to review them in light of the reflections that emerged during the interviews. In the majority of the cases (8 out of 13), the report had been written after the interview. However, contrary to expectations, we had to recognize that *descriptive accounts* (Moon 2006) had remained essentially the same: these reports focused mainly on a description of the host organization and the activities performed, without much reflection on outcomes in terms of learning. We frequently found extremely generic statements about personal growth and skills development, without explanations of *how* learning had been achieved and *what* specific knowledge or skills had been developed:

> This traineeship experience helped me grow both professionally and as a person.

> During my traineeship I found many connections between the theories learned in class and the development of the child observed during everyday life at the kindergarten.

Only in one case did we note an improvement from *descriptive writing* to *descriptive writing with some reflections*, where the student, whose traineeship took place in a foster home for disadvantaged minors, went beyond merely reporting facts and included some personal evaluations of her learning achievements:

> Every time the staff intervened, they would explain to me why they had acted in a certain way and remind me that every ward has his/her own past and personality that need to be respected. Therefore, it is necessary to understand when it's the best time to intervene to tackle a problem.

> It's been a positive experience from all viewpoints, for the close relationships that I've developed, and also for the knowledge, both technical and personal, that I've acquired […]. What I learned from university exams was extremely useful, but not enough. You need to have experience, a lot of experience, to really understand how everything works in these environments, how to face difficult moments and how to intervene and support the wards in a constructive way.
>
> The relationship with children and adolescents made me understand that we should never take anything for granted. In every attitude, every word, every action there is a world to discover. We need to understand that world in order to make our contribution which, though small, is nonetheless very important.
>
> I didn't expect to feel so comfortable in the foster home. Before starting my traineeship, I thought it would be much 'heavier' from an emotional viewpoint, but in the end, for me, it wasn't. Obviously, there were difficulties, but, as in any other experience, it is important to know that you can make mistakes. From mistakes we learn, we learn that we should never give up, we should always be honest with ourselves and understand if what we're doing makes us happy and proud.

Finally, only one report could really be described as *reflective writing* and, to some extent, also as *critical reflection*. The student did her traineeship in a nursery and maternal school and in her report reflected a great deal on the connections established between theoretical learning and work-based learning. In addition, she elaborated on the 'conflict' between commercial and educational goals and about her own efforts to find a personal balance, accepting reality and, at the same time, refusing to compromise:

> Before my traineeship, I was advised to read *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer* by Tracy Hoggs. This book made me immerse myself in the complexity and beauty of care-giving, providing concrete instruments for daily practice with the infants. There's a passage in Hogg's book that captured my attention, where, in my opinion, the author makes the reader reflect about a pillar of education: that the 'newly arrived' should be considered as people, in their wholeness and particularity. […] Based on this scientifically valid assumption, I prepared myself for a traineeship in a school for 0-6-year-old children.
>
> The organization of spaces and materials in the nursery school where I worked was based mainly on commercial criteria, even if some more sophisticated games were available and captured my attention. […] My experience was a reality check. The institutions that operate in the field of infant education are many and diverse. They adopt educational models that are not always based on pedagogical studies. Seeing all this with my own eyes conflicted, on the one hand, with the theoretical knowl-

> edge developed during my university studies; on the other, it made me struggle, and forced me to find adequate solutions to live and act in that specific organizational context.
>
> My background in philosophy and education contributed to shaping my profile as a 'reflection-prone' individual. It contributed to my inclination towards individual and group reflection, to my attention in choosing acts and words dedicated to others, based on the situation and the context. […] I put all of myself into being there in the most serene and relational way possible, overcoming initial difficulties, willing to get the best out of a place where they offered entertainment rather than genuine educational activities.

5. Final remarks

> There can be no knowledge without emotion. We may be aware of a truth, yet until we have felt its force, it is not rs. To the cognition of the brain must be added the experience of the soul.
> (Arnold Bennett)

An informed use of knowledge is possible only when we put into play personal interests, emotions, and affection. The experiential learning theory emphasizes non-cognitive aspects of learning. According to Tomassini (2007), in the social sciences, many feel a need to fill the void created by the predominance of cognitivism in learning theories. Many are starting to oppose the idea that reflection is a cognitive activity and that the couple cognition-rationality should be considered 'superior' to emotions. From this viewpoint, a sort of 'emotionalization' of reflection is the necessary premise of every strategy aimed to strengthen reflection itself. Writing, if we wish it to become a reflective exercise, must focus on real experiences, experienced with emotion, sometimes even with 'suffering'. The storyteller must look at his/her experience as something from which it is possible to learn, something that has a moral. He/she must be able to reflect on 'what happens' outside of him/herself (reflection) as well as on his/her own actions, as if he/she were looking in a mirror (reflexivity) (Tomassini 2007). Those who tell of their experience must be able to seek and find a meaning within it. A continuous search for meaning is the root of reflection (Mortari 2003).

We tried to stimulate the search for meaning through the interviews. At first, the results of our research work were 'disappointing': we expected to receive final reports much improved and richer in reflections. However, if we refer to the experiential learning theory,

these results become clearer and can be viewed as a starting point for future action. As already discussed, experiential learning must be seen as a continuous process, rather than as an outcome. Reflective thinking is a 'fuel' for experiential learning, and if we do not provide it constantly, the learning process is going to be interrupted. We knew it was unlikely that students would learn how to 'reflect on action' with only one, albeit in-depth, interview (Schön 1983). The interviews were undoubtedly very useful for them to look at their experience from a distance, but they cannot be the only support offered. At the end of this project, what we do know is that, despite the scarcity of resources, we must do our best to strengthen and enrich the support given to trainees, especially in terms of reflective practice. We also know that we should encourage students to see the traineeship report not merely as a formal requirement for credit, but also as an occasion to re-elaborate their experience. We are currently considering setting up student-managed reflection groups, where older students help younger peers to activate a reflection process on their field experience. Ultimately, learning is never a merely individual phenomenon concerning only one person, but involves a community of practice (Lave, Wenger 1991)[3] (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 – Experiential learning cycle: goals, instruments, reflective practice, and reflexivity.

[3] The concept of 'community of practice' was first elaborated at the beginning of the '90s in the realm of studies on apprenticeship conducted by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave (Lave, Wenger 2006). These studies overturned the common belief that apprenticeship is based on a relationship between master and novice, affirming instead that learning a skill is based on a social process of participation in a practice. Such practice entails a system of relationships between the novice and other members of the group, between the novice and the practice itself, and between the novice and the culture of the group.

The group work could benefit from using our interview questions, based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle, as prompts for sharing experiences and discussion. In fact, the experiential learning cycle (Kolb 1984; Gibbs 2013) begins with *concrete experience* (question: «Can you briefly describe your traineeship experience?»), continues with *reflective observation* (questions: «Do you remember a situation during your traineeship when you encountered a problem? […]; Can you recall a moment during your traineeship experience when you felt particularly useful?») and subsequently *abstract conceptualization* (questions: «Thinking about three "areas of competence", that is, "knowing", "knowing how to do" and "knowing how to be", can you bring examples from your field experience showing your personal growth and skill development?; At the end of your traineeship experience, what do you think about your professional future after university? […]»). The fourth stage of Kolb's cycle, *active experimentation*, happens when the trainee applies what he/she has learnt – and reflected on – to his/her future actions. This is precisely what Killion and Todnem (1991) called *reflection-for-action,* the desired outcome of the first two types of reflection. We propose, therefore, to add a question for the trainees: «How can I improve next time? What can I do differently?». In this way, the experiential learning cycle never ends: the last stage flows into the first one, translating into a practice that is more reflective, more aware, and more competent.

Among the materials we provide on the Moodle page are guidelines on how to write logbooks. In talking to students, we realized that logbooks are considered useless and a 'waste of time', and are rarely used. Instead, daily or weekly logbooks could become the main source of reflective learning for trainees. Noticing facts, beliefs, emotions, and critical incidents when they happen is fundamental to remembering and, later on, using as material for reflective thinking. Logbooks could also offer input to be discussed during classes, trying to establish connections between theory and field experience. Reflection, Dewey wrote, is a process of inquiry (Dewey 1933), and inquiry means asking questions. It is very important to elicit students' questions in all phases of their academic and work-based experience: not only questions on what we tell them in class, or on the reading materials for our courses, but also on what they see and experience at their placements. Logbooks could also be the place in which to gather all their questions, waiting for the occasion to share and search for answers. In sum, keeping logbooks regularly pushes the learner to alternate between being an actor or an observer, to go from active involvement to analytical detachment, exercising critical thinking by entering a cyclical experiential learning process. Moreover, while writing is widely recognized as a tool to enhance reflective practice

by re-processing and interpreting experience, we should not make the mistake of taking writing abilities for granted. In some of our interviews, we noticed reflective thinking skills that unexpectedly 'disappeared' in the written reports. Reflective writing should also be taught and practised. One way to do this might be to show students the difference between descriptive accounts and reflective writings, or perhaps to share some of the best student work from previous years.

For the moment, we can say that our first intervention initiated a process of simultaneous training and inquiry. We plan to continue our laboratory for reflective practice, providing students more and diversified occasions to exercise reflection on action. Every strategy, to become effective and real, needs to deal with a scarcity of resources, but as Dewey would say, «a genuine purpose always starts with an impulse» (1938).

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EDUCATORS IN TRAINING AND WRITING: PERCEPTION, EXPERIENCES, PROBLEMS

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the relationships between academic, professional and personal writing among Italian university students. The specific focus is on educators trained as part of the degree course in Education and Training Science. A solid, evident link exists between educational professions and writing practices, as shown by the over two decades of research on this topic: writing facilitates the objectivization needed for sharing and, at the same time, makes it possible to distance oneself from the effort involved in the teaching professions.

Keywords: academic didactics, educational writing, professional writing, educational professions, active learning.

1. Writing and education professions

In our knowledge-oriented society, writing is a key element, since it helps the creation of the various kinds of knowledge (Starke-Meyerring, Paré, Artemeva, Horne, Yousoubova 2011) and the performance of human activities. The intrinsic meaning of writing lies in its contribution to human relationships and to the enactment of textual actions. As stressed by Bazerman and Russel (2003):

> Writing is alive when it is being written, read, remembered, contemplated, followed--when it is part of human activity. Otherwise it is dead on the page, devoid of meaning, devoid of influence, worthless. The signs on the page serve to mediate between people, activate their thoughts, direct their attention, coordinate their actions, provide the means of relationship. It is in the context of their activities that people consider texts and give meaning to texts. And it is in the organization of activities that people find the needs, stances, interactions, tasks that orient their attention toward texts they write and read. So, to study text production, text reception, text meaning, text value apart from their animating activities is to miss the core of a text's being (p. 1).

Within a professional context, these aspects gain an indisputable importance. Starting from the assumption that professional writing may take different forms (Tab. 1) – within the polarization between functionality to the performance of an activity, and reflection

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on the activity carried out, with these two targets likely to overlap – we can extend this multi-dimensionality also to so-called «educational writing», a series of writings all «connected to the performance of one's didactic, administrative, organizational and institutional task» (Biffi 2014: 35).

Table 1 – A model for professional writing. [Source: reviewed by Sposetti 2011]

Macro-target	Subject	Target	Recipient	Text type
Communication of contents to improve the practical performance of the professional activity	Reports of specific activities	Improving internal communication	Internal	Presentation. Persuasion. Description. (*Technical reports, minutes, school register, indications etc.).*
		Improving external communication	External	
		Improving the practical organization of the activity (simplification of practices and procedures, streamline of times, etc.).	Internal/ External	
		Achieving recognitions for the activity carried out.	Internal/ External	
Improvement of the professional activity through reflections on the experience	Professional experience	Divulgating the experience (Cognitive function.)	Internal/ External	Narration Argumentation (*Logbook, individual diary, life stories, reports, surveys, notes, etc.)*
		Reflecting on the experience (Inferential function.)	Internal/ The subject	
		Sharing the experience	External	
		Showing and controlling feelings and emotions (Restraining emotionality.)	The subject	

Since the early 20th century, the depth and evidence of the relationship between writing and professional activity has led to interesting reflections resulting from assorted studies and researches on the field. The general subject is the use of the writing process regarded as a professionalizing tool in different sectors and areas requiring the supply of services to other individuals: caretaking,

teaching, training, etc., i.e. all the contexts falling within education and training sciences.

The dimensions of professional writings in the educational fields can easily be investigated by highlighting the ability of written communication to provide useful help within professional educational contexts. In the introduction to a recent study on reflective writing, Cros (2014) offered an overview of the studies in this field starting from an engagement for training through the analysis of professional practices, which was developed in the Nineties. This context also fostered an interest in writing intended not only as a subject of communication but also as a training tool for educators. Logbooks, school works, narrations, reports, portfolios and any other written production act as general research tools and elements. Simultaneously, the concept of training changes as it is considered not only a mechanical learning of operational procedures necessary for the performance of a specific professional activity, but also a «development of an adaptive, creative, and critical intelligence, a distancing and an analysis, a development taking place on the same level of practice» (page IX, translated from the French by the author.) As a result of the onset of new needs and training requirements, writing seemed to be the most suitable tool to provide an answer, giving subjects the opportunity to confront both themselves and the external ever-changing reality. The characteristics of writing promote analysis, imply the possibility to take a certain distance and turn experience into words by reducing the implicit, unstable, and feeble element typical of oral transmission and allowing for a 'deferred' communication: thus, writing becomes a tool of knowledge and professionalization. Moreover, writing is also an economic instrument, since it is easily manageable and immediately available to the individuals being trained: everyone can write and conceivably they have already tackled professional writing.

Over the last decade, reflection on the features of professional writing in the educational context has been extended to the possible specificity of this professional means[1]. This extensive and transverse research activity has emphasised two typical elements

[1] In the attempt to assess this assumption, various researches have been conducted on the writing-based training instruments in various professional contexts (training of trainers and educators, teaching, training of social workers, etc.) with the purpose of understanding whether writing can actually generate professional competences, whether a specific kind of writing can lead to a professionalisation process and, if so, what are the peculiar characteristics of these writing forms. The main international and intercultural results were collected in two works carried out by Cros together with Louise Morisse and Martine Lafortune, published in 2009 and 2011.

of writing regarded as a professionalizing tool: a) writing belongs to a well-defined training context in terms of deadlines, support and clear identification of the targets; B) writing implies a reflection and an intensification of professional activity, in the form of 'reflective writing'.

2. The functions of educational writing

Writing has several functions; for the purposes of this paper, it is worth mentioning three of them in particular: communicative, epistemic, and heuristic function (Cros 2011).

The communicative function is immediately clear. The purpose of communication is to share something with the others such as information, experiences, and moods, which thus become known to others. Moreover, writing also has an epistemic function, i.e. the production of thoughts and knowledge:

> Through writing, experience – turned into the subject of reflection – can interact more easily with individuals' knowledge and competencies and be integrated by them. Thus, a form of epistemic writing can be recovered, namely a writing leading to a change in and growth of knowledge (Bereiter 1980), 'Where composition helps the writer acquire a higher comprehension' (Bereiter, Scardamalia 1987, 1995: 86) (Salerni, Sposetti, Szpunar 2013: 12).

As stated by Cros (2011)

> We may say that we write to know our thought [...] We are our first readers and the words written on the paper ask this reader (ourselves) some questions and suggest interpretations other than the original intentions towards the others. Through the reading of our own writing, we reveal ourselves to ourselves. The sense of a text is never ultimately reached; therefore, we must carry out an exegetic activity on our own texts. This activity can be scary and may result in split thoughts ... Actually, it is wrong to say that writing consists of two different steps: first the processing of thoughts and then the correct transcription in writing of the thoughts (p. 2, translated by the author).

The heuristic function of writing is connected to the epistemic one, since it helps identify innovative ideas and the links between facts and thoughts, culminating with important discoveries. After all, heuristics is one of the seven functions of language as defined by Halliday (1975), through which men perform a linguistic exploration of the surrounding world based on questions such as «Why...?»

or «How…?»[2] This function is further enhanced by the written expression, especially among adults, with the purpose of recalling, telling, and sharing experiences. Furthermore, within the learning of writing, Halliday (1993) refers to a specific linguistic shift from the general to the abstract, which helps transform experience into systematic knowledge. Writing – learned as a secondary symbolic system – offers a synoptic insight into reality. With reference to our study of professional writing[3], this aspect is connected to the specific ability to shape the world around us by putting down in writing the flow of events through their selection, combination, and a creation of new possible meanings.

Therefore

> Writing proves to be […] a tool suitable – probably the most suitable – for a reflective elaboration and sharing of experiences, since writing helps distance oneself from the past, just as it enables a symbolic representation of the experience through thought, with reference to the emotional and cognitive sphere (Mortari 2003). Therefore, writing fosters the objectification process underlying sharing and, at the same time, helps distance oneself from the adversities of the education professions. As evidenced by Fiamberti (2006: 3), 'The purpose of a worker's writing is to rely on a mirror (reflective need) as well as on a bank (containment need) to face the complex situations and emotional involvement in everyday life' (Sposetti 2011: 267).

3. Research on educators being trained and writing

In line with the issues concerning writing within the education professions, this section presents the data collected during the 2015-2016 year during an interview with some students enrolled in the Master's Degree in Pedagogy and Educational Sciences at The Sapienza University. The interviews fall within a broader investi-

[2] The other six functions are: instrumental (meeting needs: «I want»); regulatory (controlling others' behaviour: «Do this»); interactional (interacting with the persons around us and creating a dialogue: «hello»); personal (introducing oneself and one's tastes: «This is me»; «I like»); imaginative (being creative and building worlds: «let's pretend that»); informative (sharing information: «Today is sunny»). The scholar has identified these functions based on an investigation of the development of language among children.

[3] Halliday (1993) reflects on the writing learning process among children. His thought focuses on the relationship between learning and language and, in particular, on evidence suggesting the interpretation of the former (learning) based on the latter (language).

gation of written productions and of the attitude towards writing among the students attending the first year of the Pedagogy and Educational Sciences (PSEF) course, started in the 2011-2012 academic year. These students had taken a three-year degree in Pedagogy and Education Techniques, thanks to which they were able to work as educators with children aged 0-3 years at group homes, post-school, and social institutes as well as with people of various ages and unique needs (the disabled, the elderly, foreigners, immigrants, etc.)

The investigation relied on the assumption that these students were fully aware of their relationship with scientific and professional writings, including any evolution, changes, and difficulties. In fact, they had followed a growth path during their academic studies together with a considerable experience in scientific writing during the drafting of their final dissertation and apprenticeship reports.

Based on the outcome of the first years of the research, in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years, the author of this paper conducted analysis on the entrance exams that the PSEF students had to take. This analysis was backed up by short interviews on the academic writing[4]. In 2015-2016, detailed interviews were conducted to better understand the meaning of the writing process for the individuals and have an insight into this phenomenon based on the participants' perspectives[5]. The students interviewed accounted for almost two-thirds of the people enrolled in the first year of the Master's Degree Course (42 students), equal to 25 students plus 4 students enrolled in the second year. They were all professional educators since they had taken a three-year Degree in Education;

[4] The survey was conducted using mixed methods, by using specifically designed grids, T-Lab 9 software for text analysis, and an examination of the contents of the interviews, which required an initial brainstorming with the students culminating in the 2015-2016 academic year with a more detailed interview draft to help the interviewees give their opinion on their relationship with writing.

[5] The interviews were conducted with students who attended a workshop within the PSEF Degree Course, coordinated by the author of this paper. The research method consisted of training the interviewers through theoretical references and simulations. Then interviews were conducted in pairs with a single speaker, so that notes on the interview could be written down without disturbing or interrupting the advancement. In the 2013-14 academic year, the interviews were conducted by: Chiara Cacciotti, Marta Cecalupo, Elena Cefaloni, Piera Del Prete, Federica Flammini, Ilaria Frabetti, Valentina Maddion, Elisa Toni, Simona Trombetta, Roberta Magoni, Federica Pezone, Martina Pasquali, Lidia Tavani; in the following academic year more in-depth interviews were carried out by: Alessia Ballato, Tiziana Bonanni, Giulia Caccia, Marco Cadavero, Arianna Chiaravalle, Erica Cozzolino, Martina Ferretti, Alessia Giacomini, Maria Cristina Grosso, Roberta Guidano, Claudia Iacovacci, Laura, Masala, Giulia Rocchi, Sara Sannella, Martina Squadrilli, Annamaria Strabioli and Elena Trevisan.

27 had attended a Degree Course in Educational and Training Sciences at the Sapienza University and 2 a Degree Course in Training Sciences at the Roma Tre University; over two-thirds of these professional educators being trained already had work experiences. This was a sub-group made up of 21 students, 8 of whom regularly work as educators. Thirteen participants had professional writing experiences at work, 6 interviewees had gained professional writing experience for the drafting of the apprenticeship report required by the three-year Degree Course in Educational and Training Sciences[6], while 10 students declared that they had no writing experience, neither for work nor for apprenticeship purposes.

The interviewees were asked to reflect on three fundamental issues: their relationship with a) writing in general, b) academic writing, c) writing specifically for educational activities[7].

As for the last aspect, they had to define professional writing by mentioning the differences with respect to so-called 'leisure writing' so as to gather information on the perception of specificity and the recognition of a specific text form. The participants largely agreed on the peculiarity of leisure writing, since it is characterised by emotionality, confidential contents, personal expressions, spontaneity, low formality and attention to correctness, familiarity with the interlocutor, who is treated as a friend. Only one interviewee found a slight difference between these two forms of writing, while another assumed that it might be equally challenging; finally, one student provided no answer to this question.

According to the participants, the intimacy of leisure writing contrasts with professional writing, which is speculatively intended as more accurate in terms of compliance with the rules and text form, with some differences being observed between those who had writing experiences within their educational work or apprenticeship and those who had none (Tab. 2). Educators subjected to training with writing experiences mainly believed that professional writing is characterised by compliance with language rules (9 students, only 1 of whom had no writing experience), the use of a specific terminology (4), the role of the addressee, the work context, and the subject in question. Those who had no writing experience tended to provide generic answers: professional writing is more immediate (4), more accurate and requires a formal register (4).

[6] For a description of the apprenticeship in this course refer to the contribution provided by Anna Salerni and Silvia Zanazzi to this paper.

[7] This essay could not dwell on the series of data collected. For an insight into this issue, see Brusco, Lucisano, Salerni e Sposetti (2014) and Sposetti (2017b, forthcoming) also for an explanation of the tools used.

Table 2 – Characteristics of professional writing (28 participants).

Professional writing	Experience of professional writing			
	At work	For the university apprentice-ship	No experi-ence	Total
strictly complies with spelling and syntactic rules and well-structured form	6	2	1	9
deals with different topics, has a more specific context and a well-defined addressee	5	2	-	7
is more accurate and "reflective" [sic]	-	-	4	4
must refer to a precise field and feature a formal register	-	-	4	4
has a more complex language and terminology	2	2		4
Total	13	6	9	28

In most cases, the educators being trained who were interviewed for the purposes of this research believed that writing is an important work tool; as for usefulness, the answer provided by those who had writing experiences was different from those who had no experience at all (Tab. 3) 5 participants said that writing is almost or totally useless, while 4 people had never written texts for professional purposes. The latter tended to give quick and assertive answers like «It's not important» (int. nos. 1 and 28) or «It's unnecessary» (int. 29); those who had already had writing experience believed that educators should be able to face specific kinds of writing (such as a *logbook*), whose drafting does not require exceedingly difficult skills. The other reflections recognized the importance of writing for the acquisition of important instrumental skills (9 interviewees, 1 of whom had never had writing experience), relational competences (8, 2 of whom without any writing experience) or professional growth (7, 3 of whom with no writing experience.)

Finally, educators were asked to interpret their relationship with professional writing in relation to the three-year Degree Course, including the fulfilment of sufficient professional writing criteria by the graduates in the educational sector (Tab. 4). The answers mostly indicated the need to acquire further competences, both general and specific. This was the opinion of 17 interviewees, 14 of whom with

writing experiences at work or during their apprenticeship; 6 of these stressed that the burden of the acquisition of these skills should not be on universities. Only 4 participants – equally distributed among the two categories – believed that the new educators did not have the writing skills necessary to meet professional obligations.

Table 3 – Interpretation of the importance of professional writing for the educators (29 interviewees).

Is professional writing important for educators?	Experience of professional writing			
	At work	For the university apprentice-ship	No experi-ence	Total
Scarcely or no important at all for work purposes	1	–	4	5
Very or sufficiently important since educators must have writing skills suitable for their reports and projects	6	2	1	9
Very important, since it improves competence and fosters human interactions	4	2	2	8
Important also per professional and personal growth	2	2	3	7
Total	13	6	10	29

Table 4 – The competences of the graduates (29 participants).

Are the professional writing skills of the new educators suitable for their activity?	Experience of professional writing			
	At work	For university apprenticeship	No experi-ence	Total
Absolutely	2	–	2	4
Yes, in general	1	2	5	8
These skills are gained over time and do not depend on academic studies	2	4		6
Some specific skills are necessary for professional activities	8	–	3	11
Total	13	6	10	29

4. Final remarks

The data relating to the interviewees' opinion on writing for education professions should be seen in the context of the relationship with writing *per se*, and with writing as part of a training path. The use of writing was regarded as positive by most of them with reference to a generically expressive or functional (writing for study purposes) and more complex dimension, when it came to coping with the different writing opportunities included in the academic path, together with the drafting of the final dissertation.

These students saw writing as a sort of double-headed herm, resulting from the formal vs. informal polarization, where formal writing is associated with compliance with spelling, grammatical and syntactic rules as well as proper terminology. They regarded formal writing – whether intended for university or a work context – as 'accurate writing', a kind that complies with morphosyntactic and lexical rules. Yet the forms taken by writing within the education professions can fall within divergent genres, ranging from scientific writing to a more confidential writing of a diary; sometimes multiple forms coexist in the same text. Within educational writing contexts, it is easier to find texts where narration, description and argumentation tend to overlap. Professional writing often shows features associated with spontaneity and poor planning which the interviewees attributed exclusively to personal writing, defining a dichotomy between the latter and professional writing which emphasise production in one case and planning in the other.

In this regard, the educators being trained involved in the survey seemed unable to perceive the complexity and versatility of this tool or the *continuum* between formality and informality, especially considering the marginality of stylistic aspects in the professional educational writing: what really counted was not the aesthetic properties of the writing, but its ability to report experiences in a detailed manner. To achieve these goals, educators must undertake a complex path which starts from their experience and culminates with its verbalization, thus leading to the production of texts that must be readable by external readers and rely on narration and description, on one hand, and argumentation and reflection, on the other (Cros 2014).

These writing forms are crucial for educators' work and their acquisition requires training and support, as stressed also by the interviewees. The professional writing skills described above do not and cannot result exclusively from a curricular academic course: similarly, they neither manifest spontaneously during professional activities nor do they arise from the routine drafting of documentation. Writing intended as a professional growth and development tool includes

some rules, and its learning is based on a path consisting of deadlines, assessments, discussions, and support from experts or the group itself.

This means that professional writing involves both the institution requiring the production of a certain kind of writing and the path for the acquisition of writing skills. Professional writing cannot be decontextualized or abstract. For educators, writing should be a means and not an end in itself, since it should act as a professional and practical support to concrete situations. The relation between university and work (Pollet 2001, 2004; Reuter 2004; Chartrand 2006; Ganobscik-Williams 2006; Lillis 2006; Hyland 2007; Blaser 2008; Lillis, Scott 2007; Lea, Jones 2011; Baudet, Rey 2012) as well as between academic education and leisure and work contexts (Ivanič, Edwards, Barton, Martin-Jones, Fowler, Hughes, Mannion, Miller, Satchwell, Smith 2009) is key, and requires reflection on the necessity to create specific and well-structured learning paths. Within educational Degree Courses, apprenticeship is regarded as a special occasion also for training aiming at the production of 'professionalizing' writings closely connected to the work, and acting as a connection and shift from training to work. The reflections of the participants moved precisely in this direction, recognizing the importance of the apprenticeship report for the orientation of professional writings.

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CHAPTER III

GUIDANCE AND CALLING

INTERPRETATIONS. MARKET, WORK, TRAINING

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Abstract: What of the job market in the era of Brexit and in the international arena of the Trump presidency? Naturally, there are various perspectives, but forms of emotive or propagandist rhetoric threaten to hold sway here. Above all, *Guidance Towards the Job market* means recognizing the complexities of geopolitical change within our information-sharing and collaborative networks, as well as the various and contrasting interpretations that arise. The current decline of the European Union – of which the UK public referendum result is symptomatic – and the 'America First' slogan, now a distinguishing feature of the current US government, are only two of the multiple forces interacting and defining pervasive transformations in economic, labour, and educational policies.

Keywords: guidance, market, work, training.

What of the job market in the era of Brexit and in the international arena of the Trump presidency? Naturally, there are various perspectives, but forms of emotive or propagandist rhetoric threaten to hold sway here. Above all, *Guidance Towards the Job market* means recognizing the complexities of geopolitical change within our information-sharing and collaborative networks, as well as the various and contrasting interpretations that arise.

The current decline of the European Union – of which the UK public referendum result is symptomatic – and the 'America First' slogan, now a distinguishing feature of the current US government, are only two of the multiple forces interacting and defining pervasive transformations in economic, labour, and educational policies.

Conflicting views abound. Take, for example, the challenge of agreeing on multilateral interventions to address the issue of immigration. Or the relationships between *market, work, and training* considering Europe's infringement procedures for excessive debt, which affected Greece so drastically, and the lack of any formal rebuke by EU authorities regarding Germany's excessive trade surplus.

Globally, professions and employment dynamics 'are coming to terms' with interpretations that the official statistics reports summarize with expressions such as «the slowing of the world economy», «increasing inequality and the acceleration of change», «quality of

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human resources and attraction of investment» and «oversupply and low-cost labour».

When the CENSIS Foundation processed the latest data from the *International Labour Organization*, the *International Monetary Fund*, and the *Bank of Italy,* it observed a global increase in unemployment and in the number of poor and vulnerable workers, confirming the continued use of forced and child labour[1]. In many respects, the data on *Employability and Competencies* was unsettling.

In light of these trends, it is logical to refer to a document that had a global resonance fifty years ago. In his Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI noted: «An ever-more effective world solidarity should allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny», «every human life is called to some task» (Pope Paul VI 1967: nos. 65 and 15). This cautionary message from 1967 was echoed in the words of Pope Francis, both in his United Nations Address and in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*: «The misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion» (Pope Francis 2015). And «we are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or a dignified sustenance for all people, but also their general temporal welfare and prosperity. This means education, access to healthcare, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory, and mutually supportive labour that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use» (Pope Francis 2013).

Since the 1950s, we have seen the acceleration of technological progress, an increase in gross domestic product, and economic-financial interdependence on a global scale. These have become part of a concept of development preoccupied with production, oriented towards increasing profit, and not to the general improvement of living conditions, nor the creation of a supportive society.

[1] CENSIS, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale del Paese 2016*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2016, p. 159: "Lo *slowdown nell'economia mondiale.* World growth was 3.1% in 2015 and 2016, and will not exceed 3.4% in 2017. World trade grew on average by 6% between 1990 and 2011, and by 2.7% annually between 2012 and 2014. *Global unemployment is growing.* In 2015 global unemployment reached 197.1 million, which is around 30 million more than the pre-crisis figure. Between 2016 and 2017, the figure is expected to rise by 3.4 million. The unemployment rate is stated to be around 5.8%. In 2017, the number of unemployed is expected to exceed the 200 million mark. Poor and vulnerable worker numbers are increasing. Precarious employment, with limited access to protection, affects 1.5 million workers, around 46% of the total employed. *The "rest" in the informal economy, forced labour and child labour* Informal employment in non-agricultural sectors has reached 50% globally. 21 million people are in forced labour, whilst child labour is estimated to account for around 167 million people."

Today, Pedagogy contributes *iuxta propria principia* to develop cultural sensitivity and lead the political consensus towards a concept of *change governance*. Such a perspective focuses on the relationship between education and work (Federighi 2010), and between the individual and the sense of community. This is a regulatory objective still to be reached and never fully achieved globally or substantially on the ground; including the concept of *stakeholder* in this scenario *personalizes* the responsibility of companies, public entities, and educational institutions towards society, identifying the specific groups or individuals to be taken into consideration in the actions associated with transforming the labour and education 'markets' (Vischi 2011).

1. Market, stakeholders, educational planning

Examining organizational structures and procedural regulations to achieve better results in terms of service efficiency, and/or product quality becomes a point of reference for a system of reasoning based on the *interdependency between striving for competitiveness and ethical tension*: the civilian community as a whole is the *stakeholder* when it comes to finding the best possible allocation of resources and redistributing the benefits. In cases of inefficient and wasteful services, or expensive, sub-standard products, then expenditure must be reviewed, and, at the same time, the investment must be evaluated from an ethical perspective. The effectiveness of the objectives pursued and efficiency in human work and in the use of material resources are cardinal elements of an approach to educational project design that is attentive to the ethical and economic interconnections of organizational action and the *governance* of its development.

No choices are merely technical or justifiable through *recommendations* or guidelines laid down by specialists in organization. It is inappropriate and misleading to uncritically accept arguments deduced from economic and financial publications and studies on management, to make decisions on spending cuts and cost saving, prioritizing certain administrative or corporate departments over others. *Good deliberation involves well-founded, practical wisdom and takes on a political, ethical, and educational character* that no corporate management theory should underestimate. Much as it is welcome, the work of specialist commissions and technical support must be scrutinized by the *stakeholders* to be adopted appropriately.

Educational planning for organizational change takes place within a context rooted in history, which can be visualized as a group of interacting stakeholders, with the names and faces of members of society. The challenge is to build an authentic dialogue, without forgetting to decide which *stake-*

holders to engage and how they can best be involved in the deliberation process. In all cases, there are multiple groups of interested parties (shareholders, communities, consumers, suppliers, social activist groups etc.), who require the *management*'s attention. Educational planning, in pursuit of the common good, must be tailored to consider the multiplicity of the rights represented by the *principle stakeholders identified* and to manage mediation in all its complexity, to encourage the achievement of coherent objectives and the balanced development of the community.

Human capital formation is consciously and intentionally an ongoing project. From a systemic perspective, educational planning requires the *responsible engagement of the various stakeholders in developing the curricula and the strategies of the training plan.* Its success or failure not only has consequences on the ultimate shareholding *stakeholder* – society as a whole – but on all *stakeholders,* corporations, institutions, etc.

At this dynamic historical juncture, it is essential to reflect on the challenges of *matching competitiveness with social cohesion, technological progress and economic development* in order to explore new routes for educational planning. In order to plan meaningful interventions to manage change, we must *find an appropriate new way to define development*, a prospect that requires *integrity and the skill of political representation*, deals with *growth and equality in economic reforms*, and concerns *the quality and productivity of investments in teaching and human capital formation*.

The banking crisis, which has caused such alarm since late 2007, reveals the danger posed by the distorted dynamics of the markets and credit management systems, by inadequate regulation on new high-leverage 'derivative' products, and by *change governance* models that have related poorly to ethical and moral values and have been ethically inadequate in a number of ways, and therefore not very transparent in terms of the close link between the *management*'s *performance* and the disingenuous sale of risks to the investor. The crisis, the consequences of which can still be sensed in the social fabric of many countries, must inspire constant vigilance with regard to the *need to introduce the question of the moral, political and economic responsibilities of proprietors and senior management in the principal areas of multidisciplinary investigation and public debate.*

The emphasis placed on the crisis, which has had serious and prolonged effects, may also stimulate suitable decisions regarding a *different way of structuring knowledge* (Morin 1999). Today, a thorough reinterpretation of the culture of work and management training is strategically important to guide change and promote innovation. Many success stories demonstrate that it is not by luck that a product or process triggers growth, but is rather by creating a *culture based on creativity* and the willingness to invest in the fusion of human capital, participative leadership and financial resources.

An authentic business culture generates wealth if it is part of a supportive citizenship structure and pursues education on legality as one of the key values in planning and governance. One theory on *human development as freedom* (Sen 1999) binds together the market, the stakeholder, and educational planning.

The pedagogical debate in the last decade in Italy offers various contributions to support the hypothesis that investment in educational planning can bring about an *increase* in value and beneficial participation on the part of the *stakeholders*. The diversity of cultural orientation and the juxtaposition of methods in relation to the planning of education and training in the knowledge-based society, with reference to theories of organization, research into communities of practice, social responsibility, and the relevance of social pedagogy, are all essential heuristic elements, which generate reflexivity and strategic development (Alessandrini 2007; Fabbri 2008; Malavasi 2007).

Is it a realistic ambition for educational planning to develop a structured understanding of *governance* and *guidance towards the job market* in line with the perspective of the International Conference *Employability and Competencies. Innovative Curricula for New Professions*?

An affirmative response is closely linked to the relevance assigned to the culture of education as a vehicle for human development. The texture of solid inter-institutional models, and planning that respects the various partners' prerogatives and competences, are cooperative approaches that generate value i.e. human dignity and economic profit, in a long-lasting way, if they are targeted at reducing inequality, redistributing revenue, building social cohesion, and cultivating/protecting the common good.

2. Competences, Education, Work. Learning and working: a case in point

An integration between the educational system and the world of work, based on the promotion of human life and real justice, must be considered essential for the development of future competences and professions, and for steering the education of young people and adults in a fair and supportive way (Bertagna 2011; Bocca 2000; Federighi 2011; Vischi 2014).

The complex issue of employment calls for the transition from school and university to work to then be constantly improved. On the one hand, it is important to enhance policy and the educational offering in relation to the professional profiles and qualifications required; on the other, we need to improve the acquisition of competences that are adapted to the demands of the production and services system. Meanwhile, we must restore the confidence of many of the

young people who do not study and do not work, for whom personal frustration leads to the mistrust of institutions and the lack of any sense of belonging, which is likely to result in insecurity, confusion and a marginalized experience of life.

In Italy, the introduction of obligatory participation in the work-related learning programme in the last three years of the high school is a profound innovation and marks a real change. National Law no. 107/2015 encourages young people and schools to engage in work-based learning programmes. Learning and working, beyond the restrictions of complying with regulations and implementation challenges, brings us closer to vital situations and contexts: corporations, associations, social voluntary work, and *service learning*, etc. Specifically, it «enables students to develop confidence in terms of tasks, schedules, and ways of working in the professional word, as well as testing out their own competences (including social and emotional ones)» (Rosina 2015: 83). Our future prosperity depends on the young, as the European Commission points out in its report *Youth on the Move,* in support of the *Europe 2020 Strategy*. This is particularly relevant to Italy, which is one of the advanced economies most lacking in complete and suitable tools for including new generations in the enhancement and creation of wellbeing (European Commission 2011). Young people who could potentially serve as a resource for development may become, paradoxically, a social cost, partly because of the absence of comprehensive, active work policies, incentives for enterprise, and sufficient investment in research, development, and innovation. If we do not take incisive action, such social disadvantages will become chronic. Indeed, authoritative international research institutes anticipate a potential *lost generation* (IMF 2015). The issue of employment must be integrated into a structured system of measures that coherently combine vocational guidance with education-to-work transition, «but also the achievement of autonomy and the construction of a solid basis for planning one's own life. Policies, therefore, that are not only motivating but also enabling: tools that encourage autonomy […], reduce starting inequality and make young people more dynamic and responsible […] less vulnerable to becoming trapped in long-term unemployment or entirely precarious employment (Rosina 2015: 98).

A culture that is constantly considering new *work-related forms and ethical content*, within the changing historical and social context, constitutes an *educational endeavour* hinging on personal freedom and the equal dignity of the various professions, with important legal, economic, technological, religious, and media-related implications. This article is exploratory in nature, and its aim is not to examine the many issues and technicalities at play, nor to develop the ethical and moral

dimension of work, the relevance of which is often overlooked. The issue of organizational wellbeing and the fostering of loyalty in professional relations should be carefully explored, along with means for reconciling family time and time at work, training for professional abnegation and overcoming doubts and resistance regarding investing in the younger generation.

Pedagogy, the science of education and training, understands *change governance*, in its multi-faceted complexity, to be an inexhaustible field of experience and processes upon which to reflect in terms of planning. Beyond and through particular conjunctures and events, the success of policies for *socioeconomic* growth and related ethical and moral enterprises to raise the quality of life for everyone on the planet, is closely linked with the ability to generate a *creative momentum* and enhance the talents of one and all. The anthropological choice behind work-related education stems from a holistic view of humanity, which understands the education of the *individual* to mean promoting their dignity and responding to the human vocation for work; this is considered essential for development, against a backdrop of rapid change and the pervasive nature of mediatization throughout the world.

The role of a form of *pedagogy* open to multidisciplinary dialogue is: to evaluate the fusion between professional knowledge and business practices; to identify needs and provide vocational guidance; to develop theories and operative protocols to instruct and engage the community, taking a holistic view of humanity (Giuliodori, Malavasi 2016). The inequity of issues such as absolute poverty, hunger, and youth unemployment is related to *environmental, social, and economic sustainability;* it calls for the 'deployment' of the sciences and technologies, imposes a participatory model for *doing business*, and calls for the contribution of religious values.

In the face of the dominant 'market' ideology centred on short-term profit, research and intervention on ways of ensuring that our *schools, universities and businesses* do not create inequality in society are essential. The importance now attributed to the *human capital* economy, amid much controversy, must be transformed into competences as a common good, *competent planning* (Birbes 2012) *increased dignity* and *value,* and opportunities for enterprise on an intergenerational scale.

Competences are often represented in a functional way, as a sort of *unit of certified educational capital,* which can be exchanged on the global work market as a *standardized* commodity, with a 'guaranteed origin' to be recognized by potential interested parties for its declared value. This supposed transverse validity about the curriculum justifies the adoption of the term in close continuity with that of 'certification' (Guasti 2000). According to the usual interpretation, a *certified skill* is

now considered the necessary condition for an individual's educational and professional mobility. The rigour of certification procedures and the reliability of the results lead to the dynamics of interpersonal communication and inter-professional exchange. Above all, one needs to gather the coherent features between the two dimensions of competency, the internal interaction between knowledge and experience, and external universal recognition, which reflect and justify each other, the one influencing the other.

Competences are related to technological development and management principles: flexibility and mobility within a company, as well as on an inter-company and inter-system level, surpass national boundaries and constitute the necessary attributes in a context where the scale and quality of production is changing, and not only in negative conjunctures, but as a normal condition of market unpredictability. Linked to the faith in succeeding to create a system for rationalizing human capital centred on competences, is the by-now considerable credit attributed to standards, which 'legitimize' the prescriptive value of competences by internationalizing them (Guasti 2003).

In many respects, the debate on competences affects the theory regarding work-related training and is one of its main heuristic crossroads. Nevertheless, at the same time, we cannot overlook the criticism of a new formalism that could impact research programmes if it endorses a procedural culture based on certification, indicators, and standards. Beyond reductive semanticizing, B. Rey underlines the importance of second-level analysis, according to which, competences maintain an irreducible position, since they define the capacity to choose, combine, and modify knowledge to respond to an unprecedented situation (Rey 2006).

The epistemology of business practices has brought to light the fact that these have authentic, specific, theoretical properties. Placing the central position of the act of learning at the start of the process means not foregoing a *technical and personal parameter* with which to consider the credibility of the term *competence* in terms of its vast use in international regulations. Educational and economic models of human capital – or, as U. Margiotta theorizes in Italy, *welfare delle capacitazioni* (capacity-building welfare) (Margiotta 2011) – can recover, through a clear-sighted appraisal of the real condition of the skills market, a sphere of knowledge that cannot be reduced to traditional discipline-based systems (no less specific, such as business administration), compared to which they have sometimes been considered *minor* or simply *applied* versions.

The discovery that every generation of entrepreneurs, teachers and students must make on the key role of *practical knowledge,* which is in many ways *original* both in terms of phylogenetic and socioge-

netic reconstruction, is what provides the richness in combining the «curricular route with the construction of an individual's identity».

Learning also *happens* through identification with qualified professionals and a certain degree of mimicry typical of *non-didactic* (i.e. practical/applied) learning. Skills, beyond the didactic mediations of teaching and the taxonomies of learning, belong to the world from which emerges: the profession.

The proactive synergy between school, university and work, the alternation between skills-based and creative life experiences can create the future, subverting situations that appear hopeless, alongside realistic forecasts of decline. The education of individuals and communities in navigating towards a *good life, with and for others in decent institutions* is not dependent on the current situation, unchangeable as this may seem, and opposes the processes breaking down the human experience and those of the contextual, associated paroxysmal diversifying of convictions and conventions.

Building society in an intentionally participatory and creative way calls upon the educational sector or the entirety of essentially human experiences that define and form *humanitas,* laying down the undeniable principles such as the pursuit of the common good, respect for life and moral responsibility in the practices of freedom, *employability, and competences.*

Innovative Curricula and New Professions. Lectures towards the Job market and Education.

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FOSTERING PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION GUIDANCE PROCESSES

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Abstract: Education is a constantly ongoing process that allows individuals to interpret and transform reality. The variety of life contexts, formal, non-formal or informal, are explicitly or latently involved in this process and contribute decisively to building a personal knowledge and competence system at the basis of subjectivity. The aim of this paper is to highlight the role played by knowledge and competence arising from personal experience within profiles of professional competences, to implement possible reflective paths in higher education guidance processes.

Keywords: personal knowledge and competences, higher education, subjectivity, guidance.

1. Introduction

Education is a process of acquiring a continually evolving form of one's identity that allows individuals to transform and occupy the world they live in, through the construction and use of diverse forms of knowledge able to foster their adaptation to the environment (Cambi 2010). Such a process must embrace a multitude of living conditions and experiences, and constitute an important contribution to the construction of a system of personal knowledge and competences at the basis of subjectivity (de Mennato 2003). From this perspective, human knowledge must assume a particular, existential importance, in that it is characterized by its interpretation in the world, beginning from the variety and significance of individual experiences (Bruner 1992; Neisser 1981; Polanyi 1990).

Knowledge is 'rooted' in the environment, in a relationship of co-adaptation with the mind, which cognitively and emotionally organizes knowledge (Bateson 1976) both explicitly, through formal facts and in tacit, latent ways too (Bruner 1992). At this point it is well understood that knowledge is expressed by one's own personal way of living in the world, based on individual, autobiographical repertories that constitute a subjective key to access the real world. Consequently, each fragment of knowledge has no meaning in and

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of itself, but acquires it through the mental processes that connect new knowledge to that acquired previously (Neisser 1981), weaving a tight web between identity and alterity. In this way, human knowledge assumes a social value, in view of the circularity with which it constructs and shares itself with and between individuals; in other words, personal stories of education are realized in the light of other people's lives and experiences.

2. Processes of knowledge and development of subjectivity in higher education

With reference to the above, it is understood that students involved in higher education contexts enter the educational system 'in their wholeness', in that they bring with them personal knowledge and competences coloured by various personal epistemologies representing the way in which these relate to the system itself. Such settings, unlike other learning contexts, can create unique opportunities for contact with a vast array of knowledge, which should, ideally, facilitate individual and social experiences of all-round and self-knowledge. However, too often, individuals are not completely aware of the deeper causes that motivate their lives and educational choices, and interpret study as being isolated from other experiential contexts.

Explanations for such a division most likely hark back to the individuals' educational stories. A frequently found scholastic culture still concentrates excessively on the acquisition, retention, and repetition of content, while excluding the more intimate and personal components of learning, such as the emotional aspects. Consequently, these components are rarely recognized as the best way of supporting a meaningful learning in didactics, according to a constructivist perspective of learning processes (Cunti 2014), a perspective now backed up by scientific research in didactics and pedagogy.

Knowledge and competences developed outside formal teaching settings are understood as needing to remain separate, a concept that seems completely unsustainable, especially since every form of knowledge shifts continuously between an 'open system' of individual construction, and a 'closed system' of intersubjective and contextual construction (Varela, Thompson, Rosch 1992). This means, in other words, that every form of knowledge has at the same time a *personal* value, because it is filtered by subjective processes of decodification, selection, and construction of reality, and a *social* value, since it assumes a significance in the context that produced it, which also makes it shareable and desirable to a greater or lesser extent (Bateson 1976; Maturana, Varela 1985).

The paradigmatic crisis of postmodernity (Bauman 2002) has intensified the climate of widespread distrust towards formal education, which seems to have progressively lost the ability to foster in students the competences needed to plan for the future, from both an existential and a professional perspective, decreasing the employability of students at the end of their career. If a vision of work that is generally coherent and fairly stable with its own formal education, still very socially rooted, is less and less clear or at least defined as job placement, it follows that formal education is gradually losing its appeal; this means that higher education is undergoing a lack of recognition of its value in use which, in the past, distinguished it from other forms of education, especially since it was considered a possibility for individuals to improve or enhance their own living and working conditions (Morin 2000).

The widespread crisis in which many young adults find themselves is, therefore, a difficulty in overcoming the so called *developmental tasks* (Havighurst 1953), which largely concern the construction of a life project that precedes a progressive transition to those areas of training and working that characterize adult life (Boffo, Gioli 2016). All of this is related to a negative vision of change and an inability to imagine the future, creating forms of discomfort that prompts youngsters to assume a distrustful attitude of a certain disorientation (Cunti 2008; Cunti, Priore, Bellantonio 2015).

An extremely unnatural and artificial compartmentalization of knowledge, overly analytical and fragmented, coupled with a lack of effective employability of the higher education system, requires a systemic approach to the issue. From this point of view, if individual existences are increasingly discontinuous, in the sense that they tend to change rapidly, with individuals the first to adapt to the environment (Bauman 2002, 2006), one wonders what kind of education is most suitable to overcome this *impasse*.

2. The role of guidance processes in higher education

Responding to the young generations' needs for the future cannot merely dissolve into the simple offering of prospects and opportunities, but requires these to be recognized as important chances by the individual. The necessity is to connect *higher education educational paths* with *employability* and *life projects* through guidance strategies that seek not only to undermine the widespread mistrust of the future, but, above all, to promote critical-reflective competences for students to imagine themselves as competent adults (Lo Presti 2015) and therefore effectively support existential transition processes from higher education to working contexts (Boffo, Gioli 2016).

The importance of guidance practices in higher education is now largely agreed upon by national and international governance policies, at least in terms of intentionality expressed on a declarative level. As a result, the fragmentation and precariousness of individual lives have prompted an important reconsideration of operational guidance strategies, revised considering theoretical paradigms of a constructivist matrix (Guichard 2005, 2012; Savickas 2002, 2005, 2015). From this perspective, the construction of a professional career is closely related to individuals' ability to adapt in a flexible manner to the flow of job events; in this sense, a current educational request seems to educate individuals to take reflexive attitudes that help them continuously define and re-define themselves in the workplace (Savickas 2015). In the dynamic construction of the Self, then, reflexivity and the exercise of metacognitive thought become a valid personal competence to be developed for the construction of a life project (Guichard, Pouyaud 2015). Today, individuals are constantly involved in dealing with various aspects of their lives and, for this reason, it is no longer conceivable to think that professional development is a totally separate field from the personal sphere, also considering that increasingly frequently, individuals are engaged in *dual careers* that see them involved in the foreground on both personal and professional levels (Arthur, Hall, Lawrence 1989; Hall 1976).

This theme is highly significant, due to the fact that nowadays, 'existential bustles' are increasingly frequent between the personal and professional spheres, which demands guidance strategies that urge the individual to deal with ever more frequent existential transitions. Guiding the subject to a personal life project, therefore, means nurturing a lifelong process of self-construction, emphasizing and articulating the various roles individuals play in their existential complexity; in this sense, guidance becomes an educational strategy to build one's own identity (Lo Presti 2015).

In the end, accessing personal knowledge and competencies also means working on professional epistemologies; personality traits and implicit theories play a key role in defining personal knowledge and contribute, often in a tacit and latent form, to the construction of changing professional profiles that seem to be necessary in a historical period strongly marked by precariousness and liquidity (Savickas 2015).

3. Fostering Personal Knowledge and Competencies in Higher Education

In the light of the above considerations, it is important to underline the prominent role of personal knowledge and competencies derived from personal experience through higher education contexts.

From a review of the literature on scientific research engines and through the use of concepts and keywords referring to the themes of interest, it emerges that a certain awareness has developed: to promote more sustainable *employability* a range of personal knowledge and competences is necessary which, if accompanied by *knowing-how skills* (Boyatzis 1982; Campbell *et al.* 1970; Jones, Lichtenstein 2000) can determine a more effective job placement. In this sense, personal knowledge and competences, individual skills and psychosocial resources make it possible to convert technical and specialist knowledge in a specific field of work into more efficient work practices (Allen, Remaekers, Van Deer Velden 2005; Boyatzis 1982, 1995, 2002, 2008; Spencer and Spencer 1993); beyond the specialist skills, therefore, those acquired in other life contexts can be defined as effective *professional amplifiers* (Allen, Remaekers, Van Der Velden 2005).

Research undertaken in recent years (Boyatzis 2002, 2008; Spencer, Spencer 1993) has also highlighted the role of *emotional intelligence* (Goleman 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee 2002) in describing and predicting human behaviour in the professional field, too; from this point of view, this particular kind of intelligence is understood as a real competence capable of effectively managing conflicts in the workplace and actively tackling work-related stress (Ashkanasy, Daus 2002; Jordan *et al.* 2002; Humphrey 2002, 2006). It has also been considered that individuals with elevated levels of such intelligence are more able to handle their own and others' emotions by developing a quality of positive relationship that can expressly improve the quality of work (Wong, Law 2002). Some of the empirical evidence in certain scientific studies also asserts that personal knowledge and competences play a prominent role in improving the construct of professionalism both in terms of emotional (Goleman 1995) and relational aspects (George 2000), significantly influencing the success and effectiveness of professional careers (Sturges, Simpson, Altman 2003).

Despite the obvious benefits of much scientific evidence, higher education still seems reluctant to promote personal knowledge and competences; in this sense, university students are not yet accustomed to the development of metacognitive abilities through the exercise of critical-reflective thinking about themselves and their own education; in fact, higher education still fosters knowledge characterized by repetition in a passive and uncritical way (Busana, Banterle 2008). This is also due to the fact that many teachers consider the development of personal knowledge and competences the task of job placement offices or external experts from business contexts (Boyatzis, Stubbs, Taylor 2002); teaching programmes are still mostly structured in a traditional way, which seems in direct contrast with certain research data, according to which formal education that also considers the personal

components of individuals is capable of educating individuals who can deal more effectively with their career path, making them more motivated and result-oriented, as well as able to work better in groups (Longenecker, Ariss 2002; Zimmerman-Oster, Burkhardt 1999).

The literature examined also emphasizes the importance of incorporating the development of personal competences into the mission of higher education and the enhancement of students' personal knowledge through implementation of curricular and extra-curricular programmes (Astin, Astin 2000; Zimmerman-Oster, Burkhardt 1999). To this end, some authors (Freshwater, Stickey 2004) have suggested guidelines to foster knowledge and competences gained from personal experience in higher education programmes, in which they take on a prominent position in the exercise of critical-reflective thinking, the implementation of tutoring and mentoring activities, and the development of empathy and emotional intelligence. Only in recent years have higher education curricula welcomed this perspective (Dugan, Komives 2007); for this reason, some universities have introduced courses on ethics and skills assessment programmes.

4. Final remarks

Although there have been some appreciable changes, the biggest challenge remains to promote and enhance the role of personal knowledge and competences in university curricula, as a fundamental part of the educational process (Boyatzis, Stubb, Taylor 2002). For this reason, it is necessary to guide subjects in their life cycle through innovative teaching methodologies that can strengthen the link between the academic world and the workplace, and make learning a self-directed process (Boyatzis, Kolb 1995).

In the light of the literature, as well as a reflective and transformative theoretical framework of learning (Mezirow 1991; Schön 1991), it could prove interesting to develop the phenomenon through qualitative research methods (focus groups, semi-structured and in-depth interviews) with the aim of further revealing the significance of personal experience in the construction of professional paths. A formal educational setting designed with such a framework implies directing individuals to enter into a close bond with the processes of knowledge from which an idea of themselves and the future can arise. There is then the need to implement educational practices that can communicate personal knowledge with expanded experience, culture, formal education, and the concrete conditions that surround the living and educational environments (Lo Presti 2015).

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NURSING STUDENTS' FUTURE EMPLOYMENT PREFERENCES AND THE REAL DEMANDS OF PATIENTS USING THE HEALTH SERVICES. A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON A GROUP OF FINAL-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PADUA

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Abstract: Increasing life expectancy and the growing number of chronic diseases have changed the kind of patients who need to be assisted. This paper presents a qualitative study conducted with a group of nursing students near graduation, aimed at describing and discussing vocational preferences and desirable health-care settings for future employment.

Keywords: nursing students, vocational calling, professional identity, qualitative research, patients' needs.

1. Introduction

The increase in life expectancy as well as the growing number of patients suffering from chronic diseases require the development of a specific nurse's profile with clinical skills and vocational motivations suitable for this care target (Mazhindu *et al.* 2016). If, after graduation, students acquire adequate theoretical and clinical knowledge as well as critical-thinking skills, they will be able to express an elevated level of professional performance (Rothwell, Sensenig 2002; Spencer, Spencer 1995; Marañón, Pera 2015; Ames 1992).

Recent studies have underlined that a nurse's vocational motivation seems to be linked to a self-realization need expressed as a caring attitude towards fragile subjects (Mackintosh 2007; Miers *et al.* 2007; Williams *et al.* 1997).

Nevertheless, students have different caring targets in mind. Indeed, a significant percentage of them tend to focus their employment expectancies on specific clinical areas that are more preferred than others: critical rather than general medicine, paediatric rather than the elderly (Rognstad *et al.* 2004; Storen, Hanssen 2011).

This could be due to students' development of a professional overview influenced by some trivialized and simplified patterns that might

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even involve the image of patients (perhaps influenced by unrealistic television series). These distortions are incoherent with the complexities of caring for ill children, and critical or terminal patients (Gurses *et al.* 2009; Aujoulat *et al.* 2006; Brewster 1982). On the other hand, these patterns seem inadequate to respond to the real needs of a healthcare that is more and more oriented to assisting an increasing number of chronic patients and, implicitly, to caring for them at home (Italian Law. 38/2010).

This kind of motivational structure may subject nursing students to frustration in their vocational project; moreover, future nurses may be unable to meet the real needs of their patients. A frustrated subject may be potentially exposed to great psychophysical stress and, consequently, suffer from some secondary traumatic stress disorder that can elicit a shirking of professional responsibility, emotional distance, and the activation of defence mechanisms. These elements can all provoke professional burn-out (Schwam 1998; Kearney *et al.* 2009; Conrad, Kellar-Guenther 2006).

The aim of the present study is to qualitatively describe vocational preferences and desirable future employment areas in a group of nursing students near graduation. The description will focus particularly on speculation concerning the coherence between students' preferences and the complexity of patients' healthcare needs.

2. Methods

A qualitative study was conducted with a group of nursing students near graduation at Padua University. The study was conducted using a bottom-up approach, and within a phenomenological perspective (Reinharz 1983; Berger, Luckmann 1966). The researchers' intention was to go beyond a quantitative description of students' choices to reach a hermeneutic comprehension regarding their desires and subjective perception.

Semi-structured interviews were realized individually with each student. The interview protocol was based on Happell's paper (2000). During the interviews, the students' personal data was collected, while the protocol included some specific questions useful to explore students' motivations regarding their desire to become a nurse and their preferred clinical areas for future employment. Clinical areas proposed to the students were: Paediatrics, Critical/A&E, Surgery, General Medicine, Geriatrics, Mental Health, and Home Care.

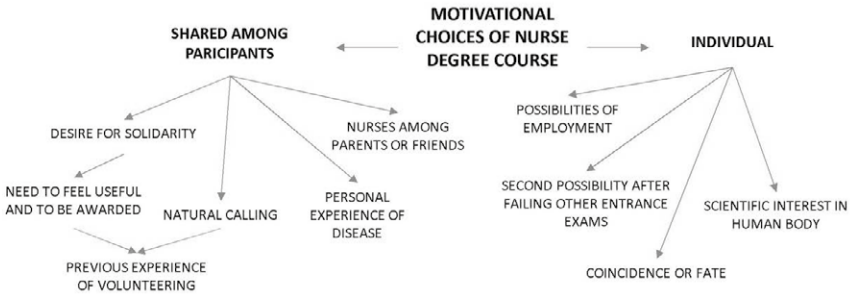
The interviews were recorded in their entirety and transcribed. Data were analysed using Atlas.ti, 7.1.8.

Results

The study was conducted in September 2013. 37 students near graduation were involved (8 males and 29 females; the mean age (±DS) was: 25.6±5.9 years.

Considering students' reasons linked to the choice of this university course, test analyses led to the identification of 10 different motivations. Some of them seemed similar for most of the subjects involved. Others, instead, were only mentioned by a few students (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 – Motivational choices on Nursing Degree Courses.



One of the most frequent motivations described concerns the need to find a satisfying strategy to express solidarity. A substantial number of students talked about the desire to receive gratitude from patients and therefore to feel that they were useful.

Frequently, students reported knowing other nurses, especially among their family members and friends. Another frequent motivation that they referred to was having had experience of social volunteering. This reason was often linked to a clear declaration of feeling pleasure when involved in a work activity with both technical and relational dimensions.

In many cases, students referred to an innate vocation, without any possible rational explanation; a sort of desire (that seems to have emerged during childhood or adolescence) to work in a healthcare setting, especially in a hospital.

Few students reported having chosen this Degree Course to have a guaranteed job, occasionally as a fresh start after a layoff in later life.

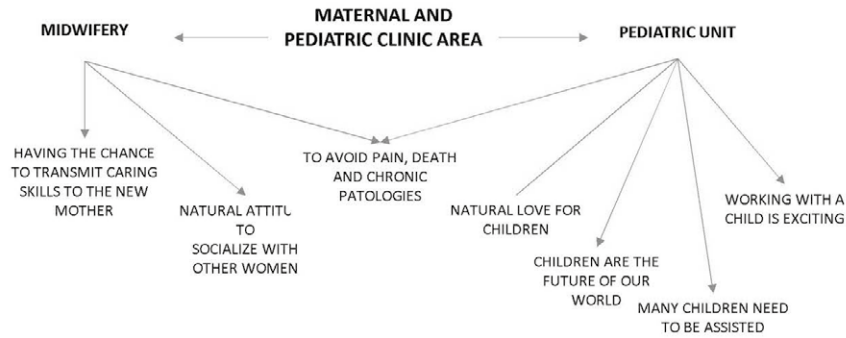
Instead, not a few students admitted that their choice was induced by a failure to pass the test for a medical or physiotherapist's degree. Nevertheless, in all these cases, they admitted their satisfaction concerning their Nursing Degree.

Other motivations, reported by only one or two students, were linked to a passion for some bio-scientific subjects of the nursing degree curriculum, or the human body as an object of interest.

Regarding preferred clinical areas for future employment, the students were clearly influenced by the positive experiences that they had had during their internships. Students frequently referred to a particular emotional context or a skilful and charismatic clinical tutor making the difference. Other reasons were also identified, distinguished by preferred healthcare areas as follows.

Five out of 37 students chose the Paediatrics Area: they expressed two preferences, for Paediatrics and Maternity units (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Preferences for Maternity and Paediatric areas: students' explanations.



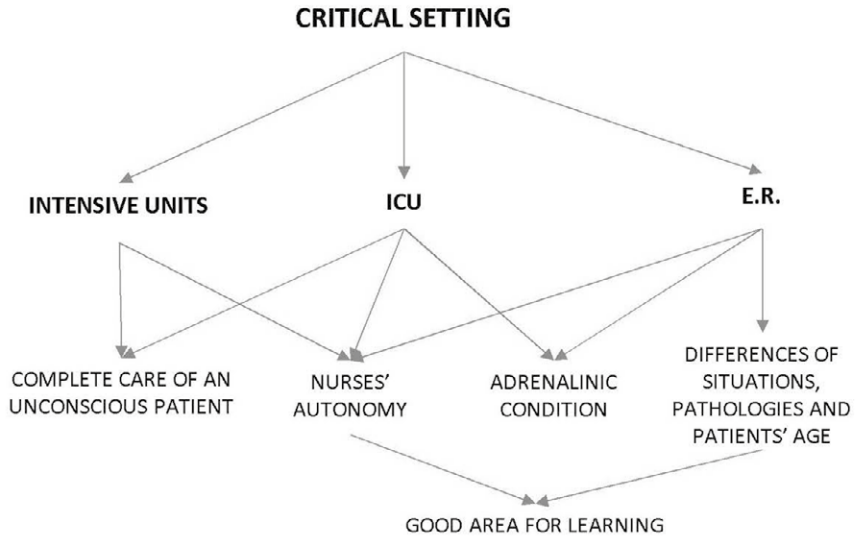
Three students chose the maternity unit because of their desire to assist new mothers in learning to care for their baby, and because of a natural aptitude to socializing with other women. Lastly, because in this area there were no chronic patients.

Those who chose the Paediatric unit explained their choice simply with the statement, «I love children, even better if new-born». Moreover, they discussed the complexity of caring for an ill child, since professionals are more emotionally engaged, this might contribute to letting them feel useful to young patients as well as their parents.

There was another interesting result: the students who chose the Paediatric and Maternity units underlined that these areas are less exposed to the risk of having to cope with death, pain, or a therapy failure compared to other areas (e.g.: Geriatrics or General Medicine).

Three units were chosen as being in the 'critical area': Coronary Intensive Unit, Intensive Care Unit, and A&E. This sector was chosen by many students: 11 out of 37 (Fig. 3).

Figure 3 – Preferences for Critical areas: students' explanations.



Regarding the reasons linked to this choice, the students reported that working in this sector represented a chance to cope with a variety of situations, pathologies, and different patients and, in addition, might be an opportunity to acquire (or reinforce) new knowledge and skills. They affirmed that in this sector nurses could play an active role in managing the critical situation and working with the medical team. From the students' point of view, these elements all seemed to contribute to a more detailed nurse profile.

Above all, in the intensive units, students mentioned the inclusive relationship they could establish with a sedated patient who, in this way, seemed to be utterly dependent on their care.

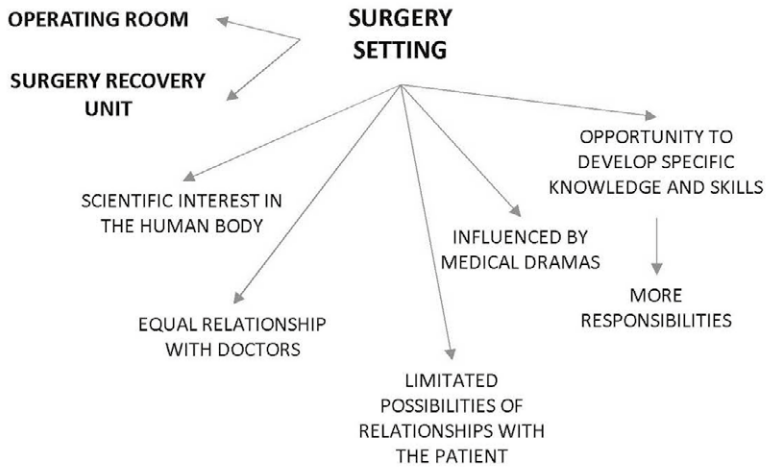
The situation characterized by A&E, the chance to save patients' lives and the adrenaline-filled condition deriving from this idea, clearly represented some salient motivations for these students.

Five students chose the surgical area; the Surgical Ward and the Operating Theatre were the two units they pointed to (Fig. 4).

The first motivation reported concerned the chance to obtain more information, knowledge, and skills linked to the acquisition of more responsibilities.

The students preferred the operating theatre where they could experience direct work on patients, linked to the chance to satisfy their interest in the human body (as a tangible object to be handled). In this healthcare setting the relationship with the doctors seems to have been perceived at the same level.

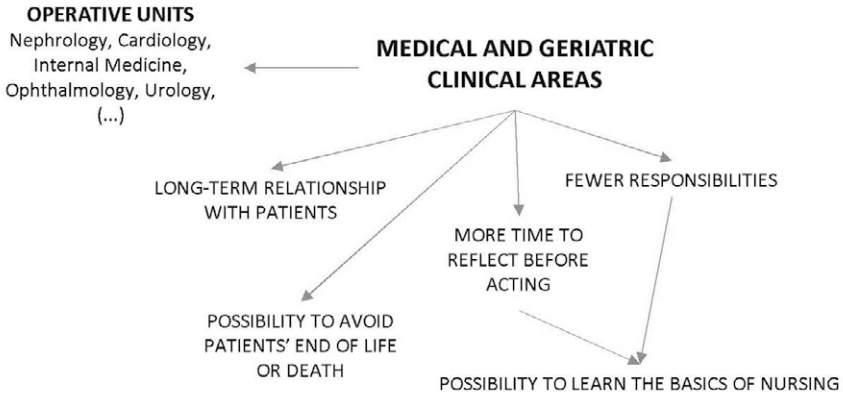
Figure 4 – Preferences for Surgery area: students' explanations.



Certain stereotypes, derived from television medical dramas, emerged from the students' accounts. Additionally, they stated that these areas let them avoid emotional involvement with the patients.

Seven students chose General Medicine (5) and Geriatric Area (2); results are described together because they present some analogies. Many clinical units have been pointed out by students (Fig. 5).

Figure 5 – Preferences for Medical and Geriatric area: students' explanations.



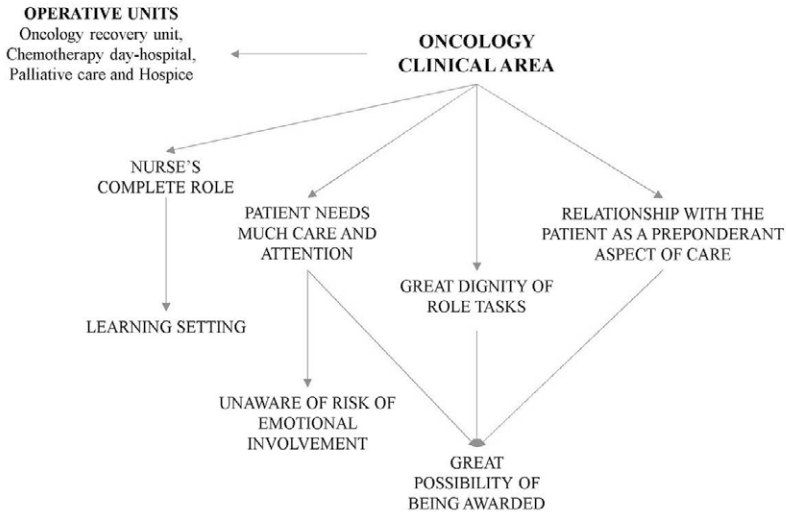
Students stated that they preferred these contexts because they offer many chances to establish a continuative, holistic, and deep relationship with the patient. This area was considered a good setting

for initial employment, because it let new graduate nurses learn the basics of their job in a safe condition. Even in this area, nevertheless, one student reported fear of patients dying.

Only one student chose the Home Care Area. His motivation was linked to the opportunity to establish with the patients and their family a caring alliance and a human relationship; this would let him become a reference point for them. In this way, he expected to receive significant payback for his efforts.

Four students chose the oncological area. They indicated the Oncology, Chemotherapy, and Ambulatory Units, and the Hospice (Fig. 6).

Figure 6 – Preferences for Oncology area: students' explanations.



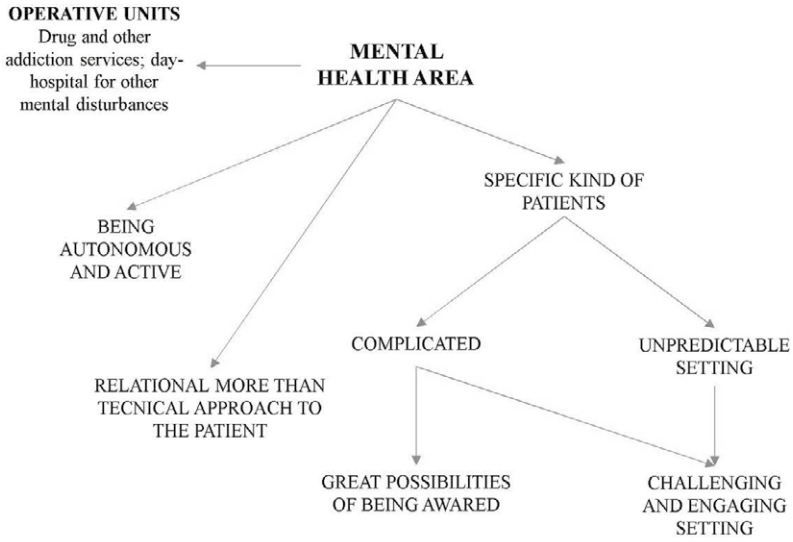
These students told us about the opportunity to play – as a nurse – a complete role in terms of caring for a patient who needs human attention. Almost all said that taking care of a dying patient during his or her last days seemed to be a virtuous professional aim. One of them mentioned some personal grief that influenced his choice; this personal experience may have significantly contributed to his future professional preferences. It is possible to reflect on the extent of his elaboration of grief.

Students seemed to perceive the oncology patient as a complex person and, for this reason, someone who could stimulate their professional learning. This complexity, indeed, and the great need for care of these patients let students imagine – or expect? – to receive significant feedback (in terms of self-esteem and self-efficacy), not com-

parable to other areas. Students involved in this study seemed not to be sufficiently aware of the risk of emotional involvement. Very few reflections on this theme were recorded.

Four students chose the Mental Health Area. Everyone indicated the Dependency Service (Fig. 7).

Figure 7 – Preferences for Mental Health area: students' explanations.



These students mentioned the operative and autonomous role that nurses can play in this context. Besides this, patients suffering from drug addiction seemed to be particularly stimulating for these students, since they were described as complex and unpredictable but, at the same time, captivating and capable of great payback. Additionally, the continuity of the assistance allows nurses to take care of these patients more through a human relationship than a technical approach.

3. Discussion and final remarks

The choices and preferences that moved these students near graduation were coherent with other previous studies (Williams *et al.* 1997). They were keen (except for few cases) to stand caring for a patient, even if suffering from a chronic condition. Despite this, the analysis of the students' answers concerning the explanation of their future professional preferences, revealed some inappropriate – or unrealistic – ideas. Students seemed not to have a clear awareness regarding

their future job in the various healthcare areas. Firstly, a sort of instinctive love for children drove some students towards the maternity or paediatric sector and let us hypothesize a desire for *maternage* – 'mothering', rather than a real understanding of the complexity of paediatric patients (Happell 2000).

In other cases, choosing a specific sector seemed to be a way to avoid suffering, death, or patients' pain: all these elements could compromise the need for security and control that many of these students expressed directly or indirectly (Rosenbloom *et al.* 1999). On the other hand, those who chose the oncological context seemed to express a heroic will, but perhaps they were seeking a social payback that they perceived as necessary for their self-esteem. The security they mentioned in coping with the risk of human involvement in a patient's history of pain, is indeed incoherent with their youth and the competences they may have acquired a few months before taking their degree. In fact, solidarity (like the main professional motivations) appears linked to a major risk of exposure to burn-out (Joinson 1992; Crumpei, Dafinoiu 2012).

Lastly, the students' desire (frequently expressed) to work in a critical setting was very meaningful: they wished for a job that would give them the chance to be, continually, in an adrenaline-filled condition, to help a critical patient utterly dependent on their skills. This dependence concerned both the patient's therapeutic needs and (even more significantly for the students) his or her life. This attitude may have derived from a prolonged adolescent desire for power and control (Barone 1990 Rosenbloom *et al.* 1999), alternatively, it could be an attention-seeking behaviour. Moreover, it could be coming from the current social and cultural context characterized by a hyper-stimulating environment which might induce them to need continuous stimuli at every moment of their life (even from a professional point of view) (Griffiths 2000).

Considering the preferences and desires expressed by the students involved in this study, there is little space for the concrete needs of the patient. It is not simply arguing what level of awareness these students near graduation possess regarding patients' human needs, or about their skills and competence (or limits) in caring for them (Cowin 2001).

The results of the present study let us partially confirm our initial hypothesis; generally, it was indeed possible to identify in these students a limited consideration of the concrete opportunities for employment and a poor awareness of the real complexity of both their job and patient's needs. These distortions, within a few years, might expose them to some dangerous consequences concerning their own identity as well as their emotional wellbeing (Yoder 2010; Stamm 1999; Fingley 1995). This risk appears increased by a clear absence

in their portfolio of competences in some meta-cognitive skills that could protect them from any disturbances or vicarious traumas (Yassen 1995). These are some serious educational gaps that must be bridged by some specific paths to help them comprehend and integrate into their vocational wishes a more realistic idea of patients, as well as a clear idea of the nursing profession (a difficult job, full of professional, emotional, and personal obstacles). The literature appears rich in suggestions regarding training strategies fit for this student target: there are some didactic strategies by which it appears possible to lead students to integrate their – prevalently – rational thinking with a more contemplative one (Heiddeger 1966; Hixon 1978). In this way, they would able to care for a patient while thinking about his or her wellbeing (which only the patient can describe – Mottura 1986), avoiding wasting their good intentions and vocational motivation on role profiles which, in the present healthcare systems, are less and less requested.

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GUIDANCE MODELS AND PRACTICES ADOPTED INTERNATIONALLY TO PROMOTE THE EXPLORATION OF SKILLS RELATING TO THE EMPLOYABILITY OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. A FIRST META-ANALYSIS*

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Abstract: *Introduction*: Employability is defined as an interweaving of a person's human, social and psychological capital, mediated by situational variables, which allows individuals to enter the job market with a professional personal project (Grimaldi, Porcelli, Rossi 2014). Nowadays, young people enter the job market through long, precarious, and poorly contextualized paths, while the socialization processes become recursive, discontinuous, and fragmented (Lodigiani 2010). A key role can be played by guidance services, which can start at university, to meet the demands of the (many) young people who are discouraged and disillusioned to the point where they cannot even imagine a job while still at university. In the employability stakes, what is even more complex is the encounter between young people with disabilities and the world of work, due to the persistence of stereotypes and stigmas. *Research questions*: What are the intervention models and guidance practices adopted by university guidance services internationally to promote the exploration of skills relating to the employability of students with disabilities? *Objectives*: To analyse the main intervention models and guidance practices adopted internationally to explore the skills associated with employability in students with disabilities. *Methodology*: It was decided to carry out a theoretical analysis of 20 scientific articles concerning the models and practices adopted to explore the competences relating to employability in certain university orientation services for students with disabilities in Italy, France, the UK, and the United States. NVivo software was used (Richards 1999) to systematically explore the scientific literature. *Preliminary Findings*: A first scientific paper showed that, like in Italy and France, the «Competence Balance Sheet» (Ardouin 2010) is the guiding practice in the USA, while in the UK, it is the Career Guidance Approach (Reid, Scott 2010). In the literature, orientation models and practices are also closely linked to the various patterns of employability. *Final remarks*: The implementation of guidance counseling paths aimed at exploring the skills associated with employability among all students and graduates is crucial to the completion of a viable strategic action in the University's social function, as a part of new organizational models that take the plurality of learning opportunities into account.

Keywords: employability, orientation, disability.

* Maria Papathanasoiu is the author of the Introduction; Marianna Capo is the author of the first and second paragraphs; Valentina Paola Cesarano is the author of the third, fourth and fifth paragraphs; Maura Striano is the author of the Final remarks.

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1. Introduction

The theme of employability involves orientation, training, and work, as well as their various junctures. In the face of today's complexity characterized by recursive, irregular, and fragmented recruiting and socialization processes (Lodigiani 2010), guidance services can play a leading role, which can begin at university, to meet the demands of the (many) young people who declare themselves discouraged and disillusioned to the point that they are already unable to imagine a job during their university studies (Grimaldi, Porcelli, Rossi 2014). In the context of employability, there is an even more difficult encounter, namely, between young people with disabilities and the world of work, a match that is still very difficult to implement, and is sometimes even denied, since very often the persistence of stereotypes and stigmas, coupled with the lack of a genuine political and systemic will in applying and enforcing the norms, often makes the world of work inaccessible, or disinclined to change in its organizational culture. It is important to bear in mind the functional and cognitive characteristics, individual goals, and potential, in the academic and professional spheres of undergraduate students with disabilities when they are transitioning to the adult and professional life. Indeed, Carter *et al.* (2012) already pointed out that disabled students usually complete their university course without the skills, abilities, and experience, and sometimes even without the support, that would allow them to have concrete job opportunities. It is therefore essential to develop training and guidance paths at university geared to the employability of students with disabilities.

To understand which orientation patterns and practices encourage the exploration and advancement of employability and related competences of undergraduate students with disabilities in Italy and abroad, we chose to make a first meta-analysis of the Italian and international scientific literature on this subject, using NVivo software (Richards 1999), with the aim of systematically exploring a corpus of selected scientific material. An analysis was made of scientific literature from Italy, France, the UK, and the USA, since there is a proliferation of studies and reflections in these contexts in relation to the subject in question. Beginning from the Grounded Theory perspective (Glaser, Strauss 1967), with the support of the NVivo Software, the collected articles were coded, and the following analysis categories were formulated:

- The construct of employability in Italy, France, the UK, and the USA
- Employability orientation practices in Italy, France, the UK, and the USA
- Theoretical reference models based on orientation practices
- The relationship between skills and employability

In the process of the contribution, the subdivision of these categories will be intensified to achieve the enucleating of a core category from a qualitative meta-analysis, defined as 'Orientation as an educational task'.

1.1 The employability construct: a brief theoretical excursus and the Italian INAPP proposal

Back in the '50s and '60s, the term 'employability' had already appeared in the scientific literature. From a review by Cavenago and Martini (2012), it is apparent that the concepts of dichotomic employability and socio-medical employability were in use in those years to distinguish between 'manageable' and 'unmanageable' people based on personal predisposition and aptitude, and physical and mental health. The increase in unemployment in the 1970s called for the introduction of the term *workforce employment ability* with which the alignment (or misalignment) between the knowledge and skills possessed by the individual was categorized with respect to market demand. In the 1980s, the term 'employability' was adopted by companies to identify the flexibility of the workforce, which at that time became an indispensable competence for addressing the demands of a brand-new job market. In political and institutional spheres, the European Employment Strategy and the various EC documents that have been around since the '90s interpret employability as people's ability to enter the job market. It was from the '90s onwards that a proliferation of studies can be noticed on the issue of employability, seen as a multidimensional construct in which certain factors come together, both external ones related to the contexts of life and the job market, and the internal ones of individuals (Lefresne 1999; Forrier, Sels, 2003; Fugate, Kinicki, Ashforth 2004; Fugate, Kinicki 2008). In constructing employability, attention has sometimes been given to more contextual/objective aspects (the job market situation, the characteristics of organizations/companies, the number of changes in work, etc.) and sometimes to more individual aspects (personal characteristics, individual adaptability, flexibility, etc.) until patterns developed that interwove both factors (Fugate, Kinicki, Ashforth 2004; McQuaid, Lindsay 2005; Cavenago, Magrin, Martini, Monicelli 2012). Of particular interest is the definition of employability formulated by Grimaldi, Porcelli & Rossi (2014) as «the intertwining of a person's human, social, and psychological capital – mediated by situational variables – which allows individuals to venture into/re-enter the job market with a professional personal project obeying the context» (p. 58).

This definition reflects the employability model developed by INAPP (National Institute for Public Policies Analysis), which considers individuals' biographical and curriculum data, their context, and their environmental and life conditions.

2. The Italian context: some examples of experimentation and good practice guidance

In Italy, the education of people with disabilities is based on a socio-bio-psycho-pedagogical approach that considers the cultural context, the physical and psychological wellbeing (but not only), and individual abilities. In the fields of accompanying study and orientation in higher education, the Italian system considers the relationship between the student and the consultant who will be co-responsible not only for the development of the student's university project but also their professional project. Particularly interesting in the Italian context is the approach and methodology of the Foro Italico University of Rome, which focuses on the orientation of undergraduate students with disabilities towards the job market. The Foro Italico University of Rome has an internship and job placement office where the professional experiences of the students during their Degree Course are collected, and advice is provided on the future possibilities of use. In general, the university offers two professional outlooks: specific training (internships) and recognition of the work carried out.

It is through the university's relationship with employers (companies, associations, etc.), regarding the availability and skills of the students concerned, that the internships become possible depending on the level of study. Meanwhile, the employer may also ask the university for a Trainee Profile that responds to their interests. Specifically, for disabled students, the internship and job placement office works closely with the Specialized Education support service. The main difference from other students is that the personal data on students with disabilities and related information are available from the Specialized Educator's Office. Overall, the students' skills and specific needs are examined in accordance with their social and educational development. Decisions on issues concerning people with disabilities are taken in agreement with the Support Centre, the Managing Director, and the individual student. The theoretical model for accompanying students with disabilities on which the orientation practices of the Foro Italico University of Rome are based, was inspired by a pilot work developed by the Danish University of Aarhus. In the framework of the European Leonardo Project, *Univers'emploi* (2012), the four partner countries involved, France, Ireland, Italy, and Denmark, adopted this model.

The basic idea of the model was the inclusion of people with different learning modes, both in the educational system and in society, with an emphasis on supporting people in their transition from university education to work. This model was based on four key concepts: education, inclusion, learning and life project. The theoretical reference substrate, based on the capacity model developed by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2010) contains a very useful picture. This model, like the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health Classification), focuses on people's abilities – or rather, on their potential. The concept of 'potential' is grounded in the theory of experimental learning by Peter Jarvis (1995) and the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1927) based on human development. Guidance practices inspired by this model relate to Career Counseling and Career Coaching, according to a humanistic-existential approach where subjects are questioned, and meaning is given to their transition to the job market (*Univers'emploi* 2012a). In general, disabled students have low expectations regarding their future in the job market. They therefore need to examine and clarify their motivations and potential in relation to the job market. Career Focus is an extension of the students' field of opportunity in terms of access to professional realization. To achieve this, it is important for students to become aware of both their resources and potential, and the difficulties and challenges associated with future job placement. Consequently, the reflection must be on their disability status in relation to inclusion and exclusion processes, for example, to a future working environment. In this light, career counseling can therefore create a space for reflection on their professional project to activate a process of clarification and to be able to plan career goals (*Univers'emploi* 2012b).

In Italy, certain permanent orientation tools have been prepared for self-assessment by students with disabilities. For example, the University of Macerata (Formiconi, Nicolini, Regolo 2015) has developed an online platform that allows a disabled person to self-assess their knowledge, skills, strengths, and working conditions, to increase the specificity of the match between the specific professional profile of the candidate with disabilities and the various training and/or work fields, enhancing the characteristics and uniqueness of their competences. The various professional profiles are then operationalized by articulating them into: knowledge, skills, needs in working conditions linked to disability, plus a profile of their own intellect. The value of the platform is the active role of self-assessor played by the candidate in disability status, thereby becoming the key resource and not a person hired because of legislative obligation. In this sense, orientation assumes the value of a continuous and articulate process whose main purpose is the support of self-awareness and potential, acting

within the area of a person's proximal development to realize their own personal, social, and professional identity. The results of research conducted in collaboration with the Chair of Psychology of Education and Professional Orientation and the Centre for Orientation and Training of the University of Catania (Magnano, Paolillo 2008) on a representative sample of the population of disabled students at the Centre for Active and Participating Integration of the University of Catania (CinAP), included an exploration of the following components: professional values; working styles and motivation; thoughts on the future – self-image; perceived self-efficacy; the relationship between all the above dimensions. The tools used for research purposes were taken from the Portfolio for Assessment, Treatment, and Integration of Disabilities – ASTRID-OR (Sores, Note 2007). To these was added an instrument for self-image capture from the Guidance Questionnaire of the University of Catania. The synthesis of the results of this research reminds us of a fundamental concept: the importance for those in a 'peculiar' state to find a dimension in their personal and professional realization, including the Other, which lets them establish a relationship where they feel useful to another person, thus being able to play, but also to develop and expand their skills and abilities. It is the dimension of the meeting with the Other that subsequently justifies all the other aspects considered relevant to the work, such as the use of one's own skills, prestige, group work, professional creativity, economic security, involvement, and commitment. This is a first element of divergence with respect to previous surveys of samples of normative associates attending the same university (Magnano, Paolillo 2008), the centrality accorded even before their own self-realization (in terms of matching work to their own interests and capabilities), the ability to be of help to others. In addition, considering the characteristics of the group involved in the research, it was noted that the decision to face a university course in search of a job is a motivating factor in itself, implying, however, an important level of investment and interest in the future, and the will to be as independent as possible.

What emerges, therefore, is a second difference with respect to normative students: the extent to which independence is seen as a professional value for these subjects is at the basis of the scale of priorities (Magnano, Paolillo 2008). Qualitative data analysis showed the choice of the degree programme mattering more than the profession to which it aspired, while the professional experiences already gained (for some) also determined the respondents' decision. Thus, their targets remained strongly 'desired', as stages of a process aimed at obtaining their autonomy and independence to the greatest degree possible. For disabled students, the moment of impasse and greatest

pressure would seem to come later, when their training path has already been 'decided' or is about to end, and the choices to be made concern their own, already concrete, professional future. From an operational standpoint, therefore, it is necessary to think of the initiatives proposed by the departments as providing guidance to organize outbound paths for those students with 'peculiar' health conditions, who are in the process of graduating. This often means that they are working on scaling down the stereotypes or irrational ideas that are sometimes present and can impact their professional future, and above all their decision-making processes, ideas that still arouse some trepidation about the consequences of their actions, at times impeding unrealistic mental openness in dealing with the uncertainty and decisions associated with a professional choice. Therefore, a key result for disabled university students is the adaptation of means and the designing of future goals for their life (Nota, Rossier 2015). In addition, the use of inclusive modalities and achievements in everyday life can make for an inclusive university experience, a model of participation to be carried with them through life and with which the university prepares its students (Getzel, Wehman 2005).

3. Guidance on work and employability in France: Mission Handicap from a constructivist perspective

In France, the accompaniment of disabled students is based on the medical-social approach. Taking care of students through the services is subject to prior recognition of the disability, which includes a medical assessment. In French universities, Mission Handicap is a point of reference for disabled students, a key pillar, and the place where pedagogical compensation and coordinated construction of the professional project (orientation, reorientation, internships, university/work Alternance). The French universities' approach places the student as the centre of the 'accompaniment work'. Orientation is characterized here by a constructivist approach that gives greater weight to the student's relationship and life experience, and emphasizes problem-solving and an emphasis on student assessment with the delivery of a final response. This approach encourages individuals to tell their story, and to identify their own life and career themes. The consultant thus operates more like a biographer who interprets life rather than an accountant who coldly deals with passivity and activity. The goal of the orientation process is thus to promote empowerment, to enable students to deal with transitions and to govern their own career path. This occurs to the extent that the accompanying practice calls for the development of social skills, adaptation, relationalism, mobi-

lization, and participation in projects, facilitation of material, human and intellectual studies, all elements that are part of a global project. In other words, success in studies is a condition for professional success. (*Univers'emploi* 2012). The demand to accompany vocational training comes increasingly from the students themselves, when they present a problem and question their path. Whether they come to this point of reflection is either because they have been forced to quickly find a compulsory internship, they have to enter the world of work, or because they have been regularly questioned by Mission Handicap on issues relating to job placement and the idea that the road gradually continues, to start verbalizing their professional expectations and begin the project. Starting from the Mission Handicap model, the contribution of the *Univers'emploi* project methodology enabled inclusion of the activity in an integrated transition system focusing on the following dimensions: to foster students' accompaniment in terms of their 'becoming' professional, in any case, an openness to the world of work; to measure the evolution of the course begun by the student; to formalize the skills gained after an internship or work experience (usually done during the summer holidays); a bonding between the accompanying, orientation and job placement services; implementing regulations between universities and companies involving issues relating to the employment of students with disabilities. Employability in the French context is defined as the probability of retrieving or retaining a job. It depends on personal factors (aptitudes and abilities) and/or situational factors (job market, workplace accessibility and work methods, adaptability of workstations and organizational schemes, professional constraints, etc.) (Busnel 2010: 17). To promote employability, on 22 July 2013, by law, France introduced education in entrepreneurship into Higher Education and Research. Several analysts see in the 'Entrepreneurship University' the future of the university alongside its new 'third mission', connected with the world of business (Vorley, Nelles 2008).

4. The Anglo-Saxon context: Career guidance services

In British universities where there is an increase in students and graduates with disability status, career orientation services are provided which provide information, counseling and guidance in an accessible way to all students. These practices are based on the theoretical model of educational and vocational guidance (Reid 2010) that 'educates' students to build and explore the narrative of their own vocations. Furthermore, in the designing of career guidance services, people with disabilities are also involved as key eyewitnesses in the

co-designing of orientation activities. Equally important is the relationship with the career counsellor, who accompanies the student in pursuit of job opportunities and internships both during the university course and up to two years after graduation, as in the case of Brunel University. The university encourages feedback from all students on Career Guidance services. Some universities, such as Manchester Metropolitan University, have developed a peer mentoring system. This provides opportunities for disabled students to develop the social skills required by the workforce and promotes career guidance services. The realization of Career Guidance services in Anglo-Saxon contexts involves exploring the possible barriers to entry into the workplace in advance, including the problems experienced by students and graduates with disabilities. Loughborough University has set up a group of professional consultants in a career guidance service together with an employment centre intended to deal effectively with the problems of students with disabilities regarding job placement and to offer effective individualized solutions, as well as the pursuit of opportunities to do internships. For example, the University of Bradford provides all students with placement opportunities during the summer break. Students meet with a professional counsellor and together find suitable apprenticeship opportunities and before doing so, there is a preparatory phase to reflect on the planned tasks and activities. The consultants visit the host company and at the end of the internship experience a 'reflexive folder' is compiled in which the students report on the activities and the skills acquired that contributed to the construction of their professional project. In regard to the employability construct, the Anglo-Saxon literature tends to oppose a simplistic model of employability, that is, the model of the 'magic wand' – according to which a student is employable by virtue of his or her university education – a model of employability development that takes into account one side of the individual's potential in terms of self-cultivation and, on the other, the actual employment the individual has had, mediated by economic and social factors (Harvard 2010). There would then be factors linking these two dimensions of work experience, namely; the development of self-promotion and career management skills; the will to learn and reflect on acquired learning. Hence the need to create pedagogically-oriented spaces and places for reflection and orientation to employability.

5. The American context: skills-based guidance services

American universities offer their students with disabilities Career Counseling founded on a work-based learning model to help them

make decisions about their careers. Through interaction between work and study experiences, students can improve their academic knowledge, personal development, and professional preparation (Brand, Valent, Danielson 2013). The purpose of this service is to promote 'career readability', namely career readiness in the achievement and demonstration of skills that prepare graduates for a successful transition to the world of work (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2015). American literature highlights the importance of exploration and orientation skills, particularly for disabled students, in cases where they are considered incapable of working autonomously and this has a negative impact on their rates of employment (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). Employers cite employability skills as being the most important (Hart Research Associates 2015; British Council 2011). Lack of employability skills can contribute to a 'talent shortage' (Manpower Group 2012). Demonstration of employability skills is correlated with top hiring rates, job success, and profits (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, Moore 2015). The Washington Department of Education has elaborated a model of employability skills that could play a crucial role in university transition programmes for disabled students, for success in the job market. The framework for occupational skills consists of three principal areas of competence:

- Effective relationships that can be translated into effective relationship skills, i.e., those skills that help individuals interact effectively with clients, colleagues, and employers. In this area they associate interpersonal skills and personal qualities.
- Workplace skills that can be translated into skills in the workplace, i.e., those skills that enable successful performance of work assignments. This category includes resource management skills, information usage, communication skills, systematic thinking, and technological skills.
- Applied Knowledge, i.e., integration of the knowledge acquired in the academic context and technical skills put into practice in the workplace. This category covers academic knowledge applied to the working context and critical thinking.

6. Final remarks: The relationship between skills and employability for orientation as educational work

Despite the criticalities associated with the employment of university students in a disability state, our meta-analysis shows that the scientific literature highlights the fundamental role played by vocational guidance services to support the transition to the world of work through various instruments from Career Guidance to Career Counseling. However, in the international context, some of these

guidance instruments involve theoretical efforts to build specific employability models and related skills. It is possible to see how skills as the orchestration and mobility of knowledge and competences are transferred to various contexts and their elaboration contributes to the definition of employability and makes it possible. Nevertheless, it is impossible to establish a universal set of skills for employability, not only because these skills vary according to the job market segments and the stratification of roles, but also because the pluralism of the value scales for the quality of work is related to competences in different socio-cultural contexts. Meanwhile, in their diversity, these models emphasize both individual factors and abilities as well as external factors related to the socio-economic reality of the world of work. In addition to this, there is a need to carry out accompanying practices for the transition to the world of work of all students, characterized not only by a 'technocratic' orientation involving the compilation of psycho-attitudinal tests to be cross-referenced with professional profiles; the ability to apply curriculum vitae and motivational writing strategies, targeted research techniques, and self-marketing practices. In line with this, the use of the NVivo software has enabled the core category 'Orientation as an educational task' to enucleate orientation as a process that people put into practice to guide their relationships with training and work through development, in the lifelong and life-wide dimensions of Competency 3B recognizable as the ability to define and make plans for life and personal projects. We could consider this competence as 'reflective' since it supports individuals in interpreting their life giving it meaning and significance (OECD 2005).

Consequently, as highlighted by Grimaldi, Rossi, and Porcelli (2015), self-orientation skills (thinking and intentionally choosing one's own future), as well as those of design and self-design (life design) allow individuals to become employed, that is, to enter the job market with a professional personal project in tune with the context. Moreover, it is vital to value both the relationship with the working world from the viewpoint of Business – University Cooperation, and the promotion of support for human and social development in the sense understood in the Capability approach. This approach aims to restore people's dignity through the centrality of the human being as a set of individual aptitudes made up of opportunities, abilities, and their interaction with access to resources. Martha Nussbaum (2010) has drawn up a list of basic capabilities that are the same for all humans, trying to overcome the distinction between 'normal' people and people with disabilities, giving everyone the same rights. If, then, someone – whether disabled or not – cannot perform one of these key functions at the appropriate threshold level, society must create

the best way possible for him or her to do so. In this sense, people with disabilities are defined as having a capability set limited to their own goals, ambitions, and system of values. Therefore, from an educational perspective, we all have the potential to decide to be what we want to be, and the role of education is to enable this potential to be activated by creating an enabling environment (Ghedin 2009).

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TELLING TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES… TO BE PROFESSIONALLY PROMOTED*

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Abstract: This article introduces experimental reflection on the experiences at an 'Employability Skills' laboratory[1] of a group of young volunteers from the National Civilian Service under the 'Support and Inclusion' project of the Employment Promotion Section (SPO in Italian) of the University of Naples Federico II *SInAPSi* Centre. Young volunteers were included as unstructured support figures in activities that sought mainly to assist and serve students with disabilities. More specifically, these activities included: accompaniment and support during lessons; digitization of teaching material; providing support for the assorted services offered by the University Centre; general training implemented by AMESCI staff; specific training implemented by SInAPSi operatives. The experiences, which were accomplished in cooperation with the Europe 2020 programme, included the creation of an integrated system to recognize and validate formal, non-formal, and informal skills, as a tool to promote youth employment (Striano, Capobianco 2016).

Keywords: employability, narration, skills, storytelling, social services.

1. The synergy between the SInAPSi Centre and National Civilian Service

Italian National Civilian Service (SCN in Italian) is an opportunity for young people between the ages of 18 and 28, regardless of gender, to spend twelve months of their lives supporting community service commitments, social cohesion values, and realizing everyone's wellbeing, collectively and individually.

* The contribution is the result of a collective work. For academic reasons, it should be noted that Marianna Capo is the author of the third and fourth paragraphs, Valentina Cesarano of the second paragraph, Maria Papathanasiou of paragraph 2.1 and Maura Striano is the author of the conclusions.

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[1] [Author's note] The work described in the article was carried out by Dr. Marianna Capo, PhD in Psychological and Pedagogical Science, and Carolina Galdo, Psychologist. Among the most recent publications of Dr. Capo, the following should be mentioned here: Capo 2016c and 2016d; Capo, Navarra 2016; Capo 2017.

As ratified by the National Civilian Service Act (Law 64/2001, Article 1), the goal is to:

- foster implementation of the constitutional principles of social service (Article 1, para. b);
- promote solidarity and cooperation at national and international levels, above all with regard to the protection of social rights, services for the people, and the bringing of peace to communities (Article 1, para. c);
- participate in the safeguarding and protection of the nation's heritage […] (Article 1, para. d); and finally,
- contribute to the civic, social, cultural, and professional education of young people through activities that may also be carried out at authorities and administrations operating abroad (Art.1, para. e).

As stated above, civilian service is to be considered an active citizenship experience that guarantees the young volunteers both human and professional growth. Moreover, for the entire duration of the project, it allows them to devote time to themselves and others, thus enriching their education from various perspectives: personal, professional, cultural, social, and civic. In this way, young people reap the opportunity to become citizens who are participants and protagonists of their own future and that of others (Muroni 2017). All made possible by the heterogeneity and multiplicity in the sectors of intervention the SCN addresses, i.e.: education; cultural promotion; the protection and safeguarding of historical-artistic, cultural, environmental, and forestry heritage; civil protection and assistance. The civilian service volunteer experience as job creation in an organized context is conceived as an occasion for knowledge and training, especially and above all of the professional variety (Capo *et al.* 2015) whose outcome and failures are rarely formalized and validated through instruments and tools specifically tailored to the user's profile. For this reason, it was suggested that the training of volunteers should not only include a specific section to assess inbound and outbound cross-skills, in order to provide volunteers with an opportunity to discover knowledge and acquired skills as well as measuring the occupational levels possessed. The introduction of a functional narrative instrument through the dedicated use of multimedia technologies was also suggested, with the aiming of promoting and evaluating the volunteers' employability levels.

The long-term objective is the development of a Balance of Competence tool that allows operationalization of the construction of employability and exploration of the related competences according to the model prepared by INAPP (previously ISFOL 2016), which, starting from this experimental encounter, can be systematized, and extended to other types of user (university students, graduates, research fellowships,

research doctors). From the perspective of further education, orientation is a necessary interface to ensure continuity and significance for training processes, facilitating the recognition of a personal and professional development project consistent with the expectations, needs, resources, and potential of individuals, in relation to their life contexts (Striano 2004; Savickas *et al.* 2010). The Occupational Promotion Service (SPO) plays a strategic role in enhancing and promoting integrated actions of guidance, motivation, and support to civilian service volunteers in developing their training and work scheme through analysis of intersecting skills possessed by the following aims and objectives, i.e., it proposes to:

- offer a comparison space to learn from the experience of others;
- help individuals become aware of their own transverse and professional skills;
- help reveal often latent knowledge, aptitudes, skills, interests, and aspirations that define them as particular individuals;
- maintain the definition of a professional project consistent with the skills developed in the various training paths (formal, non-formal and informal) and with personal expectations

and also aims to:

- promote ability in self-assessment and activation;
- help define and valorize individuals' strengths and room for possible improvement;
- know themselves and their potential (with specific reference to the potential of internal employability);
- develop interests and motivation.

This is therefore a way to intensify volunteers' training and professional pathways by means of a narrative description of the skills and knowledge gained during a work experience placement. From this standpoint, the training proposal is an intervention that allows volunteers to acquire explicit awareness of their personal and professional identity, an indispensable outlook to successfully address their own educational and professional pathways (De Mennato 2006; Cunti 2008; Lo Presti 2009).

2. The participants in the training experience and the methodological proposal

The reference sample consisted of 40 volunteers from the National Civilian Service (27 females and 13 males) of whom 5 had high school qualifications, 5 were university graduates (seeking employment) and 30 were undergraduates from the following university courses: Law (4); Engineering (5); Psychological Science (9); Social Service (4); Ge-

ology (1); Languages (3); Biology (3); Biotechnology (1). The proposed promotion of employability for volunteers at the University SInAPSi Centre was based on the use of diversified tools, and used a methodology founded on the narrative approach of Life Design Counseling (or Narrative Career Counseling) (Savickas *et al.* 2010; Savickas 2005, 2012; Savickas, Porfeli 2012). As Savickas points out, this is a frank attempt to bring meaning and shape to our future. In addition, the ability to narrate leads clients to better understand the driving motives of their own existence, their vocational personality, and their personal adaptability resources (Savickas 2005). Alongside this approach, the Balance of Competence was adopted according to the French model (Le Boterf 2000; Lemoine 2002; Lévy Leboyer, 1993; Aubret 2009), which requires self-assessment to activate the re-appropriation and enhancement of individuals' competences. This investigation was structured in 4 phases, for a total of 6 encounters, involving the following steps:

- reception (plenary session);
- exploration (group and individual mode);
- in-depth analysis (group and individual mode);
- conclusion (group mode).

The operational proposal for civilian service volunteers focuses on studies and research that support the use of narrative/autobiographical instruments that 'tell the story of one's life'. This can encourage greater awareness, revealing to the subject unimagined possibilities for change, and thus activating a power of existential and design reconfiguration. Indeed, the narrative is presented as a 'sense organizer', since it restores a sense of direction to heterogeneous and composite subjective experiences (Delory Momberger 2015; Formenti 1998; Pineau 2000).

Furthermore, the operational proposal refers to the outcomes of the European KVALUES project, revised within the Biographical Self Labs project: Objective Portfolio Worker, funded by the Puglia Region (*Bando Giovani Idee* 2012) (De Carlo 2014), considering the plurality of approaches and instruments for validation of learning, collected, and distributed by CEDEFOP in the European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (Brussels 2005-2011) and ISFOL (2014).

2.1 The promotion path to employability and the autobiographical Self

The training process to promote employability (including the Balance of Competence) is a qualitative/quantitative tool that can prompt autobiographical reconstruction, that is not merely a description of the past anchored to an ephemeral dimension, but a dynamic connection

between one's own self and the designability of one's own self. This reconstruction is intended as a journey through which subjects discover and re-elaborate experiences, grasping not only objectives and orientation, but also the ability to re-invent themselves, recognizing a set of elements to lay the foundations of their own development strategy on. The specific autobiographical dimension of the evaluation allows the individuals who use it to generate, through a narrative exposition, self-defensive cognitive processes that clarify the significance of the personal cognitive-emotional paths of experience and create a 'broader' sense of self, embracing the past, the present and the future. In this sense, the focus of the entire evaluation is to outline precisely the Autobiographical Self, so dear to Damasio (2000), who, in *The Feeling of What Happens*, describes the Extended Self, also defined as the Autobiographical Self, present within the extended consciousness as an elaboration that can provide individuals with a developed sense of self that considers the past and the anticipated future. For Damasio «here and now is still present, but it is accompanied by the past […] and, equally important, it is accompanied by the foreseen future» (Damasio 1999: 237). The evaluation of competences is, in fact, a retrospective of the past, which individuals form, and which makes them 'competent' in return, to re-read their past in the present while creating a large opening towards their future: all this autobiographical reconstruction work of experiences is part of a pedagogical framework in which training is understood as a complex, dynamic, active, continuous, and multidimensional process, attentive to relationships, inter- and intro-subjectivity. The immense importance attributed today to the subjective dimension of the balance of competences rather than to the objective one, concerns the use of all those narrative practices that represent privileged opportunities to enable individuals to become better acquainted with themselves, their desires, their own projects, their own successes and failures, but also their own expectations and concerns, and, above all, those skills possessed or implemented. Indeed, in recent years, a series of narrative orientation practices have spread as the most suitable for exploring oneself, but also for knowing and relating to others and to contexts; in fact, «there are narratives that can stimulate narration on oneself, fundamental narrative, and necessary for a guidance path […]. Then the confrontation appears, where the listening to the narratives of others, the identification of the narratives of others on us, constructs the collection of narratives» (Batini 2005: 49). Parker too argues that

> behind any autobiography there is always a person who gives importance and priorities to certain matters over others. […] These are the essential 'goods' with which the subject lives, which determine choices and ac-

> tions based on a particular ethic. […] Such goods […] inevitably form the stories the subject talks about when planning the future, reconstructing his or her past or present (Parker 2007: 1).

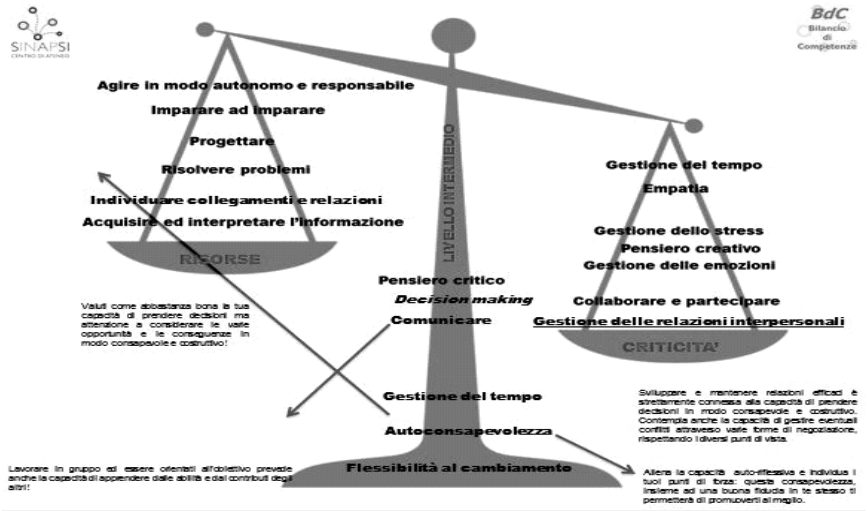
For this reason, the skills budget must be a sharing space 'where the subject feels free' to name these essential goods. A space of sharing that can reflect the subject, helping him to fully realize his or her cognitive and emotional skills. And is «the interweaving between the human, social, and psychological wealth of a person – mediated by situational variables – that allows subjects to re-enter the job market with a professional personal project in tune with the context» (Grimaldi, Porcelli, Rossi 2014: 58). Through this training to promote employability, individuals can connect, integrate, and articulate their resources in the light of a reflexivity that becomes an articulate analysis which then makes it possible to recognize the motivations that have guided their actions and also the skills and abilities gained in other experiences.

3. Variation in educational training for SCN volunteers operating at the SInAPSi Centre

The course is structured in two modules, Inbound (BdC1) and Outbound (BdC2), each divided into different training days where individual work moments alternate with activities in groups and/or subgroups. The work is based mainly on the direct experience that participants have through exercises, games, moments for reflection, focus groups, and brainstorming. Each volunteer is invited to collect all the material produced in a personal 'archive', a personal 'Travel Diary' representing the memory of their experience. Below we illustrate the three steps of the incoming route and the related tools used. The first phase is devoted to the reception, the creation of a collaborative environment, and the formation of the group. The group instrument is assumed as a context suitable to accommodate the «stresses of a plurality of models, each of which bear a selective enhancement of one or more structural dimensions of competence» (Galdo, in Striano, Capobianco 2016: 187). Through reciprocal presentation and interactive exchange, the relationship between the participants begins: the main dimensions the work emphasizes are motivation and relational attitudes. At this stage of the work, the participants are also given a 'Travel Diary', a folder to collect the tools used, which represents the memory of each participant's route. At this point, the contract or training agreement has also been clarified, which is where the presentation of the content of the training (inbound and outbound modules) is also planned. The second exploration phase is aimed at

subjective exploration through the distribution of a self-assessment questionnaire on cross-skills, and the AVO Giovani (ISFOL 2016) to assess internal employability potential. The third step is «to present an autobiographical narrative instrument, the *My Skills Patchwork*, an instrument designed to 'activate personal promotion' with the aim of supporting volunteers in reconstructing and presenting their personal history and training with particular attention to the various formal, non-formal, and informal contexts» (Capo, in Striano, Capo 2015: 142). This session is therefore key in «activating a subjective reconnaissance and reflection on personal training experiences, but also in interpreting students' expectations and aspirations» (Capo 2015: 142). At this stage, some time is also dedicated to the clarification of motivations, expectations, and general reflections: participants are offered the opportunity to reveal their personal motivations and expectations on the path they are facing through guided reflection. The ultimate step follows the final phase during which the skills profile returns in a paper version (Fig. 1), elaborated both by an analysis of *My skills Patchwork* and by the questionnaire on the self-evaluation of skills (quantitative analysis). From the analysis of the training experiences in the various contexts (formal, non-formal, and informal), initial and non-professional experiences, but above all through analysis of the questionnaire, «it becomes possible to identify for each student those skills that we could identify and define as "weak" and "strong", while photographing the set of core competences possessed by the subject» (Striano, Capobianco 2016: 145) as illustrated in the following chart:

Figure 1 – Graphic representation of the individual profile of cross-competences.



The reception phase of the incoming module (T0) provides an introductory moment during which the goals and stages of the entire evaluation path are presented to the volunteers. At this initial stage, and at the opening of subsequent workshops, the group is offered the use of the photo set 'Inside the photo' created and developed by ISFOL (2006). After specifying that this is a game of imagination where there is no right or wrong answer, the trainer asks each volunteer to choose one or more photographs (up to three), among those available, on the basis of which the person presents him- or herself and explains the expectations nurtured by the SCN experience. Volunteers point to a Post-it note positioned next to each selected image, with the size and characteristics identified. Then, positioned in a circle, they are invited to present themselves based on the reflections triggered. The introduction of such a procedure is particularly effective in facilitating exchange between the various members of the group and the establishment of a positive climate, essential for carrying out subsequent experiential activities. Within this game of imagination, the descriptive features of stimuli can be elaborated by the participants in a subjective manner. Each volunteer tends to attribute the pictures in the photos, their expectations and feelings, to the experience, as well as their own personal characteristics, skills and competences: the images become the starting point to narrate their own personal and professional experiences, facilitating the emergence and sharing of thoughts and emotions. After the presentation ends, the activity continues with a later stage of work, to be held this time in a group. In the absence of the trainer, the participants will arrange the photos, individually selected, on a single noticeboard: the task is to choose, from images and individual representations, a name and/or an allegorical figure to represent the group's identity. The goal is to work on defining the identity of the volunteers' group and to bring out its motivations and expectations. The next exploration phase is dedicated to the distribution of the My Skills Patchwork tool which each volunteer will have to deal with individually (Tab. 1).

This is a narrative instrument divided into two thematic sections of in-depth analysis:

1) 'My Educational Experiences', with a focus on: a) the context's learning experiences (formal, non-formal, and informal); b) perception with respect to the educational implications of the experiences.

2) 'My Portrait' with a focus on: a) personal events considered particularly significant for professional growth; b) attitudes; c) the relationship with the professional context (Capo 2016b).

Below is a chart of the sections the narrative instrument is divided into.

Table 1 – Diagram depicting the sections of *My Skills Patchwork*.

My learning experiences
Formal experiences: indicates all those formal pathways (school, university, etc.) or any training course that led me to the acquisition of certificates, professional qualifications.
Non-formal experiences: indicate all experiences - personal activities (reading, cinema) in which I felt that I learned something significant, even though no formal recognition was obtained.
Informal Experience: Shows all experiences gained outside the formal circuits (eg, workplaces, etc.) that usually do not lead to official certifications but leave a lot of implied skills.
Professional Experience: Indicates all work experiences, including short-term or occasional ones.
My personal portrait
I define it with 5 adjectives: indicate 5 adjectives with which we define and present ourselves to the others.
Why I chose to do the Civil Service ...: Explain the reasons which led you to choose to experience Civil Service. And why did you choose the Sinapsi - Centro di Ateneo ?
My 'biographical evidence' indicates those milestones that have represented significant moments for personal growth and which have helped me achieve greater personal awareness
My interests: indicates the interests that at this time seem to be the most important
My Attitudes: Indicates your attitudes, that is, what you think to do independently of your own interests.
I volunteer to: ... tell how you live 'your' volunteer civil service.
My projects: try to expose your future personal / professional projects.

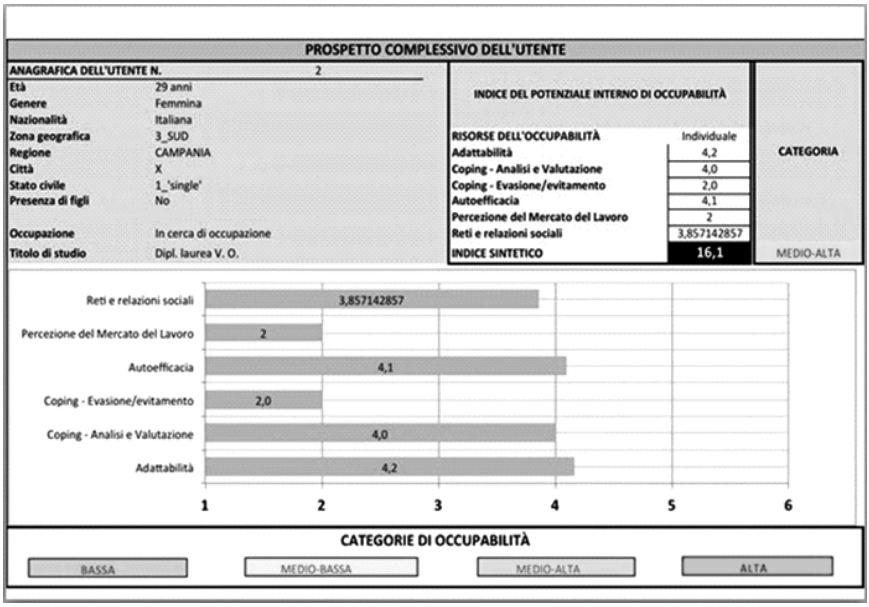
Therefore, the biographies/fiction sheet, *My Skills Patchwork*, for volunteers on the course is a useful tool to facilitate the approach to and comparison with different subjective dimensions such as self-image, interests, motivations, and attitudes. From this point of view, the subjects, with the trainer as a facilitator, can identify their skills more clearly, positively surpass critical situations, and, as far as the 'biographical wealth' is concerned, gain and increase their skills, abilities, and knowledge (Malrieu 2003; Guichard 2005; Rossi, Fabbri 2005; Delory Momberger 2013; Capo 2016a). It is therefore «a process that facilitates the recognition of personal abilities and competences for the subject, meaning the latter "not as static", given components but rather as "emerging" dimensions, or distinctive elements of a subjective dynamic and reflective reconstruction» (Capo 2016b: 4). The subject is promoted through the act of narrating and self-telling, therefore, the account does not favour access to a story that is already there, instead, the narration represents the space-time through which subjects create their own story and establish themselves as the subject of this story (Delory Momberger 2004; Guichard 2004). From this standpoint, the life story represents a «performative act» (Pineau 2000).

Subsequently, in the phase to intensify the evaluation, the volunteers are provided with a self-assessment questionnaire on cross-sectoral skills based on the key competences of the European Qualification Framework (2008), and Life Skills (OMS 1999, 2004). These skills are considered fundamental, especially in the field of work and in other aspects of life in general. In addition to these competences, as indicated by the EQF, the questionnaire examines Life Skills, a range of basic cognitive, emotional, and relational skills that enable individuals to work with both individual and social competence. Of the ten Life skills, eight were taken into consideration, since problem-solving and effective communication, which are two Life Skills, were already part of the EQF's competences. The questionnaire, consisting of 46 items with *Likert*-type scale *responses* (from 1 = nothing to 5 = very much), allows the subjects to express and attribute their value to the skills they are examining. This compilation formula is a training highly focused on the subject, since it uses a methodology aimed at the investigation and promotion of a subject's personal resources (Capo 2016a; Capo 2016b; Capo, Navarra 2016). Subjects', by expressing their own opinion with respect to the characteristics of a given competence (i.e. indicating what is consistent with a mark from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 5) reflects and gains greater self-awareness (Maiocchi, Porcelli 2007).

Beginning from 2016, the Occupational Health Services (SPO) section started collaborating with INAPP (previously ISFOL) and allowed the BdC orientation path specialist to administer a pilot experiment, anchored to the employability construct for a new audience of users, or young volunteers from the National Civilian Service (SNC). The AVO Giovani questionnaire (ISFOL 2016) identifies the employability profile (Fig. 2) of a subject based on some of the personal resources available that permits recognition of internal employability potential. The AVO Giovani questionnaire is subdivided into several sections which allows the investigation and elaboration of those aspects that have a major impact in determining subjects' employability (Grimaldi, Porcelli, Rossi 2014), e.g.:

- networking ability;
- knowledge and enjoyment of local services;
- social support;
- perception of the job market;
- endurance – coping;
- perceived self-efficacy;
- adaptability;
- locus of control

Figure 2 – Employability profile. [AVO Giovani questionnaire, 2016]



As can be seen from Figure 2, the calculation of the questionnaire scores allowed us to obtain both a score for each measurement scale, and an internal employability potential index. At the in-depth analysis phase, which follows the concluding one, feedback is given to each volunteer, in a paper version, as well as an individual skills map developed from the questionnaire analysis and the employee employability profile. Through recognition of professional and firsthand experiences, personal events, representation of the current state of volunteering, knowledge, and personal resources, and above all through the compilation and analysis of the questionnaires, it becomes possible to identify the 'strong' skills that represent the personal assets of the core competences possessed by the volunteer, as well as the 'weak' ones, i.e., those skills present at a medium to low levels. During feedback in a group context, from an individual evaluation, subjects are offered the opportunity to talk about their employability profile and the skills highlighted by the course.

4. Reflection on the data obtained during the training course

As part of the 2017-2018 year, the set of 40 young people from the National Civilian Service was divided and organized into two

groups: Group 1 and Group 2. Compared to the 'Inside the Photo' activity proposed during the reception phase, the first BdC1 group proceeded to implement their commitment by first selecting the photos chosen by its individual members. Subsequently, a second skimming allowed the removal of a further series of photographs. Once the most important choices had been made, members thought about applying the images, leaving a space to fit the chosen phrase into.

As can be seen from Fig. 3, the title of the poster is the result of the observation and analysis of the participants in the training course. The Civilian Service Project collects boys and girls of different ages, culture, profession, and education. In this diversity, it is possible to find a common element which needs to be emphasized: the emotion of working together with a shared purpose. This is how the title 'The Rainbow of Identities' was born. The term 'identity' was chosen deliberately to indicate what goes beyond the skills or competences that emerge in a given context. In this sense, there is a need to refer to the concept of identity spoken of by Erickson (1982), namely, the individual's awareness of a constant and continuous sense of self within time, and also the recognition by others of such qualities of an individual's self.

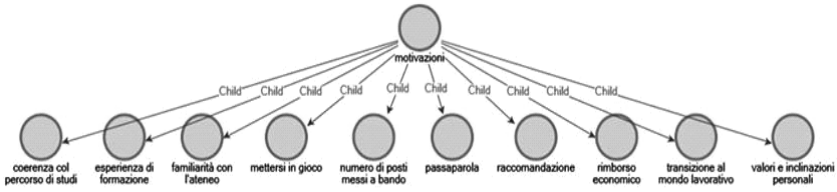
Figure 3 – The outcome of the 'Inside the Photo' activity carried out by the 1st BdC1 group.

Figure 4 – The outcome of the 'Inside the Photo' activity carried out by the 2nd BdC1 group.

The identity dimension, not yet well defined, of the 'tribe' (group) and the travel metaphor, found space in the work of the second subgroup (Fig. 4) which was to support the recovery of a temporal and emotional dimension of the newly formed training experience, enabling an explanation of motivations and expectations. The pivotal point of the image configuration proposed by the group was the fire around which the 'tribe' gathered, after numerous experiences (represented by the horizon and the sea behind the tribe). Fire becomes the element of a design thinking: the tribe is reunited, determined to enhance its ability to be, and to improve its knowhow – the 'tribe' wants to learn. The tribe is therefore in the game. The goal, not yet visible, has to do with intentional change (Boyatzis, McKee 2006), with both personal and group growth. It strongly emerges in the discussion when each member of the 'tribe' brings out any desires and dreams related to the goal yet struggling to define him- or herself around a clear personal and professional project. In this case, the group becomes a privileged place to learn, slowly coming to define itself as a space of self-awareness, as a reflection on its designing experiences in a design perspective. The group context becomes an opportunity to establish relationships and a place to achieve an active confrontation with oneself and with others, with multitude points of

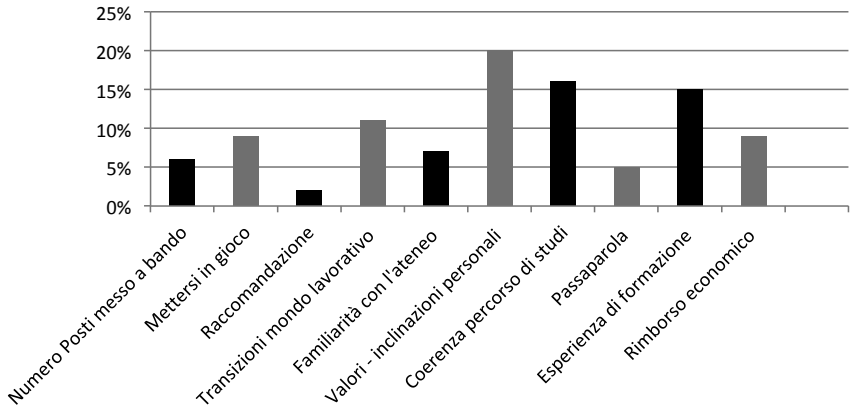
view, motivations, and attitudes and «yet just by listening to such a wealth of visions, a small (but significant) change [can be inaugurated]» (Formenti 2017: 75). The collection of 'biographical' materials produced during the training has made it necessary for a qualitative analysis of the collected narrative material from the compilation of the *My Skills Patchwork* instrument using specific software: NVivo 11 Pro (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing Vivo). This is a programme to analyse texts, images, and multimedia, and is part of the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) programme (Pacifico, Coppola 2010; Coppola 2011). Primarily, we identified the 'parent' node, which is a principal category, and then their respective 'child' nodes, which are subcategories. Below we show a graphic representation (Fig. 5) of the dimension explored with the respective 'child' nodes that emerged:

Figure 5 – Graphic representation of the 'parent' and 'child' nodes found during the analysis with NVivo 11 Pro software.



The next step shows the compilation of charts related to the dimension of motivation, as core-categories in the speech produced by volunteers through the support of the narrative-autobiographical instruments (Fig. 6).

Figure 6 – Graphic representation of the motivations that led volunteers to choose to try SNC.



From the graph above, it emerges that the motives which stimulated the volunteers who chose to try National Civilian Service, and in particular those that led them to choose the SInAPSi Centre project were:

- Personal values and inclinations: 20% of the volunteers stated that they chose to do this experience because it seemed to be in line with their values, ideals, and interests. For example, in the narratives stimulated by the My Patchwork skills some responded: «I chose this project because it complied with my personal inclinations and values»; or, «I have always tried before to help others, but the SInAPSi centre allowed me to develop this inclination through volunteering, acquiring new skills at the same time […] it has turned out to an opportunity that has enriched me significantly»; «I chose to do civilian service in this area because it was adapted to my personal disposition»;
- Consistency with a study course: 16% of the volunteers claimed to have chosen to undertake National Civilian Service, and in particular to have become involved in this project in the 'Assistance' field, because it was in continuity with the course of studies they were attending or had already completed. Some of them stated: «I wanted to do an activity that was close to my study course»; or, «I was interested in having experience in a context where the knowledge and skills I had acquired during my studies were involved»; «The SInAPSi Centre project caught my attention because it belonged to a field related to my social studies»;
- Training experience: 15% of the sample stated that they wanted to undertake National Civilian Service in order to enjoy a training experience that could serve them at multiple levels (personal, professional, social, civic, etc.) and that would accompany them for the rest of their life as a pleasant reminder of their youth. Some volunteers said, «I wanted to live a new experience, but at the same time one that was highly educative, learning directly in the field»; «I chose this project because it promoted interesting activities, able to enrich my collection of theoretical and practical knowledge»; «In my eyes, the civilian service experience was an opportunity for personal, professional, and civic growth»;
- Transition to the working world: 11% of the volunteers involved in the research said they had completed this National Civilian Service experience because it was midway between university and work. In this way, young volunteers, still students, or who had just completed their university and/or higher education, were given a 'taste' of what the working world entails and requires, namely: respect for rules, responsibility, interpersonal confrontation, etc.). In this regard, the volunteers stated: «Volunteering for me represented an opportunity to have an experience that was a bridge between study and work»; «I wanted to do a volunteer experience that I could add to

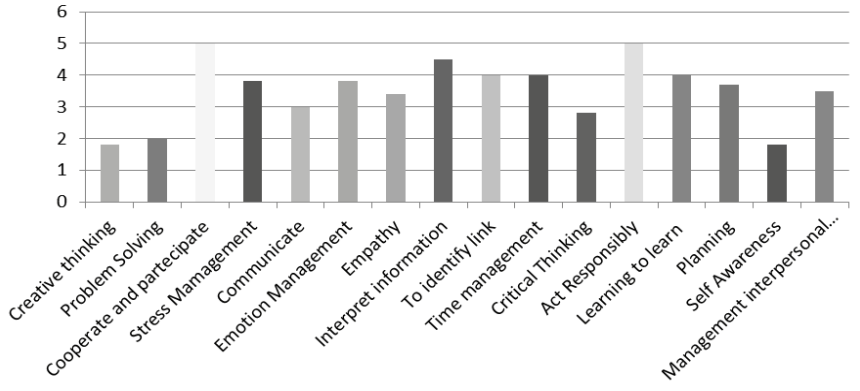
my curriculum at the same time, […] have an experience that would give me the opportunity to discover new awarenesses and abilities, working in a relatively secure context»;

- Becoming involved: 9% of the volunteers claimed they had chosen to do National Civilian Service because it offered them the opportunity to test themselves as people «learning how to handle new situations and thus assuming tasks that require a sense of responsibility, the management of emotions or stress, etc.»; or to kick-start their life situation, which had stalled for various reasons. Others asserted: «I wanted to have an experience which I would get by myself»; «I wanted to get into the game of life, to discover a different world from mine, and then to measure and get to know better my own abilities, talents and resources»;
- Economic reward: 9% of the volunteers stated that amongst the motivations that led them to choose National Civilian Service was to benefit from the monthly payment of €433.80, which could be useful not only to cover their expenses but also to save small sums of money to invest in other areas of their lives. Some volunteers stated in this regard: «I wanted to have a new experience, but also one that was profitable»; «I participated in the civilian service call out of an economic issue, […] I had just lost my job and then I decided to take this road because […] it gave me the guarantee of a monthly reimbursement of expenses»;
- Familiarity with the university: 7% of the sample involved in this study stated that they chose to do National Civilian Service while taking part in the project proposed by the SInAPSi Centre, because the latter was part of an already familiar context, namely, the university where they were studying or had already studied (University of Naples "Federico II"). Some volunteers stated in this regard: «Being in service at the SInAPSi Centre was convenient for me, since it was on the university campus that hosted my study course»; «I chose the SInAPSi Centre project because, being located at my university centre, it gave me a sense of security and protection»;
- Number of vacant posts: 6% of the volunteers stated that they chose to do National Civilian Service because the latter, unlike most other Calls, made 40 positions available to candidates. This strikingly increased the chances of being selected and winning the contest. In fact, the volunteers said: «I honestly chose this project because it made 40 positions available and I was more likely to become a part of it»; «I chose this project because it is one of the few at a national level that offers such a high number of places»; «I thought: the project seems interesting to me, there are several places, I want to try it!»;
- Through word of mouth: 5% of the volunteers claimed to have become aware of the existence of National Civilian Service and the project in question through word of mouth, or through stories of positive experiences among their friends, former volunteers, or those in service at the

University Centre. Some volunteers said: «I was convinced about participating in this project because people who already knew the SInAPSi Centre talked about it in a very positive way»; «I became aware of the project through a professor who had contacts with the SInAPSi Centre»; «I chose the SInAPSi Centre thanks to a person I knew, who had worked with professionals collaborating with the centre».

The outlining of a *mapping* of skills, both through the BdC questionnaire and on the basis of the survey and reconstruction of each person's training past, offered volunteers the opportunity to focus on the skills they had acquired during the various training experiences. The following graph (Fig. 7) shows the aggregate results of the self-assessment questionnaire of cross-skills of the volunteers at time T0 (BdC entrance module). In general, the self-evaluation carried out by the volunteers on the dimension of the analysis proposed by the questionnaire, shows scores are mostly medium-high, which is, most probably, a consequence of the sample's characteristics. In fact, the group mostly consisted of young graduates (LM) or others who had already had initial work experience. As can be seen, Creative Thinking, Problem-Solving, and Self-Awareness are, however, the skills that volunteers allocated rather low scores. At an intermediate level, we find the skills: Communicating (in the macro-category relationship with reality), Emotion Management, Interpersonal Relationship Management, Planning, Critical Thinking (in the Life Skills category), Identifying Links and Relationships – category 'relationship with reality'); Learning to Learn (in the macro-category 'building the self'). Among the skills identified as 'strong' because they re-enter an elevated level of competence, are: Collaborate and Participate; Act Autonomously; which are followed by Empathy; Time Management, Interpretation of Information and Planning (of the macro-category 'building the self').

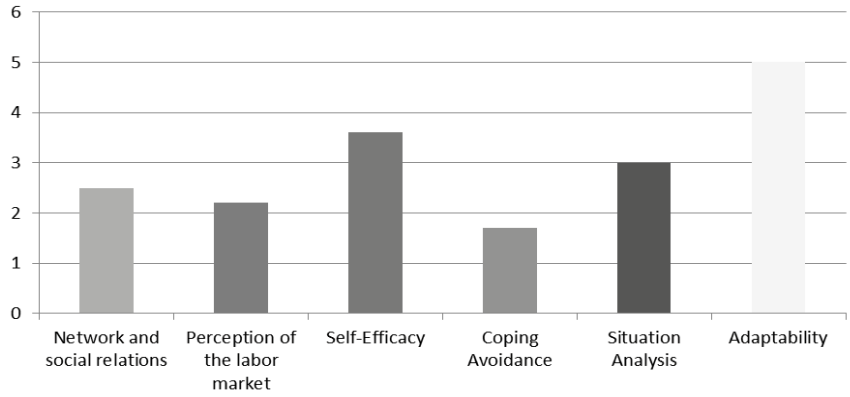
Figure 7 – Summary of the average cross-sectional skills of groups 1 and 2.



The graph (Fig. 7) was shown to the group as a component to initiate reflection on the results of the self-assessment questionnaire to provide them with the opportunity to share impressions, comments, and thoughts. The ability to Collaborate and Participate is anchored to the discussion on university experiences where, according to most participants, it seems that it was the privileged context of development and enhancement for that competence. Collaborating and Participating is mainly related to the pursuit of study activities during university years, but respectively important are the learning experiences in non-formal and informal learning contexts (such as sports, associations, or group travel). Probably these experiences have also 'experienced and/or well-trained' volunteers to interact with others, understanding differing points of view, enabling them to recognize the value of diversity and to collaborate with others. Moreover, the competence to Act Autonomously and responsibly, closely related to Collaborate and Participate, was evaluated by the young volunteers as a strong point, the subjects themselves declaring that, at the appropriate time, they can enforce their rights and needs within the various contexts of reference, while recognizing those of others, as well as their own and others' responsibilities. Certainly, personal responsibility depends on an ability to design, that is, to complete a project without the support of an adult, assuming responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions. Equally, on medium to high values, the focus was on acquiring and Interpreting Information: the young volunteers valued being able to critically capture and interpret all information received, assessing its reliability and usefulness, distinguishing facts from opinions. It seems that the competence to critically evaluate the flow of information is closely linked to the competence of Planning, that is, the ability to use knowledge learned to achieve meaningful and realistic goals. Designing, therefore, requires the ability to identify priorities, evaluate existing constraints and capabilities, define action strategies, and subsequently test their outcome. This demonstrates how the volunteers were prepared to actively participate in the various experiences and to design, or at least identify and grasp, elements that enabled them to plan and design future actions. Among the Life Skills, therefore, if Empathy, Emotion Management, and Interpersonal Relationships which were all at an average level, are excluded, young volunteers demonstrated reduced Self-awareness. If the latter competence which is closely related to problem-solving and creative thinking, also showed very low scores, this confirms that the volunteers were not always properly accustomed to recognizing their strengths and weaknesses and, consequently, translating the cognitive elements into new perspectives for change in the future.

The following graph (Fig. 8) shows the total responses provided for the individual scales of the AVO questionnaire (ISFOL 2016).

Figure 8 – Graph of the resources involved in calculating the A and B Groups' Volatility Index of volunteers.



This instrument, as specified previously, was administered at time T0, before the start of any training activity (general and specific) envisaged by the civilian service project. Once the inbound training activities (BdC1) began for each volunteer, the individual result report was returned, where both the scores for individual scales and the concise employability index could be displayed in the form of a total score and graph. Re-establishing individual profiles was used within the group to initiate reflection on the dimensions involved in computing the synthetic index. In response to clarification by volunteers, manual calculations for scoring each measurement scale was considered (professional adaptability, coping, self-efficacy perceived in job searches, perception of the job market, social networks, and perceived support). Overall, the data for the entire volunteer group had a medium-high synthetic index of 18.55. Volunteers were perceived as adaptable and learning-oriented. They said themselves that they used the most active ways to deal with challenging times, supported by an above average self-esteem. The average scores pertaining to the self-efficacy scale found in job searches were above average: the views of the effectiveness of volunteers for the various activities which they could undertake to enquire about a job are therefore positive. Among the factors related to this scale, frustration tolerance was one that averaged the lowest scores: volunteers did not seem to perceive their ability to tolerate and manage any kind of difficulties or possible failures in job searches. The coping scale, as can be seen from the graph, produced two distinct scores in relation to the two specific dimen-

sions, namely, Analysis and Assessment of the situation and Evasion-Avoidance. The latter refers to the amount of passive coping whose score is understood to be inversely proportional to a calculation of the synthetic employability index. The data also shows a rather confusing, mostly static, and insecure perception of the job market as well as the presence of inadequate social networks that guarantee worthwhile support in the search for employment. Overall, a perception of the job market was documented that was not very welcoming nor supportive of concern, anger, and resignation, and which influenced the proactivity and thereafter the potential of employability. Recent studies (Gilardi, Guglielmetti 2015) relate the perception of employment opportunities and the feeling of self-efficacy to the perception of individuals' employability; pointing out that feeling the job market hostile can affect both the sentiment of perceived employability, and the active search for work.

4. Final remarks

The formative training presented in this contribution is intended to be a guidance experience for young volunteers of the National Civilian Service (SNC) in the hope of becoming an effective and transferable model for further orientation contexts in the transition to the professional world from a point of view of self-empowerment and the promotion of sustainable employability. Volunteering is constitutionally a privileged place for learning. In the Volunteering Charter of Values, adopted in 2001 in the Attitudes and Roles section, it is written that: «Volunteers are committed to training with perseverance and seriousness, aware of the responsibilities they are taking on, especially towards the direct targets of their interventions. They receive from their organisation the necessary support and training necessary for their growth and for implementing the tasks they are in charge of» (Volunteering Charter of Values 2001, Article 14).

This summarizes the twofold nature of volunteering, firstly as a vehicle for personal growth and secondly for social consistency. Training outcomes, in terms of skills acquired during volunteering, deserve to be recognized, certified, and valued in the same way as in other areas of school, university, and workplace training: with their responsibility volunteers produce 'strategic skills' for themselves and for the company they are committed to. The aim of the laboratory for the promotion of employability is to comprehend and realize the need to update the vocational, organizational, and professional components of volunteering, pursuing the growth of volunteers by accompanying and promoting employment opportunities that can increasingly satis-

fy their needs. Cross-skills constitute a framework that every subject should cultivate in a particular way since they are characterized by a high degree of transferability to different contexts and demands. They are, in other words, a resource of fundamentally subjective means to achieve the social and ethical goals of volunteering. The main goal of the formative action of the outgoing Laboratory Module (BdC2) is to provide transitional orientation activities aimed at promoting awareness among young volunteers for their work and training career and, in particular, promoting in volunteers «a positive self-evaluation of the self-concept, [and therefore] a feeling of having control over the events of one's life, solving problems in a creative way, […] applying decision-making skills to the various aspects of one's own life, and making decisions in a careful and rational manner» (Di Fabio 2014: 100). Formative training for volunteers within the University SInAPSi Centre seems to pedagogically reflect on their skills set by making explicit the abilities, knowledge, and resources that would otherwise remain implicit. To 'educate' young volunteers is, in the first place, as Striano maintains, «to think that it can be seen, in the educational function, as a conscious thinking of someone's Self, or else [of that thought that is capable to inaugurate a tale, recognizing the value of experiences], a thought that formulates hypotheses and tends to an incessant search for meaning» (Striano 1999: 47). Secondly, from the point of the AVO questionnaire, it is about encouraging young people to reflect on their employability potentials, and on the various dimensions (and related sub-dimensions) that the questionnaire looks at, such as: professional adaptability, coping, self-efficacy perceived in job searches, etc., in a society like today's, in which self-redesign, grounded on an awareness of the skills acquired in various formal, non-formal, and informal contexts, the accomplishment of one's own personal life project becomes the winning card. The very experience of volunteering and its educational implications thus become a fundamental element, not left to the mercy of oblivion, but reflexively 'embedded' in the puzzle of one's own personal and professional realization, considering the skills and knowledge acquired before the beginning of volunteering as a prerequisite for giving meaning to the experience itself.

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THE GROUP AS AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE IN GUIDANCE PROCESSES

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to see what happens when reflective practice is used in a guidance intervention made with a group. Fifty university students took part in 3 focus group sessions during which they could discuss the issue of guidance and the choices and construction of a life plan. The results show a clear perception of wellness and usefulness in the educational experience, based on the possibility of knowing oneself, comparing oneself with others, activating systematic reflection on oneself and promoting change.

Keywords: guidance, focus group, reflexivity, higher education.

1. Group guidance

The construction of a life plan involves reflective processes that support the individual in exploring the perceived possibilities and in the critical connection between internal instances – needs, wishes, aspirations – and the demands that life contexts impose (Cunti, Priore, Bellantonio 2015). Today, thinking and designing the future means risking, exploring the unknown, putting up with uncertainty, but also desiring, hoping, and choosing; all prerogatives that make the future a human time (Morace 2013), therefore, a time to educate, turning to the subjects that are projected towards it. Experimenting and cultivating choice in training venues allows individuals to prepare themselves in the presence of the need to have to suddenly choose, and in the most critical transition phases, where they can feel disarmed and occasionally exploited. The educational task, then, comes to develop learning paths that promote a capacity to manage the Self in relation to change (Cunti 2015), to provide resources that enable students to choose properly. In fact, individual choices need to be the object of a reflection process (Schön 1987) that supports critical learning and cultural education. On the application side, this involves the use of techniques and instruments that assume a guiding value by making students aware of themselves through a continuous construction and re-construction of their personal story (Savickas *et al.* 2010), which may allow them to congruently connect personal features and their educational and professional choices (Lo Presti 2010; Loiodice 2009; Cunti 2008; Domenici 2003; Pombeni 1996).

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The aim of this paper is to investigate what happens when this reflective exercise finds space and is cultivated in a guidance intervention carried out in a group context. The guidance practice, arranged in this way, attributes centrality to the subject through a work of Self on Self (Foucault 1985) that is mediated by others and is therefore based on the idea that such a work can be better valued by the individual when supported by others. In other words, the key guidance capability, i.e., the critical management of Self, is considered to be valued and integrated by individuals when they are supported by other listeners and interlocutors, when they are involved in a discussion, when they reflect themselves in others to know themselves better; indeed, the actual potentialities of an individual can be traced starting from the perspective of others: personal identity is built through a constructive discussion with the experience of others, but only when the intimate dimension exceeds the social one. From an educational point of view, this implies setting out conditions and strategies to ensure that the internal aspects, who we are, how we represent ourselves, what we think, who we wish to become, meet the external aspects, the whole group, its participants, their experience, but above all, the opportunity to swap experiences on common ground.

From this perspective, the group, with its relational and interactive dimension, may thus prefigure itself as a precious resource to trigger that critical reflexive leap (Guichard, Pouyaud 2015) useful, if not essential, to produce alternative ideas and possible solutions (Krueger, Casey 2000; Duggleby 2005). The sense of plurality that characterizes everyday life is thus reproduced inside the group in its wide range of perspectives, aspects that make it productive and functional; in the words of Usher and Edwards (2005), the efficacy of guidance consists in eliciting one's self as an object of knowledge, but situated inside an actors' network.

In a pedagogical perspective of guidance, the group (Di Nubila 2008; Venza 2007) is thus interpreted as an educational setting in which to construct meaning about experiences that belong to the individual members, and to lay the foundations of personal life plans; conflict, but also the mutual care that characterizes the creation of a group and the deployment of their work, will be the humus of that meaningful and potentially transformative learning (Mezirow 2003) so necessary for individual development.

The methodological choice of group guidance therefore includes the perspective that the group represents a positive setting, facilitating the activation of processes such as decentralization, comparison, cognitive conflict, and hence the development of transverse skills (Ladogana, Cardone, Mansolillo 2015). Should we like to view the group as a way to cope with critical issues, we can identify in its ho-

mogeneity (Pombeni, D'Angelo 1994), at least in terms of the needs shared by the participants, an element of efficacy in achieving common goals. Although the uniqueness of individual experiences distinguishes and offers different points of view and perspectives of meaning to various issues, the group remains centred on a common task that identifies and makes the various participants resemble one another. In fact, this mechanism facilitates the opportunity to feel closer to one's own views, positions, and ideas that would never be considered alone. The group thus becomes an instrument that can activate critical-divergent thinking, a learning opportunity that finds its foundation in experiential and relational aspects rather than in intellectual knowledge, as so often happens.

Such a guidance experiment implies a twofold function: on the one hand, it activates critical exercises addressed to self-management in choice systems, on the other, it is proposed as a privileged context of socio-emotional and relational experimentation in which to locate and verify operating modes which, in the working context, are considered functional and productive; suffice to think of team-working in which cooperation (Kagan 2000; Kaye 1992) is based on skill in managing differences and conflicts.

The group, as a mental space for discussing subjective experiences, offers the chance to increase the ability to find connections between themes and experiences, between stories and meanings, but also the forms of adaptation between internal and external dimensions. The complex dynamics that generically characterize each group, but above all the specific guidance aim that is discussed, depend especially on the role played by the moderator. The latter has the complex task of catalysing the group's performance by working on transformative thoughts through feedback, reflecting but also emancipating; assembling, reorganizing, translating, reviving, and interpreting the participants' interventions. These represent some basic steps that lead a working group to generate critical-reflective thought (Schön 1987).

2. Educational research with University Students

Fifty university students (divided into four groups), enrolled in various active three-year Degree Courses at the universities involved in the national research project, took part in 3 focus group sessions (Merton, Kendal 1946) during which participants could discuss and exchange views on the guidance issue.

In this research phase, it was decided to involve the users of university guidance services, i.e. students, with the aim of achieving the following research objectives: identifying their guidance needs; the

individual and deeper aspects underlying their choices and life planning; possible guidance strategies to respond to these.

However, when it came to the educational objectives, the focus group was assembled with the aim of supporting the participants in acquiring greater awareness regarding the choices and construction of a life plan, by galvanizing critical-reflexive thought.

The structure of the focus group sessions was inspired by the way Savickas and Hartung (2012) organized 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 a life plan.

The themes discussed during the 3 sessions related to the meaning in life, also through narrative education and the presence of significant institutional figures or family/friends, choices, transitions, and changes, of the questions; «Who am I?» and «Who will I become?», starting from the way each subject was located on his or her own educational path; the calling, how, whether, and what aspects and factors would make it changeable. Such themes supported the participants in reflecting together on the sense of university guidance, their deeper guidance needs, personal learning experiences, and identifying potential solutions and strategies through which the university as an institution could support their educational paths with specific guidance.

The reflective instruments used during the focus sessions were narration, metaphor, and brainstorming.

All the data gathered, the methodological choices, and the results will be collected in subsequent publications; here we have chosen to investigate aspects of evaluating the path, and possible changes experienced by the students. To this end, the participants were given an evaluation questionnaire centred on organizational elements, content, and method, and the student's personal change.

The questionnaire consisted of a closed-response part that contained a series of statements to which the student was asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert-like scale (*Not at All*, *Somewhat*, *Moderately*, *Quite a Bit*, *Very Much*) or dichotomously (*Yes*, *No*); with an open narrative part that asked the students to discuss more deeply the evaluation of the path they were participating in. As a last point, the students were asked to fill out the questionnaire anonymously to avoid only desirable answers.

Turning, instead, to a general evaluation of the course the students were attending, there was a clear sense of wellbeing 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 referred to dimensions such as:

- self-knowledge («it allows you to evaluate aspects of yourself to which little importance is given»; «it encourages you to discover 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 you to reflect on yourself»; «there's a need to reflect on yourself»; «it's 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 were along the same lines. The categories that emerged in this regard highlighted the possibility of:

- understanding the value of guidance («it makes you understand the usefulness of guidance, which is often undervalued»; «I would recommend it to confused university students because it helps you to think about yourself and to understand»);
- in-depth self-analysis («we don't always have the chance to analyse 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 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 people and their potential («it helps you improve yourself and understand how to do it»; «addressing important issues for the development of people and their potential»);
- active participation course («a course in which you analyse issues to find solutions to university and guidance problems»; «a good way to feel active in the university»; «discussion of some concepts to understand university guidance and make it more effective»);
- a reflective course («it helps you pause a moment to think about yourself»; «it's a very reflective 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:

- organizational proposals (avoid meetings during exams; schedule 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).

As for the involvement of the students during the focus groups, the responses revealed that about 66% said they felt 'very much' involved and about 34% 'quite a bit' 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:

> Previously, 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 the 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.

3. Final remarks

Considering the recent theoretical models that have emerged in the literature (Savickas 2015, 2005, 2002; Guichard 2012, 2010, 2005), but also starting from the simple point of view of emerging adults engaged in constructing their own educational and professional path, guidance means educating people to become more flexible and critical observers of themselves and their personal story. In this process, group work is set up as an educational instrument and a condition which, through comparison with others, allows people to intercept and recognize with greater clarity deep aspects of themselves. The passage from 'us' to 'me' and vice versa, typical of group dynamics (Bion 1961; Lewin 1948), and the result of proceeding through reflection, identification, projections and spacings that fuel the change of perspective on oneself and on the world and, as a result, open the construction of new meanings to attribute to experience.

The theme of the choices and the recursive transitions (Boffo, Gioli 2016; Guichard, Di Fabio 2010) appears redundant in the participants' narratives, 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 the education of the person, on the other, it seems to be experienced in negative terms, i.e., as a weight to carry on the shoulders and a moment of difficulty to cope with. It is often associated with a sense of obligation, conditioning by others, renunciation, and especially the absence of those fundamental aspects – knowledge, passions, interests – starting points to make decisions that consider both rational and emotional-affective aspects. In other words, choices assume profound meanings that transcend a simple selection from among different alternatives and therefore require greater attention from educational institutions.

In fact, although change and transition now represent a structural feature of a person's entire life cycle, those described in the narratives seemed to possess a potential criticality precisely due to the need to make choices that evidently also involved the resolution of conflicts with themselves and their surroundings. So, what seemed to have, at least in earlier decades, an evolutive potential for emancipatory change (transition as an exclusively positive event), is currently also characterized by a regressive character, procrastination, and/or stagnation. It is therefore necessary to rethink traditional guidance practices, intended in a diagnostic sense and focusing on linear paths of life, to try to respond to subjects' need to reflect and know themselves, allowing for the dimensions of plurality and flexibility.

In this framework, group guidance could represent a valid proposal, an opportunity to experiment and consciously cultivate choices within a cooperative learning process in which everyone leaves and takes something from comparison with others. Group guidance means focusing on an individual's psycho-social resources, recognizing that each transition, decision, and project belongs to the individual, but is inevitably negotiated with others.

The passage we wish to highlight is one which, from guidance based on an individualized approach, then tends to the construction of knowledge based on interpersonal, social, and cultural factors. The efficacy of the proposal is traceable in the perceived change, reported by the students, which, although not generalizable, finds in the possibility of implementability and transferability in other contexts, a future prospect of research and education. The key element reported by the students is that they were fazed and surprised by how the stories and their meanings, nowadays given as certain, through the group took on a new light, and might steer their ideas on the future in a different direction.

To conclude, the function of the group in guidance interventions is to re-create, in a protected mode, an «episode of social life» (Usher, Edwards 2005: 407), and to emphasize the network and the relationship between the actors, hence, the production of interrelated and dialogic knowledge.

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CAREER CALLING: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS*

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ABSTRACT: In this moment the policies on lifelong guidance, recognition of learning and skills certification seem more working on who should do what and not on how make. It would be desirable to create links between the various providers of training, education and business, allowing for a reframing of orientation processes and of identification and certification of skills. All these practices can reduce distances for those who are likely to remain at the margins of education, training and work (Neet and over fifty).

KEYWORDS: lifelong learning, skills, orientation, guidance, identity, carrier.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to develop a reflection on how the standards in Lifelong Learning, Lifelong Guidance, the Certification of Competences, and the operating systems implemented by various institutions can represent a true resource for the needs of students and professionals. As a result of repeated calls by the European Union, Italian Law 92/2012 Article 4 (paragraphs 51 to 68) equated formal learning with non-formal and informal learning and hence the different ways of acquiring professional and technical skills in all processes and at each stage of training, orientation, and work of specific competence[1].

It is our belief that lifelong learning and the various contexts (formal and non-existent) today represent the fundamental element of the resources whereby people cope with the needs of late modernity. Extremely complex systems, where the autonomy of individual action increases, leave the student or worker the responsibility for building and growing their own knowledge base, skills, motivation, and propensity to action that blend in the term 'competence' (Beck, Gernsheim 1990; Lupton 2003).

According to the writers, to disentangle the current debate, it is worthwhile speculating whether the current certification and guidance procedures really do allow students and workers in limbo

* Marco Schiavetta: paragraphs 1 and 3; Sonia Startari: Introduction, paragraph 2 and reflective final remarks.

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[1] As stated by Decree 13/13 provided for the creation of a national system of competence certification Cedefop: *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning* (2015).

between a 'mechanical' model and a model based on free self-entrepreneurship, to develop awareness and the relevant resources. The risk is for those who fail to keep up with the processes of training and acquiring new skills that a flexible and knowledge-centred organization of work requires. Recognition of lifelong guidance, validation of previous learning, and competence certification could be the means to guide the structuring and restructuring of professionalism, which, in turn, requires a process of re-socialization (Berger, Luckmann 1995), thus redistributing values relating to the reality of the job market and education. To date, however, there are still cultural barriers in the formalization of guidance procedures, recognition of learning, and skills certification, such as:

- the legal value of qualifications obtained through formal education and training paths;
- the traditional weaknesses of further education and adult education and training, which in Italy are not as widespread and consolidated as in other European countries;
- the absence of an explicit national system of qualifications and competences and auxiliary services for choice and lifelong guidance services;
- the multitude of institutions involved in this issue at national, regional, and local levels (ISFOL 2012).

Within this problematic context, the process of recognition, validation and certification of skills acquired in formal, informal, and non-formal contexts can be significant in terms of both professional and personal development. Acquiring awareness of their skills can be an opportunity for individuals to redesign their career, but also to consider entering a path of education and training and, more generally, it provides an opportunity for critical–propositive reflection on their past to design their own future. In the light of continuous changes in the forms of work and professionalism required, lifelong guidance can become a tool for continuous growth and development.

It is also a process of learning intended as change, an ability to play, to choose, to take responsibility for ourselves; a process by which one becomes skilled, capitalizing not only on past experience, but all the experience of the very processes of orientation, identification, validation, and certification.

2. Lifelong guidance today

The Age of Uncertainty: Orientation and Life Design in the 21st Century was the title of the 16th SIO Conference (Italian Orientation Society),

and it can be argued that this represents a social snapshot of today's advanced demands, including orientation. The concept of 'Life Design'[2] is based on an ability to consciously design one's own life (following an individual's real and profound needs) within a biocentric and holistic evolutionary model. To identify the needs to be met in a lifelong guidance perspective, studying work transitions allows us to investigate mechanisms to structure the opportunities and inequalities systems and their degree of permeability (Schizzerotto 2002).

While, on the one hand, this approach has enabled one side to understand the degree of societal openness or closeness, on the other, it has overlooked some peculiar configurations and mobility features. Reflection has focused primarily on all the ascending and descending, inter- and intra-generational movements, seen as an indicator of the real change in life and affiliation opportunities. However, it has not focused on changes associated with horizontal displacements in social space (Bison 2002; Cobalti 1995); and while great emphasis has been placed on structural and context variables, the interest in subjective lives and the sense of the individual's own work career has been studied little and left in the background.

Hence, our proposal is to widen knowledge of mobility dynamics by studying individual displacements along the horizontal axis and among working positions of different areas of use in which elements of regularity and predictability are induced by the action of social automation, and attention is focused on the micro-social dimension of the passages previously indicated (subjective lives and the sense that individuals attribute to their work and training career)[3]. This could be achieved by focusing on the supply side of the job and seeking more precisely to look at aspects that have already been investigated but can provide other valuable information, such as motivations, expectations, and individual preferences that generate and guide change.

The purpose of lifelong guidance is to understand how the traits of uncertainty, volatility, and fragmentation typical of the current social context (Bauman 2002; Giaccardi, Magatti 2003) affect work and employment transitions (including career choices made by university students) and to redefine not so much and not only the linearity and consequentiality (Fullin 2004; Sennet 1999), but also the intrinsic meaning. In particular, within a cultural and occupational universe whose traits are difficult to fix and where the contingency of the choices made

[2] Life Design (or Vocational Design) is based on the use of a narrative approach (Life Design Counselling, or Narrative Career Counselling).

[3] Interesting in this line of research is the quantitative study on job-to-job mobility, co-funded by the MIUR within the Prin Cofin 2005, as part of an inter-university survey of mobility and local job market transitions (Colasanto, Zucchetti 2008).

is more than stability and long-term commitment (Bauman 2004; Sennet 2006), all of this can contribute to generating and self-feeding a weakening, standardization, and a crumbling of social relationships.

The most consistent hypothesis is that work forces are devoid of the meaning of a career as a social institution – or as a system of disciplinary rules of substantial weight in individual and collective life (Castel 1995) – while, instead, individual protagonism becomes prevalent in the form of a constant tension to achieve what makes more immediate sense, with personal experience and the construction of one's identity thereby resulting in a narrowing of the temporal perspective and an acceleration of subjective time (Aubert, Haroche 2013).

Today, we no longer have the expectation of a better life for our children, on the contrary, we fear that their lives will become more difficult. If we wish to avoid this worsening, we must move at a faster pace, increasing our efforts, and innovating even more every year. The current crisis in the Eurozone is a practical demonstration; political actions do not tend to create a better society, they do not create expectations, but simply focus on overcoming the crises by adopting the quickest workable solutions in order to avoid a *worst-case scenario*.

The linear social time ruled by our clocks has been replaced by a 'timeless time', a ceaseless flood of de-territorialized flows (capital, goods, people, ideas, as well as diseases and risks) that are emerging worldwide, giving rise to the phenomenon of de-synchronization of living places (Rosa 2012), and a consequent increase in uncertainties, inequalities, and discrimination (Piketty 2013).

3. Recognition of learning and certification of skills

Legislative Decree 13/2013 provides a definition of competence that does not neglect the learning contexts: «Proven ability to use in a work, study, and professional development context, a structured set of knowledge and skills acquired in formal learning contexts, whether non-formal or informal». It is also explicit when it says that

> in the context of public education, training, work, competitiveness, active citizenship and welfare policies, the Republic promotes lifelong learning as a person's right, and ensures equal opportunities for the recognition and valorization of competences., however acquired, in accordance with individual aptitudes and choices and from a personal, civic, social, and employment perspective.

It focuses on people's acquisition of knowledge and skills throughout their life, in their study and work lives, ensuring a transparent,

pertinent recognition system. These skills become an indispensable element for interventions aimed at professional development and job placement processes, which include the various training providers, employment services, schools, universities, and enterprises interconnected in the creation of institutional strategies and actions which seek to overcome a concept of accompanying and episodic orientation, and which intend to create opportunities with specialized action plans that surpass the idea of welfare.

From this perspective, the methodologies, tools, and techniques adopted by the competent entities and their actual functionality and usefulness regarding recipients' real needs come into play. It is perhaps necessary to be careful not to fall into an «educator's perspective» (Cepollaro 2008: 127), that does not surmount the possible contrast between personal goals and the means at hand and the actual opportunities to achieve those goals. The challenge is how to work on the 'weak link' that exists between formal, informal and non-formal learning supporting the identification of skills.

We believe that validating and certifying are not one single process. Underlying these reflections is the belief that before you can evaluate and then certify the acquisition of a series of skills, it is necessary to make the skills possessed by the subjects visible, and subsequently recognize them as examples of knowledge or stable knowhow acquired, and subsequently certified. At a national level, it remains necessary to distinguish between the validation of previous learning and competence certification. These two paths are linked, but different.

Among the most important difficulties remaining is the confusion in certifying skills with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. As already mentioned, competence has come to the fore in terms of implementing specific actions in contexts. Professional repertoires are split into skills and knowledge, which contribute to producing competence and the level of autonomy with which actions are carried out. The critical issue here is to unite the informal and non-formal learning acquired in the professional background of a person with transverse skills, which are not found in the regional repertoires of professional figures, and have not even really been evaluated in formal paths[4].

[4] See, for example, the Dublin Descriptors, a general outline of learning expectations and skills for each of the closing titles of each 'Bologna' cycle, that is, the typical achievements of students who have obtained a qualification after successfully completing a study cycle. These include elements of which there is no formal evaluation if not tacitly through examinations and positive evaluations of internships. 'Knowledge and Understanding'. 'Applied Knowledge and Understanding' (applying knowledge and understanding). 'Making Judgments'. 'Communication Skills'. 'Learning Skills'.

In implementing recognition and certification processes, it is equally important to recognize the role of the accompanier, recalling that, in selectively reconstructing their biography in terms of training experiences or otherwise, candidates mature awareness of the professional applicability of these experiences, and focus on the profile proposed for certification. The accompanier plays a crucial role in recruiting candidates for the initial stages of education, further education, professional and personal experiences.

The selection of experiences, carried out with the aim of facilitating the recognition and worth/marketability of the experiences that subjects have developed in different contexts, should be fostered, in our opinion, through assisted self-assessment of skills with an approach that recalls the output–links–resources model, aiming to aggregate appropriate skills to a specific role that should be explicitly expressed in:

- output production processes with all the technical-realizational problems that have different degrees of predictability;
- connections with clients and internal or external suppliers with the relational difficulties that these involve;
- resources which, under their own responsibility, raise many difficulties associated with management dynamics.

The accompaniment should:

- define the objective of the entire recognition and certification path that can be identified:
  - in the certification of competences for the recognition of qualifications within the regional Directory of Professions system. The development of this goal may also include new profiles if they are not already present in the Directory;
  - in previous learning consistently with the content of training and/or education paths that may allow for the acquisition of a formal diploma/qualification.
- identify the most significant experiences and, for each experience identified, analyse the entire process of each macro, thus finding the relevant skills.
- find continuous training paths in line with the goal.

The whole accompanying phase is complex for both the accompanier and the candidate, since in the process of conceptualizing professional and personal biographies, all experiences seem valid, and it is not always possible to identify those that are genuinely marketable. The greatest risk is to fall into the trap of stating the possession of skills through an account of what the person did and to merely exhibit documentation that 'certifies' these. However, we need to be

very aware that this is a reflective narrative (Reggio, Righetti 2013) which shows the ability to reason on what has been done as well as the resources that have been mobilized to achieve the result or deliver the performance.

This reflection is not always easy for potential candidates for certification, and therefore it requires the support of a qualified guide. Moreover, it is indispensable to think about how to redesign study courses at all levels in a lifelong learning perspective. This means thinking about what skills learning should be offered, which delivery method is most cohesive with the local territory and job market, and how to create validation and certification services and procedures that will be recognized by all education and training agencies.

4. The impact of orientation and lifelong learning on career paths

Lifelong, lifewide and lifedeep[5] are increasingly invaluable conditions for the effective exercise of the right to active citizenship. These variables, which are present to different degrees as resources in individuals, now more than in the past represent guarantees to protect oneself from the multiple risks of marginalization or exclusion from the workplace[6]. This is the set that constitutes the underlying conditions from which mobility paths develop. Such paths are characterized by a degree of complexity and articulation of trajectories and are not necessarily driven by a search for material aspects, such as hierarchical progression and authority, and pay rises (which are among the aspects of gratification), but are instead aimed at achieving a gratifying personal condition, defined by the level of initiative and autonomy exercised; by the correspondence of the job carried out with personal interests, expectations, and ways of being subjective; by the possibility of satisfying integration between the personal and professional spheres (Bovone 1984; La Rosa, Meda 1998; Lewis, Rapoport, Gambles 2003).

Today more than ever, Career Calling represents a challenge that requires us to reflect on how to launch a professional vocation; its dimensions and relationships with studies, motivation, satisfaction in life and work; the professional identity, and the career choices made

[5] Lifedeep Learning is a third dimension that has only recently begun to be debated. It relates to beliefs, values and life orientations.

[6] On 19 February 2014, the MIUR published its *National Guidelines for Lifelong Guidance*, in which life-long orientation is recognized as the right of every person and exercised in different and specific forms and needs, contexts and situations (Lisbon 2010, Europe 2020).

by students (Fournier *et al.* 2016: 93-143) and adult/lifelong learning. To deal with this task, three different key interpretations can be used. The first is based on reflections on career theory, above all, the approach where cultural patterns and norms of use depart from traditional models towards a new, multifaceted, versatile, indeterminate, and self-taught business idea (Arthur, Rousseau 1996; Hall 1976). This perspective signposts increased opportunities for movement beyond organizational boundaries, between and within employment sectors, through a series of episodic, often unplanned jobs[7], in particularly dynamic employment markets, especially for the most qualified professional profiles, but also for intermediate figures. These opportunities are organized in a design plan whose stages are characterized by lifelong learning and the acquisition of those multiple skills that this learning can help to build. In fact, there is a high probability of further inequalities,[8] particularly on the road to success, since this is measured by the ability to ensure meaning and continuity throughout one's life story (Arthur, Khapova, Wilderom, 2005).

The second follows the approach of the life course, which identifies itself as a combination of a series of events, transitions and paths, the practice by which individuals produce and reproduce their identity, each time reaffirming themselves. The course of life and the working careers in it are interpreted as a cumulative result of the multiple career lines which make up an individual life story, and the trajectories of the 'significant other', including partners, family members or, more generally, members of one's own social networks. These are, therefore, the results of experiences and change, whose outcomes can be both unexpected and foreseeable (Saraceno 2001; Schizzerotto 2002). These, however, seem to continue to follow a series of institutional references – typical of modern society: work, the family – whose relevance and normative nature seem almost unaltered (Kohli 2007).

The third perspective is enclosed in the culture of the project, whose principles have been described by Boltanski (2005), pointing out how in the features that distinguish the 'new spirit of capitalism',

[7] Due also to changing market conditions and organizational structures, the responsibility for deciding the ways and direction of such a career path falls entirely on individual subjects, who, in the absence of a reliable guide provided by the firm, undertake to collect information, skills and knowledge that will enable them to orient their subsequent choices.

[8] On the one hand, thanks to the human and social capital possessed, they can play the protagonist and thus exploit the opportunities of realization that unfold. On the other, there are those who find themselves on a shaky unyielding path, made up of continuous moves, within a precariousness that they cannot abandon and which causes the lack of available resources.

of priority is the value assigned to the activity which, past an original identification with the work for the market, is reinterpreted as the involvement of the subject in changing and heterogeneous episodes and projects that are not confined to the employment dimension alone. These projects, by their very nature, have a limited timeframe; once completed, they require the ability and will to be questioned again, along with a promptness to change the scope of action, meaning, and relational values. Here, there is a very serious risk for individuals, namely, the loss of their roots as a result of the frantic success of the various projects, something which can create a deep sense of anxiety, fuelled by the fear that the plurality and complexity of the projects undertaken may actually prevent one from making sense of one's life[9].

5. Final remarks

The development and implementation of lifelong guidance models, the recognition of learning, and the identification and certification of competences, depend on how institutions face the challenges of European and national legislation. In current practice, the focus seems more on who should do what and not on how, why this should be done, and what the effect will be on recipients of this new right to competence and recognition of learning matured in their lives. It would be desirable to find a common ground that creates links between the various providers of training, education, and business, allowing for a reframing of orientation processes and the identification and certification of skills. This ought to represent a common system of development and inclusion for those who have failed to build a linear career in the name of flexibility, limiting themselves to experiencing several iotas of professionalism. Lifelong guidance, the recognition of learning, and skills certification can shorten the distances for those who are likely to remain at the margins of education, training, and work. Operators should be careful not to remain involved in bureaucratic and documentary schemes that cannot create added value, but could produce symbolic and stigmatizing hierarchies for those who obtain a degree through a recognized traditional course.

[9] The basis for individual success and social recognition is, in this cultural landscape, risk predisposition, and an ability to adapt and be flexible; Thanks to these qualities, individuals succeed in nurturing an identity in progress, supported through the social networks they have created and the unceasing experiences that ensue in their life story.

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CHAPTER IV

EMPLOYABILITY AND TRANSITION

BOOSTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP CAPABILITY IN WORK TRANSITIONS

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Abstract: Work personalization within cognitive capitalism (Alessandrini 2013) demands universities to certify competences that can promote new forms of employability (Boffo, Federighi, Torlone 2015), connected to global network innovation (Steiner *et al.* 2013). Personal entrepreneurship becomes the heuristic promoter of career changes (Federighi, Torlone 2013). This enables individuals to ask new questions, to provide innovative solutions, and to create endeavours that can extend the current limits of knowledge, or define new ones (Costa 2014). *Methodology*: The research analysed variables and, by doing so, strengthened entrepreneurial competence (Morselli, Costa 2015; Costa, Strano 2016) from an enabling perspective, involving more than one hundred people going through a career change (Sen 2000). Based on a mixed method (Ponce, Pagán-Maldonado 2015) the research was developed over four phases: 1) *Self-assessment* (Pittaway, Edwards 2012) of entrepreneurial attitudes; 2) *Recognition* (Federighi 2014) of emerging competences from global innovation networks; 3) *Reflective thinking* (Mortari 2003) and switching in terms of awareness (Mezirow 2003); 4) *Capability* (Sen 2006) of opportunities and resources for the instigation of entrepreneurial action (Costa Strano 2016). *Results*: The data observed show that during career changes the development of competences is positively linked to age, education, and experience, above all when combined with enabling processes. As for entrepreneurship, training contexts in the service industry prove strategic, even if still too focused solely on the technical-informative dimension. Furthermore, the results show that entrepreneurial training (Pittaway, Edwards 2012) becomes competence that can promote action starting from resources/opportunities in various career changes (Costa 2014).

Keywords: entrepreneurship education, capability approach, agency, university education, work, education policy.

1. New forms of work representation within work transitions

Nowadays, work is being traversed by profound transformations following changes in demographic factors and production systems, along with digital transformations that require new skills to operate as efficiently as possible (Federighi 2014) within these new innovative contexts (Costa 2013). Novel technological and production processes (smart economy, open innovation, Industry 4.0, Shared Economy) have transformed (Alessandrini 2016) the inner performance value of skills into

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'Ability/Competence to Act' (agency) thus relaunching a new training and social deal (Learnfare) in which the educational system is the starting point to empower development based on people's talents (Costa 2016).

Consequently, the intention to strengthen our students' employability brings new responsibilities (Ajello, Morselli 2016) to Universities, since social inclusion and citizenship are now related to employability (Bohlinger *et al.* 2015). Hence the need to identify new opportunities for our students along with new environments of activation which mean work-based learning. These processes can then support those progressions of consequential transition (Federighi, Torlone 2013) which imply an identity change: the feeling of turning into a new person thanks to the spread of knowledge. When managing these collateral transitions[1] (Engeström 1996), the young student will have the sensation of being uncertain, of being continuously on the move, and of experiencing new identities and new relationships. It follows that the university, within the current paradigm of cognitive capitalism, cannot address only technical and economic environment demands. In conjunction with this, it needs to promote the generation of a transformative identity among its students: a mix of abilities to seek, give meaning, and share. The link between transition and employability is no longer driven by a simple functional and productive logic, but is characterized by a stochastic, unforeseen process, capable of crossing the boundaries of action between university and the job market, mediating between personal and collective senses.

2. From competence to enablement: the value of agency

Work transitions in the post-Fordism period have been described as a protean career (Hall, Mirvis 1994), and a boundaryless career (Arthur, Rousseau 1996). The adaptable career (Protean) is a theoretical model which describes the role of individuals in a self-directed running of their own career. Those who implement an adaptable career have a strong locus of internal control. They firmly believe in their ability to control and govern events and are individuals with strong adaptive skills, able to manage processes of professional and organizational learning.

Capability Activation (Sen 2006) in support of employability, thus becomes an expression and result of a reflective and recursive investigation process, able to engage peculiarity in the variety of contexts and systems of actions in which students will be non-passive performers of their own

[1] According to Engeström (1996), knowledge acquisition is the outcome of an active and constructive process, a path based on a strategy, on a form of control of the wide process of the codification, transformation, and storage of information.

transition, leveraging their own inclinations (aptitudes, motivations and desires) and talents. This is why students' employability value is now the result of social awareness, participation, responsibility, and an ability to think: the basis of the processes of action. Agency not only expresses the mere possession of practical knowledge – to master different situations – but embodies the aptitude of willingness to perform an intellectual activity that begins from action. Furthermore, agency expresses the leaning to learn when at work, by combining thought and action, thanks to a flexibility that becomes a cognitive plasticity which supports individual capabilities (Sen 2000). Overcoming the perspective of neoliberal culture, flattened by the functional need of a university caged in by the job market, it is obligatory to recover a new vision hinged on the generative and creative freedom of the student when it comes to learning in the workplace. Enabling agency is linked to students' ability to use different resources, preferences, aptitudes and values, to design their own future (Morselli, Costa, Margiotta 2014).

Consequently, the development of youth entrepreneurship – as an enabling tool – becomes fundamental within educational systems. The role of education in promoting entrepreneurial skills (an entrepreneurial mind-set) has become increasingly significant in recent European strategies for employment and the strengthening of qualifications (EUCIS-Ill 2013). The term 'entrepreneurship education' has been defined as a set of knowledge, skills and aptitudes aimed at making individuals capable of 'turning ideas into actions', considering the possibilities and relationships in which they are involved at work but also in social contexts (hence the more appropriate term of 'intrapreneurship'). A spirit of inventiveness, a proactive attitude, creative thinking, entrepreneurship (European Commission 2006), ability to take and manage risk are the core of those intangible strategic skills (Loiodice 2009) that activate students' enabling agency, beyond the value of each individual skill acquired (Costa 2014). Entrepreneurship has been defined as one of the eight key European competences (European Commission 2006), so important that the Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020 (European Commission 2013) indicates education and training as supporting axes to fund entrepreneurial development. Furthermore, most recent European documents reiterate the need to make education and training systems a growth laboratory for the entrepreneurial mindset of youth (European Commission 2016).

Entrepreneurship Education (Mwasalwiba 2010) in Europe is mainly compared, even if in a restricted way, with the simple technicalities that are the basis of 'doing business'. However, talking about 'Entrepreneurship' (Morselli, Costa 2015; Costa, Strano 2016), could be the way to overturn this logic, re-thinking entrepreneurship not as a mandatory skill to find or perform a job, but as a rich ability to realize an individual's own development. Educating with this perspective, therefore,

goes beyond the technical and economic outlook and becomes an acting aptitude that qualifies transformative thinking (Mezirow 2003). Entrepreneurship competence (Bohlinger *et al.* 2015) becomes the ability to combine and re-think those scenarios and new possibilities that arise from the social and working context experienced by students during their lives. From this point of view, therefore, educating in terms of entrepreneurship means generating in students an authentic entrepreneurship agency (Costa, Strano 2016) within the perspective of a lifelong learning culture, increasing the levels of social awareness, participation, accountability, and thinking ability (Siebert, Walsh 2013).

3. The research: context, phases, and methodologies

This research has been included in the framework of the overall action that C.I.S.R.E. (International Research Centre for Education and Advanced Studies) of Ca' Foscari University of Venice has been pursuing on entrepreneurship education over the last years. The experimental action took place in 2015-2016 during some courses on entrepreneurship held at a Training and Entrepreneurial Development Centre in the Triveneto region, which saw the participation of several organizations, universities, institutions, and social partners.

The main aim of the research was to recognize and clarify the correlation between entrepreneurship agency and professional (and personal) youth development, trying to rethink adequate areas within tertiary education that could transmit the entrepreneurship value, better linking the university world to the job market and enhancing the heutagogic dimension (Canning 2010)[2] of the enabling process. This would empower young people's freedom of choice, the ability to manage their own lives according to the future they have planned, valuing the experience with a critical approach and as an opportunity to create an alienation between past experiences and future scenarios.

The concept of entrepreneurship education led the research to develop its own training tool to enrich the concept of entrepreneurship (Strano 2015, 2017). This tool consists of four 'activation areas' and sixteen 'enabling skills'[3], which can subsequently allow the adoption

[2] The concept of *Eutagogia* exceeds that of andragogy since it broadens self-directed learning practices, through which young people and adults actively develop necessary learning skills to meet their needs (Canning 2010).

[3] These skills are not technical skills, but intangible and strategical (Loiodice 2009), able to cross different areas of activities and subsequently support the acquisition of further technical skills.

of specific operating choices (Sen 2000, 2006)[4]. The four 'activation areas' were placed at the capability level (Sen 2000) namely: the Identity Area (Demetrio 2003; Mezirow 2003), the Practice Area (Costa 2013; 2016), the Relational-Intersubjective Area (Alessandrini 2012; Rossi 2011) and the Organizational-Institutional Area (Nussbaum 2012; Margiotta 2012).

Using this training instrument, the experimental research analysed several variables (context and development), and thereby strengthened the entrepreneurship competence (Morselli, Costa 2015; Costa, Strano 2016) from an enabling perspective (Sen 2000; Nussbaum 2012), involving more than one hundred people who were going through a work transition. Founding the research on mixed methods (Ponce, Pagán-Maldonado 2015), the process covered four major phases:

1) Self-assessment (Pittaway, Edwards 2012; Di Francesco 2015) of entrepreneurial aptitudes;
2) Recognition (Tessaro 2011; Federighi 2014) of emerging skills;
3) Reflective thinking (Mortari 2003) and awareness transformations (Mezirow 2003);
4) Capability (Sen 2000, 2006; Nussbaum 2012) of opportunities and resources for entrepreneurship activation (Costa, Strano 2016).

The succession of these four phases furthered the entrepreneurial agency for the individuals involved thanks to the interaction of two important pedagogical concepts: self-awareness-vision and enabling-capability. They gave birth to «a recursive construction movement, through a complex mixture of actions and tools that continuously [returned] on individual's agent function, outspreading the recognition of abilities and possibilities and, therefore, deploying the activating and enabling action» (Costa, Strano 2016). The tools chosen and elaborated to work within these pedagogical meanings were:

a) GET2 test (General Enterprising Tendency 2 Test), of the University of Durham, oriented to predictivity, which investigates individuals' potential entrepreneurial inclinations;
b) The double-moment (survey and individual interviews) of QACEN (self-assessment questionnaire on entrepreneurship skills), designed by the research group; able to affect reflection and awareness processes, by carrying out a context analysis and revealing the consequent process of activation-enablement.

[4] Each skill was associated with five referential competences, which develop on progressive levels in terms of increasing degree of autonomy and responsibility (Tessaro 2011). These references help in defining the concept of competence.

4. The research: results and initial findings

The survey results show that skills development and the strength of entrepreneurship during work transitions are positively related to age, education level, and experience (both work and personal experiences and social life), above all when the experience is related to enablement processes, i.e., processes based on critical thinking, context analysis and alternative options analysis (Sen 2000), to achieve personal goals.

The impact of education and, even more, of tertiary education on entrepreneurship development was identified through a series of results (even though these same results, not always so clear, opened up the long-standing issue of a tertiary education that needs to improve its orientation to the entrepreneurship concept):

- The QACEN survey protocol showed a clear difference in certain dimensions concerning the level of social participation and personal activation between those who had taken a Degree and those who had not: graduates showed very high values in all the dimensions investigated, while non-graduates showed very low values.
- Observing the GET2 Test, which analysed entrepreneurial dispositions through five large axes (need for self-realization, need for autonomy, creativity, aptitude for risk, locus of internal control), those with a Degree showed significantly higher values than those without one.
- Returning to the surveys carried out through the QACEN survey protocol, we would like to briefly convey these additional data:
  - observing the impact of different life contexts on entrepreneurship development, the contexts that had greater weight were professional and family ones, while scholastic and university experiences were less relevant;
  - thinking about the skills of the training instrument, the graduates reported higher values in individual competences linked to creative, innovative, and relational processes;
  - the radar chart, which plotted several profiles based on the levels of development of the sixteen training instrument skills, although reporting a general superiority of the graduates compared to the non-graduates in all four 'areas of activation' (Identity, Practice, Relational-Intersubjective, Organizational-Institutional), at the same time clearly highlighted that between these two categories there was not such a significant surplus in several competences, especially in those of the Practice and Organizational-Institutional areas;
  - with respect to the competence of the training instrument, competences of the Organizational-Institutional area stood out with the lowest development values, both for graduates and non-graduates.

5. Final remarks

Work personalization within Cognitive capitalism requires universities (Bohlinger *et al.* 2015) to categorize the skills needed to promote new forms of employability (Boffo, Federighi, Torlone 2015) in line with today's timeframes and innovative contexts (Steiner *et al.* 2013). The concept of employability competency (Alessandrini 2013) exceeds the purely performative dimension and becomes an ability to act: any student, before being competent to produce, must be competent to act and this is why universities play such a key role in empowering an entrepreneurial aptitude (Costa 2016). University education must know how to support these transformations, promoting in students (through teaching, mentoring and guidance) the ability to create problems and solve them, to solicit the certain from the uncertain, to cover different paths and to try out new solutions in their work transitions (Costa 2013).

Research has shown that educating towards an entrepreneurial mindset does not imply sticking to the linearity of economic theories and knowledge: universities should integrate competency and enablement, interpreting skills development as the functional element for agency enhancement. Furthermore, this kind of education should know how to: «Formulate new educational models focused on an individual's agency; re-thinking the paradigm of competencies relating to the concept of enablement; designing formative pathways that value individual, social and contextual complexities; focusing on work as a transformative process able to leverage the entrepreneurship agency» (Costa, Strano 2016).

Framing entrepreneurship development within this paradigm (Valerio, Parton, Robb 2014) requires the efforts of all university stakeholders to support and generate this precise, expansive variety of learning (Engeström 2001), the result of an intentional cooperation towards the co-generation that underlies the boundary zone (Konkola, Tuomi-Gröhn, Lambert, Ludvigsen 2007). In summary, it could be said that leading the sense-making of work transitions recombines the sense of employability competency, focusing the power of choice as a key expression of an individual's development (Sen 2006). Borrowing the words of Adriano Olivetti, from his book *L'industria nell'ordine della comunità* (Olivetti 1952: 21): «*The new economy* we are imagining contributes to *material progress* and accompanies the individual while they perfect their personality and vocations».

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TRANSFER OF NON-ACADEMIC SKILLS IN ACADEMIC CONTEXT: TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYABILITY*

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Abstract: This essay is an element of dialogue between educational practices acquired in territorial education contexts and the University. In particular, starting from the 10-year long experience consolidated in three educational centres operating in border areas of the Province of Naples, a series of 'key competences' have been highlighted that are indispensable to the containment of social risk disadvantage in an inclusion (Bertolini 1977; Freire 2004; Rossi 2014; Sabatano 2015a, 2015b) and well-being project (Iavarone 2007, 2009) from an educational point of view. Such competencies have become subject of a 'participatory didactic planning' between expert educators working in these contexts and a university course on 'Pedagogy of relationships' within the Department of Motor Science and Well-Being at the University of Naples Parthenope. The participatory planning practice has set the most ambitious goal of achieving a 'system methodology' to be used in the curriculum-design of the university courses in order to make the academic education offer a proper link element between the educational demand of young people, the demand for professional skills in the territory and the emerging social needs in order to improve employability processes. The main results that this experience has highlighted can be deducted from the student's satisfaction survey, as well as from the data collected and processed by the University Assessment Team, in the Department's Joint Commission Reports, which show a clear and overall improvement of the communication processes between non-academic institutions collaborating with the University for the conduct of internships, training sessions and placement-targeted activities. The empirical evidence and the positive results obtained provide substantial comfort in considering that the experience gained can be a 'good practice' to be included in the didactic planning process of the courses, even in relation to the need to improve the educational and didactic offer with reference to the new quality assurance parameters (QA) for the periodic accreditation of the CdS according to the AVA-ANVUR legislation in force.

KEYWORDS: non-academic skills, employability, social educators

1. Participatory didactic planning for sustainable employment

Acquiring useful skills to improve employment is a crux in the contemporary socio-economic and productive debate which, how-

* This essay, although prepared by the two authors in its overall content, shall be attributed as follows: first paragraph to Maria Luisa Iavarone, while second paragraph to Fausta Sabatano.

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ever, should be primarily set in the context of education and training systems, first of all by means of a better focus on the curricula-design of the study courses, in order to make the educational offer a proper link between the demand of young people, the demand for skills coming from the labour market and the emerging socio-economic needs in the territory useful to improve the productive osmosis, condition which is indispensable for real employment.

The awareness that a more effective and efficient reform of the training and didactic systems is the best prerequisite for training professionals who are more suited to the needs of the labour market is an inevitable challenge and, moreover, extremely problematic, given the intrinsic complexity of the training-employment relation, as it involves not only the training systems *sensu stricto,* but also the territory, politics and local economy in its relationship system.

Consistent with this analysis, the project – to which this essay refers – intended to make a righteous *liaison* between the academic world and the labour market, by means of a 'participatory didactic planning' experience between a university course and a social educational enterprise that offers employment for educators qualified in inclusion processes of subjects with social risk. Specifically, the project, which took place at the University of Naples Parthenope, consisted in the experimentation of a teaching module called *Pedagogy of the relationship* of a Master's Degree in *Motor Science for Prevention and Well-Being*, which was planned in a participatory manner between the Professor, the person who teaches the courses, and the Scientific Director of the Educational Centre.

The idea underlying the experimentation and shared among the partners of the project was to start from destructuring the idea of 'academic training', traditionally understood as knowledge container, and to opt for a learning model based on the confrontation with 'real professional environments' through in-depth study of observation and reflection models in local contexts. Such analysis methodologies have been particularly used for studying contexts, related problems and needs of the ultimate recipients of educational work (minors at risk) in order to find strategies and interventions that are professionally appropriate and consistent with the local market demand and in tune with the academic curriculum chosen. This option has come forward to an education clearly understood not as a closed sector but as a personal and professional development environment meant for intercepting employability through a better understanding of the development processes of the territory and its communities, also in terms of social inclusion, health protection, prevention of educational risk for a better individual and collective well-being. Such orientation is, on the other hand, highly coherent with the national strategic objec-

tives and the European directives on *lifelong learning* and *higher education* related to the "descriptors of Dublin" EHEA (*European Higher Education Area*) and to expected learning according to EQF (*European Qualification Framework*).

In the second place, it turned out to be essential to pay close attention to the need to create connections between formal and informal learning: a lot of literature emphasizes the utility of implementing *crossover learning*, that is fertile connections between the quality of knowledge coming from different contexts, in order to enhance the incisiveness of the experience through non-traditional learning methods originating in the work places and in social and professional networks. For this purpose, participatory planning has included seminars integrated with the presence of privileged witnesses from working contexts to assess the way methodologies and instruments learned in the classroom can have a real meaning and utility in the professional context of destination.

The ultimate purpose of the project was to create significant learning environments and experiences on a pathway that is not always linear, and in which, however, the personal and self-conceptual dimension of each trained individual is enhanced in order to allow the possibility of experiencing himself/herself, creating knowledge.

Certainly, this way of rethinking education, especially in the academic context, puts methods, practices and even institutions in crisis because participatory planning indispensably places the theme of training for employability in the centre. This makes that a recent debate (Dunia 2017) refer to five key aspects:

- *empowerment* of the skills and young people;
- *engagement* of the territory and citizens;
- *endorsement* of politics;
- *enforcement* of regulations;
- *execution*.

With regard to the *empowerment of skills* for youth employability, it is necessary to refer to those which are useful and on which, therefore, the educational pathways should be focused. This field covers in particular strategic or meta-competence skills that each individual can use to redefine their knowledge according to the needs of the personal and professional context, with particular attention to the ability to consciously use social media and the network.

Engagement of the territory concerns the ability to cooperate with local institutions in redefining the curricula, with the aim of enhancing the experiences coming from below and contaminating the territorial fabric, affecting also the citizenship and social belonging areas to somehow influence the economical and productive fabric in the strict

sense. Starting from this perspective, local authorities could play a significant role in the outside world to support young people's start-ups, also in order to strengthen the local entrepreneurship.

Endorsement of politics and enforcement of regulations refers to the opportunity to promote educational paths that are created and re-absorbed by the labour market, designing the dialogue between the *lifelong* educational system and the work and professions system, also serving as a service to the society for better social, economic and cultural inclusion.

Execution, however, refers to the skill distribution process in the so-called 4.0 society, where the educational system must be aligned with the programming of social and economic-productive policies. Employability is also increased by means of innovative actions based, for example, on practice communities and on accompanying and vocational guidance systems, as well as by means of using active teaching methods – also in academic contexts – that facilitate the development of self-efficacy skills, such as resilience and the ability to work in a team.

2. The educational plan

In order to create pathways centred on the well-being and inclusion of subjects in conditions of social marginality, good will, passion, good feelings are not enough, even though they are essential elements that nurture intentionality and educational practice. It is absolutely necessary to structure an indispensable profile of skills in order to respond to the complexity and variety of educational needs. Therefore, implementing an inclusive perspective requires being able to meet competencies and needs. This is a fundamental issue that can be addressed only by reaching greater clarity over the professional profiles that accompany the life of a subject with ordinary or special needs (Canevaro)[1].

This essay, as mentioned above, springs from the dialogue between educational experiences, gained within the territorial educational contexts, and the university. In particular, starting from the 10-year long experience acquired in three training centres operating in border areas of the city of Naples, a series of 'key competences' have been highlighted that are indispensable to the containment of

[1] A. Canevaro, *L'inclusione competente*, <https://www.unipi.it/index.php/offerta/item/download/4032_fd34783ba39ce6b5bdf058a579d6dc3d> (01/2018).

social risk disadvantage in an inclusion and well-being project, from an educational point of view.

The experiences referred to come from a project created about fifteen years ago[2], currently implemented in three centres located in areas of high social risk of Naples (Rione Traiano, Licola mare and Quarto). These structures have an ongoing activity for children between 6 and 13 years old and their families. These are families with many problems, from the moment socio-cultural deprivation problems combine with life paths – in the best cases – at the limit of legality, but generally characterised by organised and non-organised local crimes. The project involves 15 educators and three supervisors (psychologists and psychotherapists) who have the task of supervising the educational relationship between the operator and the child.

A method has emerged from this research and training experience – the *Integra Method* – (Sabatano 2011, 2015a, 2015b) to counter social exclusion and stop the poverty, deviance and school drop-out phenomena currently studied by students from different universities and school teachers on the national territory.

3. The skills of the social educator

The educator is the person responsible for the delicate and difficult task of implementing the educational experience in the daily reality according to the guidelines and the theoretical perspective chosen, in an attempt to change the practice into improvisation and, thus, to non-scientific action (Bertolini 1988: 299-300). Therefore, educational professionalism is characterised by the «intention and ability to act educationally according to principles and guidelines belonging to the science of education».

Not everyone can be an educator. To generally state that this category includes any person who deals with education at a certain degree (parents, animators, teachers) is a widespread and dangerous misunderstanding. The educator is, in fact, the one who must have the knowledge and the useful general and specific know-how, on one hand, in order to be able to make conscious choices and to ori-

[2] The Integra Project, born in 2005 in the Phlegre area of the Campania region to support the difficult lives of children living in areas of high social risk in Campania, in its twelve years of activity involved about 700 children and adolescents. The Project is carried out as an extra-educational training offer at the Regina Pacis Educational Centre chosen by the Bishop of Pozzuoli to host the educational emergency and is entirely funded by the Diocese of Pozzuoli and the 8x1000 funds of Caritas Italiana. The local authorities have never had any contribution.

ent himself/herself towards the complex dynamics that influence the educational practice and, on the other hand, to work with methods, techniques and tools consistent with a sense that give the latter meaning. This means that even the most specialised skills that he/she may have and, in certain circumstances, must possess, have to pass the filter of a general pedagogical perspective in order to avoid the risk of a crush on action, of a reductionism in the technical sense. Only in this way, practice becomes a fundamental moment of conscious processuality. In this sense: «theoretical elaborations are supplemented with procedurality and visibility that, in order to be illuminated by thought, become conscious work. General and specific knowledge and skills, therefore, in the *theory-practice* circle, make the listening modulation possible not only to tune in with greater accuracy on known wavelengths, but also to give intuition and perception possible signals» (Gatto 2008). This being said, the idea arises that specialisation is an *inner dimension*, not an *outer* one, of educational professionalism. This means it is not a response to specific external conditions (age, disability, discomfort, deviance), but it rather refers to the *research dimension* of those tools that are not ready for use, but which have a critical and reflective nature that put the educator in a position to face reality as it comes to attention. It is possible to trace four types of tools (Erdas 1991: 156-157) that are essential in the work field in order to manage the complexity of the educational setting.

First of all, the *tools of paradigmatic nature*, i.e. the assumptions, paradigms, and beliefs that can be used as perspectives to start from in order to set general problems in relation to which an action program is to be developed.

Second, the *tools of explicative nature* (or epistemological), to be traced in all those conceptual schemes or hypothesis by means of which different sciences interpret and explain reality and which have an indisputable value in operational terms, translated as the need of programs capable of giving answers.

Third, the *informative tools*, i.e. those useful in identifying the context in which an educational intervention takes place, making it more effective as it is more responsive to the specific situation.

Lastly, the *technological tools*, understood as the set of models, methodological itineraries and, thus, techniques that can be followed in real situations and that guide the practices (e.g. Rogers' non-managerial model, Ausubel's meaningful learning, etc.).

Therefore, the task of the educator is to master these tools in order to know how to use them when the situation requires it, without rigidity, listening instead to the expressed and emerging needs.

However, it should be noted that the specificity of certain skills should never be considered closed, in exclusivity. As Canevaro (2013)

emphasized, the risk of a 'closed' skill that eliminates every other reality, privileging those seen through its own competence, neglecting interactions, relationships with other contexts and experiences. Clearly, it is instead necessary that the educational system – in the various contexts in which it is expressed – is based on the interaction between different educational figures. In fact, the complexity of the problems posed requires an indispensable integrated approach, in which the various skills can interact with each other to co-build the educational path. In the perspective of inclusion and well-being, being competent means, therefore, knowing how to communicate through dialogue and exchange, the skills to colleagues and colleagues who do not have the same profile of competence. This means that the ability to *make the context competent* is included in the competence profile.

At this point, it seems useful to dwell on the *proprium* of the social educator: What are the pedagogical skills that characterise this figure? What are the tools and techniques that the educator should master? Sector studies have offered over the years different and many classifications in terms of the skills of the educator in order to define his/her professional profile and to share at European level the criteria for the recognition of titles and skill levels required for the practice of the social educator profession[3].

As previously stated, this consideration has the purpose to highlight the transferability of skills acquired in the field of educational curricula for the professions of well-being.

In particular, the work of observation of the skills of educators in action has allowed to identify those qualities that should characterise and inform the competent work of care professionals (Bertolini 1988: 308-311).

In the first place, *globality*, which derives from reading the educational event in the order and complexity of dimensions and variables that characterise it, pointing to the need for a competence that, as stressed above, does not deplete the understanding of reality in its own perspective, but is characterised by openness and, therefore, is able to interact with other professionals to interpret phenomena and identify possible intervention strategies.

Second, the *operativeness*, understood as the assumption of a conscious orientation towards the future and, therefore, towards the *possible*. This takes place in the actions on the field, in helping, stimulating, supporting, and encouraging the subjects in training on the

[3] See, in particular, the document edited by the European Section of the International Association of Social Educators, *Common Platform for Social Educators in Europe*, January, 2005.

path that will lead them to be *more*[4] (Freire 2004) and to imagine an *otherwise* and an *elsewhere* (Rutter 1985).

Third, the *relationality* which descends from reading the educational event as something *to do with*, a *live together* that feeds on a communication skill, playing in person as the protagonist of the educational relationship. The stories of the subjects (educator and educated) intertwine and, thus, each relationship has its own story, which is the story of those people, a story marked by different stages that affect the quality of communication.

We are all in relationships and connected to others in different ways. *To be with* is a *proprium* of the human being, «man is a social animal», affirmed Aristotle, while Seneca argued that «people are not made to live alone», in order to emphasize how human life is marked in a social sense.

Getting into a relationship and improving one's own abilities is, therefore, a responsibility/opportunity for every individual, but especially for those who play an educational role. Relational skills are embedded in three dimensions: *knowing, knowing how to do, knowing how to be*. The first dimension refer to *knowing*, as the interweaving of three levels: *scientific*, related to the consolidated knowledge and scientific theories held; *implicit*, connected to beliefs, naive theories, prejudices shared within a culture and which implicitly shape our knowledge; *personal*, referring to the idea of the world produced by one's own experience, history, and perception of the self. The second dimension is related to *knowing how to do*, as the set of skills that outline the specialist skill of the educator. The third dimension is related to *knowing how to be* and, therefore, to the ability to listen, empathise and enteropathy (Bertolini, Caronia 2015: 92)[5], to the awareness of knowing and feeling, of experimenting emotions (Gaspari 2002: 96).

Finally, the definition of the sense of competence of the social educator is the *integration between the individual and society.* The educator

[4] Freire sustains that a context that is satisfied with the existing one generates a shrinkage, a *being less*. Only a critical approach to reality causes the *righteous anger* and, therefore, a rebellion against the reality that immobilises and which, thus, betrays and denies the specific vocation of the human being: that of *being more*. Paradoxically, it is exactly this *incompleteness* – which man must become aware of – to give him greatness and protagonism in the dialectic of adaptation and integration, to oblige him to seek, improve, become an entrepreneur of culture, history, sociality and politics.

[5] Enteropathy is characterised by the ability of the listener – in this case, the educator – to decentralise and put himself/herself in the shoes of the subject educated. According to Bertolini, it is a relational style linked to *inclusive knowledge*, i.e. to the authentic understanding of the experiences and interpretations that support the actions of the subject educated. This type of relationality allows giving 'citizenship right' to subjective meanings that cause behaviours.

must necessarily look at his/her actions in the social direction, i.e. orienting the educational practices in order to increase the awareness of the youth about being a member of a community that shares rules and culture. This leads to a constant invitation to commitment and personal autonomy, so that children can progressively become self-conscious as members of a community. This process is particularly delicate in contexts of discomfort and social deviance, since belonging is not and inexistent feeling, as one might think, but rather well developed in terms of values, rituals, and behaviours proposed by the devious and illegal culture that individuals, families, the community, the children and adolescents absorb and make their own. As Bruner (1997) emphasizes, cultural belonging offers a *toolbox*, i.e. a set of beliefs, rules, values and visions of the world that outlines those cognitive patterns upon which knowledge and experience are based. In this perspective, it is fundamental for educators to recognise the dignity and legitimacy of the explanation models of the subjects educated (parents and children), who are confronted with knowledge, values and ideas proposed, varying the meaning and interpretation based on their experience. Therefore, the problem is not to equip the child or teenager with a new toolbox, but rather to understand what the toolbox used *contains*. It is about keeping in mind the *principle of perspective*, which concerns the subjective methods of giving a meaning:

> the meaning of each fact, proposition or meeting is related to the perspective or reference framework based on which it is interpreted […]. Logically, an official educational initiative will cultivate beliefs, skills and feelings in order to transmit and express the ways of interpretation of the social and natural world of the culture that delivers them. Therefore, it follows that an effective education is always in precarious balance, both in culture as a whole and in the groups representing it (Bruner 1997: 26).

Thus, the ability of the educator is expressed in educating the children to use the tools they possess, adding new ones based on the experience.

To these dimensions it is necessary to add the emotional skill, i.e. the ability to consciously manage emotions and feelings produced by the educational relationship. The socio-educational work is permeated by very intense emotional experiences, which are not always easy to decode and manage. Emotions are, at the same time, a *bond* and a *possibility*. In fact, on one hand, they often implicitly influence actions, by governing and guiding them, and on the other hand, if aware of them, they are a fundamental resource for dealing with situations, difficulties and relationships. Emotional intelligence (Goleman 1997), understood as the ability/possibility to know, identify,

evaluate, and manage one's emotions, then becomes central to the educational work, representing the basis for rational action, because emotions are driving the *thought*, and, thus, there is no thinking without feeling (Damasio 1995: 9). The development of emotional skills is, thus, a central element of educational professionalism, as the basic condition for being able to put in place an affective relationship between the educator and the educated person, on which the overall effectiveness of the action depends (Rossi 2014).

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EMPLOYABILITY-ORIENTED CURRICULUM: STRATEGIES AND TOOLS TO TRAIN YOUNG GRADUATES. THE PRIN EMP&CO. PROJECT

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the impact of employability-oriented modules on the design, planning, and implementation of work transitions. It takes its lead from the PRIN EMP&Co project developed by the University of Florence in 2014-2017, and how its research protocol allows a mapping of the construction of employability during the Master's Degree Course.

Keywords: employability, work transitions, employability-oriented curriculum, PRIN EMP&Co project.

1. Introduction

Employers frequently complain that graduates' standards are not consistent with their expectations (Fondazione CRUI 2016: 22), that they lack basic business knowledge and sense of measure in financial issues[1]. Does this mean that higher education study paths are failing in their mission? At the same time, when talking to higher education teachers, they complain about a lack of knowledge of basic principles and of critical sense and reasoning, abilities that should have already been acquired during college years if not before.

One reason is linked to the concept of 'transitions' which are always difficult and disconcerting for anyone. In other words, most young graduates experiencing their first transition to work…

> Will have a period of non-competence […] because they will lack explicit and – especially – tacit knowledge of 'what we do around here': they will be culturally naïve, reliant on any explicit and formal declarations they can find, whereas the reality of communities of practise is one of tacit knowledge, 'work-arounds' and local practices. Second […] the knowledge typically rewarded by higher education is quite different from […] expert-like behaviour, that is likely to be more significant in the workplace (Knight, Yorke 2004: 14).

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[1] See data from the focus groups organized by the Board of Professors of the Master's Degree in Adult Education, Lifelong Learning, and Pedagogical Sciences of the University of Florence with the Address Committee of the Master's Degree whose members are the main organizations of the Tuscan social economy in the year 2017-2018.

This does not mean that higher education alumni lack the intellectual and cultural capital needed for work, but that higher education has been traditionally influenced by a different culture from that predominating in the job market, and it cannot always guarantee the kind of experience, or the social or intellectual capital needed, to acquire the tools to sustain employment and employability.

Employability is deeply intertwined with the kind of assistance that higher education can provide students with to prepare their transition into the workplace. For instance, Boffo, Fedeli, Lo Presti, Melacarne and Vianello (2017) have argued that a staunch new relationship between higher education and work can help graduates in their first job since placement is considered the result of an educational process that starts a long time before. It is through traineeships, work-based and work-related didactics, developed in synergy with higher education, that students can strengthen their employability given that all these practices help the construction of a business-like, professional culture and a knowledge of the job market within the relevant curricula and programmes.

2. Higher Education, the Zone of Proximal Development, and the engagement of students with the world of work

The contexts of higher education and of work, as mentioned before, can involve different ways of learning and teaching and result in various competencies, such as the transfer of knowledge and skills from one context to another: the so-called 'skill of transfer' (Scribner, Cole 1973; Bridges 1993).

Several scientists have noticed the importance of educational programme design in the development of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1978) and of cultural practices (Leontiev 1978). Indeed, Vygotsky defined the Zone of Proximal Development as: «the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance as collaboration with more able peers» (Vygotsky 1978: 85).

In other words, the concept highlights how a pedagogical structure and pedagogical guidance help learners move beyond their ZPD and improve their competencies. This outlook suggests two different insights.

On the one hand, learning in a formal context, such as higher education, can be improved if the skills and knowledge are embedded within a social context that is essential to learning. For example, if students solve real-world problems, they will be accomplished in a way of thinking that will enable them to understand the cultural practices that can occur in a specific context, i.e., the world of work.

On the other, this outlook marks the importance of the involvement of adult educators in instructing young people, in the development of their ZPD. Those who guide and support learners can participate in and influence their process of learning through a dynamic educational relationship.

It is in these terms that Lave and Wenger saw learning, as «a relational matter, generated in social living, historically, in social formations whose participants engage with each other as a condition and precondition for existence» (Lave, Wenger 1991: 95) and as a participation process that «can be neither fully internalized as knowledge structures (within individual minds) nor fully externalized as instrumental artefacts or overarching activity structures» (Lave, Wenger 1991: 51). At the basis of learning is always a relationship that influence the learning process and this «is always based on situated negotiation and re-negotiation of meanings in the world. This implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction – indeed, are mutually constitutive» (Lave, Wenger 1991).

Indeed, as clearly explained by Mezirow's transformative theory, the role of the adult educator is that of a facilitator of metacognition processes, or of a facilitator who can enhance learners' ability to reflect on themselves, on cognitive processes, and on social, cultural, relational processes and assumptions. The relationship that the educator is able to create and maintain with the adult learner is as a mentor/friend where it is «the mentor trying to help the friend decide how to deal with a significant life problem that the friend may not have yet clearly identified as the source of his or her dilemma» (Mezirow 1991: 223). In this way, educators help adult learners identify and critically reflect on the epistemological, social, and psychological assumptions on which their beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions have been built. These constitute the 'meaning schemes'. Moreover, educators can help learners to transform their meaning perspectives (sets of related meaning schemes), to test them through participation in reflective dialogue (Mezirow 1991). «Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action» (Mezirow 1990: 1).

In other words, the transformation of the adult is realized, as Mezirow claimed, in correspondence with deep reflection linked to moral development. And at the right moment, when the learners' capabilities allow them to function as self-directed learners, then the adult educators' job has been properly done, since self-directed learning is among the most relevant skills that can be learnt (Mezirow 1985). Indeed, we can affirm that the role of adult educators, or facilitators, runs out when they are able to support adults, to stimulate them in their self-education, in their will to develop their capacity to reveal the prejudices and preconceptions of the social, moral, and economic orders that affect individual perception with respect to need.

3. The engagement of Higher Education students with the world of work

In broad terms, there are a lot of ways in which higher education can support students' learning. For example, if we think about Knight & Yorke's approach (2004: 199), we can plan to work on: 1) The students' approach to learning in general, 2) The students' approach to studying a specific task, 3) The learning environment, i.e., if it is filled with possibilities for learning, 4) The internal consistency of the curriculum, i.e., its design.

Indeed, learning is not only developed following specific instructions to acquire knowledge, but can be fostered in traditional higher-education and non-formal settings, although, as Goodyear remarked:

> we should recognize that we cannot influence directly the learner's cognitive activity [...] the best we can do is help set up some organizational forms or structures that are likely to be conductive to the formation and wellbeing of convivial learning relationships [...] Thirdly, we must recognize that the learner has freedom to reconfigure or customize their learnplace (Goodyear 2002: 66).

The success of learning can be even greater if the subject of study is taken as a site for a more generic kind of learning, a learning for life, that takes place within a study curriculum. This opens up the possibility of reflecting on employability (Yorke 2006: 3) which can be enhanced through a wide variety of facilitating practices, such as:

- Employability through the whole curriculum;
- Employability in the core curriculum;
- Work-based or work-related learning incorporated in the curriculum;
- Employability-related module(s) within the curriculum; and
- Work-based or work-related learning in parallel with the curriculum (Yorke, Knight 2004: 14-20).

These practices can be adopted in the study plan as embedded placement models that can lead to learning, enrich students' CVs, and develop their employability. Indeed, these practices can foster students' learning *for*, *at* and *from* work and thus make sure that employability is *caught*, rather than *taught*. Furthermore, they all allow internal processes of self-education that can happen intentionally when encouraged by facilitators or adult educators, as experiences that «combine the acquisition of knowledge, the construction of sense, and the transformation of the Self, and that are developed within social practices throughout life»[2] (Biasin 2009: 70).

[2] Translation from the original Italian version made by the author of the paper.

According to Harvey (1999: 2) embedded placement activities can:

- take the form of one optional or compulsory activity;
- be organized as single block placements (thick sandwich) or multiple block placements (thin sandwich);
- last one year, or one semester, or shorter periods.

These forms of contact with the job market should be the common response that higher education and academic programmes offer in the face of claims that there are skills shortages and gaps, that students are not prepared for the world of work and are not equipped with the 'right' skills. Indeed, these could bring the subjects taught at a higher education level closer to what employers want now and will need in one or two years' time, when Master's Degree students show up on the job market as new graduates.

Recent research has suggested that the scenario students will have to face as new graduates in the very near future will be characterized by certain major phenomena:

- mismatching of competences still widespread
- transition to employment lasting at least one year (Boffo, Fedeli, Lo Presti, Melacarne, Vianello 2017)
- individuals expected to be more responsive and flexible regarding technological change (Institute for the Future 2011)
- higher education institutions considered more accountable than in the past in terms of contributions and efforts to the training of individuals and the spread of knowledge among future generations of workers, since research into the processes of teaching and learning have demonstrated their impact on employment and employability (Boffo, Fedeli, Lo Presti, Melacarne, Vianello 2017) even though criteria to evaluate good quality at a global level are missing.

Difficulties in training graduates able to find consistent jobs in the short term have stimulated Italian universities to reflect, research, and work on employability and work-related activities, including projects, case studies, unconventional dissertations, and programmes that can foster a closer link between employers, higher education, and students. These are not only projects in the field of social sciences, but in the educational field. The latter are those that interest us.

4. The PRIN EMP&Co project and the EMAE curriculum

The PRIN project was conducted between 2014 and 2017 at the Universities of Padua, Florence, Naples Parthenope, and Siena, with the aim of fostering new strategies, methods, practices, and theoretical constructs

of higher education that could support students and young adults during an employment emergency, as a response to the socio-economic crisis. The project worked on designing higher education modernization strategies to support students' employability and learning processes required by the job market (Boffo, Fedeli, Lo Presti, Melacarne, Vianello 2017: XI).

The part of the research conducted at Florence University focused on the main research questions: How do young people look for a job? How do they approach the transition to work? How do they build their employability during their university studies? The research group limited the field of investigation to a smaller group of students in comparison with the general project: students enrolled in the Master's Degree study course in Adult Education, Lifelong Learning, and Pedagogical Sciences (LM57-85) of the University of Florence, aged between 23 and 29.

The research yielded two main considerations.

The first refers to the idea that the construction of a professional career should be thought about, reflected on, and prepared during the university course, and thus that employability itself relates to the years that precede leaving higher education. The idea therefore is that to intervene on employability means working on learning, on the curriculum and the competences that students will have acquired by the end of their study path, which will support them in their professional path.

The second relates to the crucial importance of care for subjects and their educational processes. Care should become not only the foundation to construct formative pathways or career guidance services, but also the key to reading transitions as care pathways that start within university courses. Studies have demonstrated that courses at a higher education level are still too theoretical and have little to do with the world of work (Yorke 2006; Wright 2013). Academia is not heading in the direction suggested by Dewey in his *The School and Society* (1899) and *Experience and Education* (1938), i.e. the connection between experience, work, and education, even though this should be the basis of every educational study course.

The distance between what Academia should do and what it is actually doing is so great that it led the Florence research team[3] to work in this direction, following the valuable results of the SALM[4] research performed in 2013-2014 within the study course (Boffo 2015: 147-168).

[3] The University of Florence research group was coordinated by Prof. Vanna Boffo (Head of the research team) and included as members Prof. Paolo Federighi, Prof. Giovanna Del Gobbo, Prof. Francesca Torlone, Dr Gaia Gioli.

[4] The European SALM research project was conducted to study the issue of the employability of young students aged between 16 and 24 in the social and tourism sectors. The University of Florence team members were Prof. Paolo Federighi (Head of the research team), Prof. Vanna Boffo, Prof. Francesca Torlone (Boffo, Federighi, Torlone 2015).

The PRIN project has developed a pedagogical instrument that puts employability in a close connection with preparation for the transition to work, with the development of skills and tools required to look for work on the job market.

The qualitative research performed adopted the case-study strategy (Mortari 2007), while focus groups and semi-structured interviews were the survey techniques chosen and realized following a longitudinal approach.

The data collected involved 10 groups, 110 interviews, and 52 graduates interviewed between June 2014 and November 2016: 39 from Florence University, 2 from Padua University, 9 from the Julius Maximilian University of Wuerzburg, since all these Universities share the same EMAE Master's Degree curriculum in Adult Education and an international comparison was therefore possible.

A rigid protocol was followed by every researcher, regardless of the role played: interviewer or observer, and the venue, Florence, Padua, or Wuerzburg. Indeed, every interviewee had the same interviewer for the entire longitudinal process, and each interviewer followed a specific recursive grid for every interview and focus group. The grid was organized in four main areas aiming at investigating: 1) Volitions, 2) Competences, 3) Channels, 4) Expectations (Boffo, Gioli, Del Gobbo, Torlone 2017: 165-166) in order to map the process of constructing employability in university curricula. Indeed, this was adopted during the focus groups to help students raise their self-awareness and facilitate reflection before the interview, while the interview was conceived as a moment of educational evaluation of the employability process, based on reflection, interpretation, and self-education.

The four fields of reflection set out to identify the youth trends towards work, the working directions desired by the graduates, and thus the families and professional figures considered consistent with their volitions. The life perspectives and aspirations area investigated the actions performed by graduates to plan their life and professional projects, while the reflection area focused on channels that helped the mapping of implicit strategies adopted to sustain transitions, namely: channels, networks, services, tools, educational and training activities in which the students participated to ease the transition.

To observe all these elements means to understand the choices made by young people and the processes that lie behind them: to head in one work direction rather than another because of deep knowledge of one specific economic sector rather than another.

Between April 2015 and April 2016, the student-researchers who took part in the SALM project in the academic year 2013-14 discussed their Master's thesis and joined the PRIN project as graduates. They were asked to answer the grid questions included in the PRIN Project research pro-

tocol and the results were interesting, especially since some of the graduates interviewed remarked on the importance of their participation in the SALM project for their ensuing job search and transition to work (Tab. 1).

Table 1 – Characteristics of the subjects of the PRIN EMP&Co. research project. [Source: author's own]

Sample	*Sample size*	*Dissertation year*	*Students' participation in employability-oriented didactic activities within "Foundations of Adult and Continuing Education" and "Research Methodology: Basic and Applied to Education and Training"*
Sample no. 1	6	June 2014	No
Sample no. 2	3	November 2014	No
Sample no. 3	3	February 2015	No
Sample no. 4	10	April 2015	Yes - 1
Sample no. 5	5	June 2015	Yes - 2
Sample no. 6	3	November 2015	Yes - 2
Sample no. 7	1	February 2015	Yes - 1
Sample no. 8	8	April 2015	Yes - 6

Indeed, within the SALM project, they were asked to conduct interviews and case studies with the most significant and relevant figures of the social sector, such as Chairs/employers/HR managers/Managing Directors, within the *Foundations of Adult and Continuing Education* course held by Prof. Paolo Federighi and *Research Methodology: Basic and Applied to Education and Training* held by Prof. Vanna Boffo in the first year of the Master's Degree in Adult Education, Pedagogical Sciences and Lifelong Learning in the academic year 2013-14.

The teaching and learning approach followed in the classes was designed to promote the development of employability, consistent with the adult education profession and practice in the Tuscan social economy. Students were guided in their understanding of the main professional profiles and related titles, skills, and competences, along with the main organizational models and employment contracts adopted within social economy organizations, to help them identify the main targets to be addressed at the end of their study path.

The main results of the interviews are shown in *Educational Jobs: Youth and Employability in the Social Economy* (Boffo, Federighi, Torlone, 2015: 147-168) but what is interesting to highlight here is the possibility given to students to become the main actors in directly and actively acquiring knowledge of the job market and becoming wholly responsible for the investigation. Indeed, they were asked to: 1) identify the actors to interview, 2) contact them by email and telephone, 3) interview them

to obtain information regarding the roles and functions they would find in their organizations, 4) transcribe the interview, 5) analyse the interview results, 6) interpret and 7) evaluate the transcript of the case studies.

Their actions took place in a context that enhanced their authentic learning, i.e. learning from real-life situations, based on the assumption that they would benefit more from authentic and problem-based learning, rather than from traditional classes, and could therefore become more employable in the long term. Moreover, the student-centred approach encouraged their active involvement through an organization of work based on small groups, a little intervention by the teacher-facilitator, and a major focus on students' experiences, analyses, interventions and resolutions of problems and critical circumstances.

From the interview analysis, the PRIN EMP&Co researchers were able to identify the positive impact of the methodological choice made: on the one hand, the active involvement of the students within the SALM research project allowed them to acquire new tools, knowledge and skills; on the other, the research protocol helped PRIN graduates to perform a critical self-analysis on the channels used for the active job search and the professional career and personal life, and understand how the work done in previous years had helped them to plan and design the transition.

With regard to the part of the interview dedicated to evaluating the channels, the students' answers showed that the two employability-oriented modules, Foundations of Adult and Continuing Education, and Research Methodology: Basic and Applied to Education and Training, allowed them to learn a great deal, although not everybody remarked this (Tab. 2).

Table 2 – Percentage distribution of students' answers regarding the channels and usefulness of employability-oriented modules within the study curriculum. [Source: author's own]

Sample	*Sample size*	*Active participation in employability-oriented didactic activities*	*% Students' awareness on learning outcomes from employability-oriented didactic activities in Foundations of Adult and Continuing Education and Research Methodology: Basic and Applied to Education and Training*
Sample no. 4	10	1	100%
Sample no. 5	5	2	100%
Sample no. 6	3	2	0%
Sample no. 7	1	1	0%
Sample no. 8	8	6	33%

In every case, the interviews allowed students to look back at their study path and the learning activities undertaken: there was a clear sense of usefulness and wellbeing deriving from participation in the educa-

tional experience, and this suggests that the graduates were highly appreciative, perhaps because they had had time to reflect on the past. Or perhaps because, when facing the real work world, they were obliged to fathom and find all the channels, networks, and tools that would be useful to accelerate the transition process from university to their first job. Reflection can be considered an essential element of work-based learning and employability-oriented learning activities.

The PRIN researchers identified several differentiated paths based on the commitment to memory of the student-researchers involved in employability-oriented didactic activities within study courses.

From the comparison, what emerged clearly is that the presence of a clear professional identity developed during the study years thanks to personal reflection on the subjects and didactic approach, work experience, and awareness in relation to the channels possessed, can deeply impact the result of transitions (Tab. 3).

Table 3 – Impact of employability-oriented modules for the strengthening of professional identity. [Source: author's own]

Graduate – The initial idea, before I enrolled in the Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy, was to take my BSc and then enroll in the Master's; then in view of the changed situation … I was never going to enrol in the Master's Degree Course in Philosophy because of the quality of the path. I looked around and I looked at what was happening inside there [Department of Education and Psychology]. I met Prof. Boffo, if I'm not mistaken, in October… no, in May 2012, and she pointed me towards the supplementary examinations that I needed to do to pass from Philosophy to the Adult Education Degree Course, then I attended Professor Federighi's class in 2012 and then… I just took my Bachelor's Degree, and enrolled in the Master's programme without any obligation. *Interviewer* – You said that at a certain point… «I would like to continue in the field of education» Why? Did you think of Philosophy as being bent on teaching? *Graduate* – Yes, I thought of it as being bent on teaching or, in any case, for a following placement in a company… or for the integration between a Bachelor's and a post-grad certificate; this was my initial idea, in short. […] Interviewer- Then, if we reconstruct the professional profile you built on this path, your initial idea was to become a teacher, at least at the very beginning… *Graduate* – Yes, but my work experience… first in Rome and then in Brussels, in the last year, had a significant impact on changing my perspective… *Interviewer* – Then your professional identity started modifying itself… *Graduate* – Of course. *Interviewer* – How do you see things now? How do you… *Graduate* – But I like to say, I can see… my professional identity as a whole. I've worked in the field of politics, then in the structuring of policies and negotiation, in short, in everything that happens behind politics. In fact, I chose to shift my attention to different studies that focused more on the precise dimension of training policies. I began to remodel my future professional interests when I started attending Professor Federighi's class, when he spoke of training policies, the relationship between educational and working systems and the whole framework of... policies and strategies and measures, in other words.

Equally supportive, the participation in empirical work done within a specific module/project designed and carried out or planned within a

research project of larger dimensions, such as a European project. This is especially useful for knowledge of the geographical and economic context where graduates live (Tab. 4).

Table 4 – Impact of employability-oriented modules for the acquisition of new knowledge, channels to support active job searches. [Source: author's own]

Interviewer – And who assisted you, if there was someone who helped you… and if there was no one, what did you do to search for recipients, businesses, communities, services to apply to?
Graduate – In Florence I had done… I had participated in a project during the course held by Prof. Boffo and Prof. Federighi. We'd done a project that allowed us to get to know all the situations at the cooperatives that operate in Florence and then I already had a list… no, I didn't only have a list, I also had a description…
Interviewer – Because this was a European project…
Graduate – Yes, exactly. Yes, yes. And in fact, that was very useful, despite the fact that it was 18 credits when I had to have 6, but it was really very useful. Actually, it was very useful from the beginning, because this opportunity we were given, we received it only in that module, then…
Interviewer – You, then the world of cooperatives… cooperation in the social economy… did you know about this or not?
Graduate – No, no. No, at the level of «I really know companies that operate in Florence and the professional profile that is being sought by these associations» no, absolutely not. It was really useful.
Interviewer- Because you then gave your attention to this type of job offer, didn't you?
Graduate- Yes, yes.

At the same time the reflexivity can be guided by the University, which can assume a key role when offering career services inspired by an empirical research project.

5. Final remarks

All over the world, young people contribute to the development of society in many ways: as active workers, entrepreneurs, active citizens, and agents of change. Notwithstanding the fact that their potential is often not fully realized because the jobs they are employed in do not match their qualifications and aspirations. As a result, many young people face elevated levels of personal and economic uncertainty (ILO 2017: V).

Ever since high-level skills became the basis for being competitive in a global environment, the role of higher education has taken on a fundamental role. Higher education is critical in this effort, since it not only helps young people acquire the desired values, technical and soft skills that make workers attractive in the job market, but is considered the engine of innovation, entrepreneurship (Almalaurea 2017: 30), and productivity. Indeed, it realizes its full potential when it can change flexibly to job market needs through a set of tools and methods (curricula, didactic

approach, etc.) that can be adopted to allow students to become employable and responsive to the economy (Almalaurea 2015). It can thus be a key driver for both individual and societal growth. Indeed, when considering the transition from higher education to the world of work, we cannot help considering that a difficult transition has long-lasting consequences not only on young graduates but on the whole of society, and the future of work itself.

This has led us to initiate a link between the higher education system, curricula, and graduates' personal attributes, hence their employability, employment and work, i.e. their transition into the working life, and businesses.

What the University of Florence has done within the SALM and PRIN projects, especially in reference to employability-oriented and work-related learning – where 'work-related' refers to activities different from pure academic subjects (Knight, Yorke 2004: 104), goes in this direction.

The research offers a deep insight into the university world, thanks also to the methodological approach adopted that allows us to interpret the lives of graduates, their desires and thoughts, their perceptions about the study curriculum. Above all, they were able to understand, from a longitudinal perspective, the professed and objective impact of the efforts made to modernize the Master's Degree in previous years.

Despite the many positive elements associated with the innovative methodological and didactic approach adopted, the implementation of an employability-oriented curriculum is still viewed as a challenge by many institutions and researchers. For instance, it entails significant effort on the part of academic professors and staff supporting the students, who are asked to play a role that is quite different from that of a tutor or subject expert, a specific kind of training, plus major involvement by employers, academic staff, and tutors, and so on.

The initiatives described were undoubtedly excellent, yet they could be perceived as isolated cases or islands, should the quality of the mainstream curricula be perceived at a different level by the students. Moreover, excellent initiatives often reach only those who can grasp them and who choose to be reached by them.

It would be important to champion a similar path at every university, although this would mean:

1) at an institutional level, new modules and programmes being proposed with a specific effort on developing students' employability;
2) at an institutional level, employability becoming an issue and concern for every work unit, i.e. educational research group, career service, and administrative unit, plus every academic department and role;
3) employability being a part of every programme presentation;
4) at a departmental level, employability being the main constituent element of every handbook, website, and assessment criterion;

5) every programme and every teaching moment being devoted to explaining to students – and teaching staff and professors – what is meant by employability and its importance in the transition perspective.

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DOCTORATES AND EMPLOYABILITY: NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR DOCTORAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: Profound processes of change are affecting doctorates all over the world, above all, to provide broader employment prospects. However, the link between the transformations of a doctorate and employability is complex, and entails re-thinking formative pathways for doctorates by focusing on the professional identity of a PhD.

Keywords: doctorate; employability; education, professional identity.

1. Introduction

Despite the centrality of the university in the development of the knowledge society, the focus of pedagogical research for this field is only recent in Italy (Gemma 2006; Orefice, Cunti 2009) and requires more in-depth study. This contribution raises the issue of employability in relation to doctorates in their interconnection with professional identity and educational perspectives. Moreover, it concentrates on the current Italian context, from solicitations coming from supranational organizations and from international trends and experiences. In fact, given the complexity of the various dimensions at stake, it is necessary to consider the issues associated with higher education from a 'glocal' perspective, where overall scenarios are inseparably interrelated with the peculiarities and specificities of national and local contexts (Altbach 2004). Special attention will be given to formative pathways that can be classed under the ERC *Social Science and Humanities* area which, even if included in a common national and international panorama, have peculiarities that nevertheless warrant closer examination, such as: the high number of subjects already working by the time they enter their doctorate programme (many as state employees) and the scarcity of additional employment prospects with respect to academic careers for those who intend to become involved in research on a professional level (Argentin, Ballarino, Colombo 2012; ISTAT 2015). The link between the transformations of a doctorate and employability is complex. If, in fact, failure to employ doctorate holders in the university sector at a worldwide level is one of the main incentives that have led to the modification of formative pathways, on the other hand, the employment prospects are multi-

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faceted and not always linear, at least as far as access to academic careers are concerned in Italy. If, therefore, employment opportunities are an indispensable element for reflection on employability, in our opinion, the approach to the issue needs to be broader and more comprehensive, and therefore include formative pathways and, more specifically, the issue of professionalism and the identity of doctorate holders (hereinafter PhDs).

2. Doctorates in the international Higher Education scenario

To reflect on the issue, we must first consider the vast transformations that higher education has undergone on a global level over the past decade (Altbach, Reisberg, Rumbley 2009) and, more specifically, the profound processes of change affecting PhDs (Nerad 2006). As already mentioned, failure to provide academic employment prospects to PhDs has given a significant impetus worldwide to the transformation of doctoral formative pathways. These processes, which have been in place for several decades in many Western countries (Auriol, Misu, Freeman 2013), have led to the issue of employment prospects for doctoral students, both in the field of scientific reflection and on the level of national and supranational policies and strategies.

It is first of all useful to remember the consolidated experience of English-speaking countries where, besides 'traditional' doctorates, there are 'professional' ones (Professional doctorates) (Neuman 2005) with distinct, sometimes even opposing, characteristics in their outgoing profiles (Taylor 2007). This trend is confirmed by the current proliferation of unique pathways: Kehm (Bao, Kehm, Ma 2016) has, for example, identified nine distinct types in European countries.

In Europe, these transformations (Kehm 2010, 2015) have provided a significant impetus, also in the wake of the efforts of supranational organizations. The Bologna Process in particular had such a decisive role that it was defined as a 'collector of interest' on employability (Sin, Neave 2016: 1448). On an institutional level, the European Union has urged universities to «ensure doctoral programmes […] promote interdisciplinary education and the development of transferable skills, thus responding to the needs of a vaster job market» (Bergen Conference 2005). The importance of professional integration has also been reiterated in numerous subsequent conferences, acting as a stimulus for reforms undertaken in various countries that have joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Within the framework of the reflection on the modernization of Higher Education, the so-called *Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training – PIDT* (European Commission 2011) were also defined, i.e., the strategic elements on which to redefine doctoral training in order to ensure professionalism and a profitable professional integration of the

subjects involved: Research Excellence, Attractive Institutional Environment, Interdisciplinary Research Options, Exposure to Industry and other relevant employment sectors, International Networking, Transferable Skills Training, Quality Assurance.

2. PhDs in Italy

In recent years, Italy has begun to implement the indications arriving from supranational organizations (Ferrara 2015). In fact, it has rapidly passed from a traditional doctorate model, based on the realization of a research project under the virtually individual supervision of an academic tutor, to more complex formative pathways, including specialized training sessions (Orefice, Del Gobbo 2011) aimed at maturing «the skills required to carry out high-qualification research activities in public and private entities, as well as qualifying them for the liberal professions, contributing to the creation of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area» (Art. 1, Par. 3, MD 45/2013). The benchmark scenario is, however, constantly evolving, and does not always seem to match one single systematic vision (CUN 2017). The most recent instances derive from the implementation notes of the *National Research Plan 2015-2020* on innovative doctorates (Prot. 1059, 31/08/2016) which, on the basis of the solicitations already contained in the PIDT, provide for the possibility of establishing, also as reciprocal combinations and integrations: Intersectoral (or Industrial) Doctorates, Interdisciplinary Doctorates, and International Doctorates, within a framework in which several of the principles indicated by the European Union have been strengthened in a particular manner. On the one hand, these innovative formative pathways seem to offer more specific training proposals, on the other – at least in some cases – they may prove particularly significant for those who do not undertake an academic career precisely because of the greater openness and links with non-academic situations. This approach is consistent with the current working conditions of PhDs in Italy, which it seems useful to briefly discuss.

In Italy, the employment prospects of PhDs are first-rate (91.5% of doctorate holders find work four years after graduation), confirming the permanence of a competitive advantage associated with the qualification, while improving job positions (23.2%) or income (17.9%) affect only a modest part of those already employed before beginning their doctorate (ISTAT 2015). As far as an academic career is concerned, even though almost all (around 98%) of those who follow such formative pathways declare that they aspire to this (CNVSU 2010), only a handful go on to obtain a permanent position at a university (Tiraboschi 2015). Consid-

ering that only 6.5% of the research grant holders will be permanently hired by a university, after a lengthy training, it is easy to understand why the rate of PhDs employed in the university sector is extremely limited (ADI 2016). The situation of students enrolled in doctoral programmes in Italy is, therefore, characterized by a significant share (30-40%) of already employed individuals who will return to their habitual job position (ISTAT 2015). At the same time, only a residual share of subjects will ever enter the academic ranks.

Reflecting on the levels of employment achieved (and presumably achievable) by PhDs, therefore, constitutes an extremely important and significant starting point, especially considering the origin (new graduates vs. professionals) and the heterogeneous working prospects (academic vs. extra academic) of doctoral students. The complexity of challenges on both an individual level (full personal fulfilment through work, the possibility of making a contribution to society…), and on a social level (developing talents, bringing individual excellence to the social, cultural, and economic development of a country, the return of the economic investment made towards education and training…), in our opinion, force us to consider the triangulation between formative pathways, occupational prospects, and the professional identity of PhDs in integrated terms without excessive simplifications and automatisms. A reflection on education and its status cannot be reduced to a merely technical issue, but forces us to consider how, in overall terms, the identity of a professional is built (Golde, Walker 2006; Lisimberti 2006; Milani 2014). To do this, it may be useful to shift the focus of attention from employment to employability, and make use of the vast integrated definitions of employability that include social value and the ramifications of the activities carried out by individual professionals.

3. Employability between professional identity and doctoral education

The debate on employability in higher education developed internationally in the 1990s, in connection with a growing focus on the quality of higher education (Harvey 2001). As far as doctorates are concerned, employment prospects are the subject of constant ever-growing attention, and are often the focus of discussion. The issue of employability, however, seems to be a less-investigated issue, even in the international literature, to the extent that it is not included among the main fields of research (Kehm 2015).

On a conceptual level, in some cases, reflecting on the product (employment) seems to be confused with the process (employability). Let us assume, in this instance, Harvey's view that employability is a process in which the subject occupies a key role (Harvey 2001) and which

leads to employment as a result. From this perspective, employability must, therefore, be investigated by placing the individual at the centre. Focusing on the subjects implies considering them as the active protagonist of their own personal and professional development without disregarding the prevalence of the socio-economic context of reference, the characteristics of the job market, and the crucial role of institutions and training models (Støren, Aamodt 2010). This systemic perspective, which seeks to highlight the complexity of the elements involved, combines well with a pedagogical approach to the issue (Lisimberti 2006), attentive to the dimension of professional development and the professional's identity.

With regards to the development of identity, there is a constitutive link with doctoral training that must be considered. The fruition of a doctoral programme induces profound transformations in subjects who must constantly re-evaluate themselves, renegotiating other roles, such as those of being a student, a researcher, or a professional (Harrison 2008; Crossouard, Pryor 2008). The diversification of outbound employment contexts (Hancock *et al.* 2016) further complicates this process, which is played out in the interaction between university space, personal space, professional space, and workspace (Pratt *et al.* 2013). According to this view, subjects and their professional and identity development must, therefore, be placed at the centre of this reflection, with reference to both the definition of formative pathways and to employability.

Exclusively considering only the employability of the individual is, however, reductive. In this sense, it seems useful to take the approach indicated by Yorke who, in defining employability as «a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes 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), calls attention to the community and social dimensions of work. Such a concept of employability also makes sense for those who are already employed. After completing their doctoral education, these subjects are unlikely to advance in their careers, but will instead experience significant development in their professionalism, which will also have an impact on their work context. From a pedagogical point of view, social and community development cannot, in fact, be separated from the integral development of the person (Alessandrini 2012), and constitute an end result. Training, from this perspective, must aim towards a full realization of the person. In connection to this, it must also contribute to the development and progress of their immediate community and of society in a broader sense. This scenario forces us to rethink formative pathways for doctoral students in comprehensive terms, to ensure full personal and professional development through employability.

4. Training trajectories for doctorates

Re-thinking formative pathways for doctorates poses problems that are far from insignificant. These are attributable to the inherent complexity of training subjects who are ready for both an academic career and for other professions. In conclusion, we will touch on some aspects that are closely interconnected, and seem useful to consider from this perspective.

Firstly, it seems essential to focus on the subject's professional development project (Lisimberti 2006). This implies the need to refrain from proposing standardized models, but rather to begin from individual needs and the resources to be mobilized. Even formative pathways which lie within common and orderly frameworks of reference should be personalized. In this regard, Green's perspective appears challenging, namely that «doctoral pedagogy is as much about the production of *identity* [...] as it is the production of *knowledge*» (Green 2005: 162). We believe that such attention should pervade every formative pathway. However, it assumes a significant prevalence for those subjects, particularly numerous in the Social Sciences and Humanities area in Italy, who – most likely – after their doctoral studies, will return to performing their previous occupation (suffice to think of teachers). For them, the risk is higher that a doctorate constitutes a hiatus. In contrast, if appropriately thought out and planned, it could bring benefits to both the individual – in terms of skills and professional development – as well as to their current profession and workplace in terms of developing innovation, networking, and connections with the academic world, plus planning capabilities, advanced research, etc.

Secondly, indications from supranational organizations, which incorporate previous scientific and experiential results, might usefully pervade the various doctorates and not merely act as a catalyst in specific courses In fact, the international literature has highlighted, in addition to the specificities and undeniable strong points, the limits and potentials deriving from the presence of different formative pathways, such as their progressive hybridization and the impoverishment of professional doctorates, often considered inferior in quality to traditional ones (Shulman 2007; Olson, Clark 2009). Equally risky would be the re-proposal of a 'monolithic' model coupled with acceptable yet isolated innovative practices, unable to optimally cope with the needs of employability that originate from the presence of extremely diverse professional and existential trajectories. The open challenge is, therefore, to find applicative strategies that can reduce those elements considered strategic within all the formative pathways.

Among the possible actions it is possible to cite, as an example, transferable skill training, which has a value that is recognized with direct reference to employability, since it makes subjects more flexible in re-

sponse to requests from the working universe (Ashcrof 2004) It also opens up a greater range of job opportunities (Fallows, Steven 2000), and directly contributes to raising the quality of research (OECD 2012). Transferable skill training can therefore contribute to the improvement of all doctorates, regardless of the origin and employment prospects of the subjects involved. Some Italian universities (almost 30%) are already active in this field and, in some cases, have launched innovative formative pathways which need to be studied in greater depth, in terms of critical analysis, also with a view to identifying possible guidelines (Lisimberti 2017).

The aforementioned aspects, together with a solid theoretical reflection, could be the start of further empirical investigations aimed, amongst other things, at identifying and presenting existing good practices and experiences. This would contribute to the creation of advanced and innovative training solutions, useful for the development of solid professional identities, ready to cope with the challenges of employability and, more generally, the knowledge society.

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EMPLOYABILITY AND COMPETENCE. BUT FOR WHICH EUROPE?

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Abstract: This paper proposes to understand the concepts of employability and competence, placing them within the neoliberal scenario that today characterizes the European project, aiming to promote maximum competitiveness in a condition of increasing austerity and a reduction in workers' rights.

Keywords: neoliberalism, competitiveness, austerity, employability, competence.

1. Introduction

A critical assessment of the concepts of employability and competence requires their placement in the wider political and economic framework characterizing the EU. Without this contextualization, the extent of their involvement becomes difficult to understand. Pedagogy cannot lack an awareness of the inherent link between the political dimension and educational models, not only in the Marxist sense of the relationship between base and superstructure, but also in order to disengage from the inevitable influence that the 'spirit of the age' exerts on the socio-cultural organization of society, working «upon weaker minds, through the unconscious, with an overwhelming force of suggestion that carries them along with it» (Jung 1972, § 653: 340).

The interpretative proposal contained in this paper asserts that the concepts of competence and employability are fully intelligible only if placed within a political-economic scenario that has been dominated by the neoliberal economic model since the 1970s.

After World War II, politicians decided that the right balance between the various countries would be the result of free competition in the global market. However, until the 1970s, the redistribution of resources and the balance between capital and work were regulated by the Keynesian economic-political model. This was backed up by the various political forces since it conjugated full employment and increasing welfare with robust economic growth. In the 1970s, with the complicity of the oil crisis, Keynesian economics were replaced by neoliberal economics that put competition and the market at the centre of social and economic dynamics. These are not, however, an expression of the

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nineteenth-century 'free market hand' capable of self-regulation, but seemingly impersonal and 'objective' rules, behind which lies the game of an increasingly powerful and globalized capitalistic oligarchy. Equilibriums achieved previously changed in direction of a *Growing Unequal*, as the OECD recognized in its 2008 report. The replacement of a solidal project with a competitive one is also reflected in the evolution of the European project: the 'Europe of the Peoples' promoted by Aldo Moro (which was supposed to lead to the 'United States of Europe' and to the centrality of its Parliament) has been replaced by the Europe of austerity and parameters, established in a technocratic way by the Commission.

The concept of competence, and that of employability, which represents the other side of the coin, are understandable if placed within the previously outlined framework. Just as the 'myth of competition' within the free global market requires workers' mobility and flexibility, employability/competence facilitates the homogenization of workers' profiles, allowing them to be competitive in the job market. However, since globalized competition produces austerity and increases in structural unemployment – as we can see today in Europe, and particularly in Italy – increasing what Marx called the 'reserve industrial army' – workers will have to compete 'downwards' and accept less favourable working conditions. Just as the Euro has achieved not a people's union but a competition between economies producing austerity, so the concept of employability/competence works as an 'educational-Euro', whose goal is to increase workers' competition, but in a growing condition of unemployment, with the result of reducing labour rights.

In the following parts, we will go more deeply, in order, into:

a) how the concept of competence becomes confused outside the newly-delineated interpretation framework;
b) how the neoliberal model that characterizes the Eurozone, using austerity as a government method, allows a distribution of wealth in favour of major capitals and to the detriment of work;
c) how the concepts of competence and employability must be critically outlined within the framework considered above, considered as a potential accused of facilitating this process of devaluating work.

2. Competence as a fuzzy concept

In the introduction we proposed to understand the concepts of employability and competence as the expression of the neoliberal soul that has contaminated the European project. Specifically, their goal is 'to fluidify' the job market, making it more 'competitive'. The problem is not the competitiveness as such – although cooperation and solidarity between peoples, which are less and less mentioned, should be alongside

it – but the fact that it is used to reduce workers' rights in a context of increasing austerity and capital reallocation in the global economy, on the way to a decline in labour and welfare rights.

All the implications of the concept of competence, which we will now limit ourselves to, become difficult to understand outside this scenario. Easily intelligible if placed within the business field from which it comes, it becomes vague, especially when trying to 'translate' it into the educational field. Norris (1991) argued that «as tacit understanding of the word [competence] has been overtaken by the need to define precisely and [to] operationalize concepts, the practical has become shrouded in theoretical confusion and the apparently simple has become profoundly complicated» (p. 332). In fact, the concept of competence alludes to something specific, matured within a precise context. In this sense, we can easily understand that a craftsman is competent, as is a lawyer or a manager. But the concept of competence becomes suddenly elusive when it is used to define the processes and products of education. These are profoundly experiential, they are concerned with self-transformation in relation to culture, to the ability to connect a multiplicity of experiences to the unity of a person. Their matrices are traceable to the Greek *Paideia* and the concept of *Bildung*. They concern the whole dynamic of a personality and not merely some factors of efficacy extrapolable from it and related to certain contexts (which we call skills or competences).

So why use the concept of competence also to redefine the processes-products of education? Why force an intrinsically 'molar' concept to define the outcomes of educational paths, which are structurally 'molecular'?

Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) pointed out how

> it is paradoxical that, while management strategists were emphasizing competences that were unique and firm-specific, the HRD [Human Resource Development] literature was more concerned with developing highly transferable generic competences required for the majority of jobs or specific occupations or job roles (Levy-Leboyer 1996; Stasz 1997). There is an inherent tension between the strategy and the HRD approaches. […] There is such confusion and debate concerning the concept of 'competence' that it is impossible to identify or impute a coherent theory or to arrive at a definition capable of accommodating and reconciling all the diverse ways that the term is used (28-29).

The vagueness of the concept of competence is attested by many authors. Van der Klink and Boon (2003: 134)) define competence as a 'fuzzy concept'. It is «an ill-defined concept with no clear content, thus allowing ample interpretations. […] Its vagueness is probably at the same time the explanation for its prominent status today, but […] makes it difficult to use the concept as a sound cornerstone for designing HRD and educational practices».

> Due to the lack of clarity of the concept of competence, assessment of competencies can be very difficult. Some authors warn against associating competence exclusively with skills, others distinguish between the terms *competence* and *competency*, whilst others treat these terms as being synonymous. The essential problem appears to be that these terms are liberally used as general terms to refer to various aspects of job performance without any attempt being made to give precise definitions of them. While various efforts have been made to arrive at a single definition of the term competence, no agreement has been reached and there is still a wide variation of meaning between various cultures and between different professions. […] It is recommended that if the term competence is being used, the definition of competence being used in the particular context should be stated […] (Kennedy, Hyland, Ryan 2009:1).

This brief bibliographic review was not intended to exhaustively investigate the concept of competence – an in-depth analysis of which requires a lot of effort – but to insist on the importance of its contextualization in the current economic-political scenario: only from this can we understand why, despite the ambiguities of the term, educational processes are being reorganized around the concept of competence. The thesis we intend to emphasize, as already mentioned, is that the motivation which has led to the centrality of 'this kind' of competence concept is extrinsic to the educational dimension; it meets, precisely, the desire of industry to create a sort of 'educational Euro', homogenizing the students' and workers' profiles and making them interchangeable in order to create a job market at a global level in which, since the demand of work is higher than the offer, a reduction in rights and wages can be implemented.

3. The Eurozone in crisis

The Eurozone is in crisis. Recently Savona wrote: «I'm just back from a conference at Oxford University with the participation of eminent economists, political scientists, and sociologists. They all think the Euro is kaput and that the common market itself is at risk» (Spadafora 2016).

Italy is one of the more compromised countries after twenty-five years of EU membership. Looking at the data of the last decade, according to «Il Sole 24 Ore», our peninsula has lost 31% of industrial production; unemployment has doubled (from 6.1% to 12.1%), especially youth unemployment (15-24 years, from 21.2% to 40.3%) (Source: ISTAT).

> The fixed exchange rate destroyed our competitiveness; on the contrary, between 1970 and 1995 it had allowed the growth of those successful companies which still allow us to survive. Italy has paid a huge price to the Euro. It has sacrificed 10% of *per capita* product since 2008; in 1999, at

> the start of the Euro, our *per capita* income was 20% higher than its average; today it is 20% below average. There are two roads: Germany leaving the Euro, or fixed but adjustable exchange rates. (La Malfa, Savona 2016).

For Festa and Sapelli (2014 : 92-93; 149-151) these results are the consequences of the assumption behind the EU political-economic model, i.e., the neo-liberal or neo-conservative one. A model through which 'free market forces' were supposed to lead the Eurozone towards continuing improvement, by harmonizing the imbalances between wealth and competitiveness. Sapelli traces the roots of this liberalism to the German *ordoliberalismus*, born between the two wars and opposed to the intervention of the State in the economy, convinced that a free market would lead to a better distribution of wealth and, at the same time, to maximum social inclusion (hence the definition of *ordoliberalismus* as a 'social market economy').

However, unlike the nineteenth-century myth of the self-regulated market, neoliberalism imposes an 'impersonal system of rules' on the market (Paggi 2016: 39): austerity policies; obsessive control of inflation (as Sapelli again reminds us, a legacy of the strong devaluation of the currency after WWI, that became marked as a stigma in the Germans' minds); the fiscal compact and the prohibition to exceed a 3% debt/GDP ratio (which prevents each country from going into debt but also from investing in public works and services, so that Europe has been steadily disadvantaged in relation to those countries, like the USA and Japan, which are free from these constraints); and, finally, the impossibility of cash transfers to the poorest States. These lines of action emphasize a Europe with little interest in social and labour issues, and strongly oriented to capital.

This system of rules appears increasingly regulated by the European Commission which «decides in a self-referential way on the basis input […] of a technical structure of tens of thousands of officials and ambassadors […], which defines, in turn, macro-objectives and macro-rigidity» (Festa, Sapelli 2014 : 93). The European institutional operation resulting from this is more technocratic than democratic, and the power of the European Parliament appears to be strongly reduced in favour of that of the Commission (Festa, Sapelli 2014).

What should have been a Community project based on a strong and fully legitimate European Parliament has become an economic austerity policy, in the hands of the Commission and obedient to «market discipline» (Somma 2016: 40). For these reasons, a European political union seems hard to achieve today. Political unification was supposed to be a parallel path to economic unification. But only the latter took place. The loss of monetary sovereignty which was imposed on the States for their accession to the EU deprived them of the opportunity to decide their own monetary policy, but without having in exchange those public interventions for debt financing that only an EU of a political nature could assure,

as the US 'Federal Reserve' does, for example. Without their own monetary policy, States cannot devalue the currency to make their produce more competitive; so, in order to maintain their monetary equilibrium, they are forced to raise taxes and devalue working, by introducing those policies of flexibility, insecurity, and contraction of wages that have characterized the last two decades; but this triggers a vicious spiral that makes public finances worse, and depresses both production capacity and domestic demand in a country. This is what we mean by the word 'austerity'.

Austerity does not appear to be an accident, however, but a desired outcome, a method of government aimed at reallocating resources in a different way. Indeed, the scenario that Europe was encouraging after the 1970s was that of the Keynesian expansive economic model in crisis. Previously, after the end of WWII, this model had guaranteed a significant increase in wellbeing, welfare and equilibrium between capital and work, aiming at maximum employment and considering a strong presence of the State in directing the economy and ensuring welfare. In the 1970s, however, strong economic stagnations brought the Keynesian expansive model into crisis. For the neoliberalists, the collapse of the Keynesian system was inevitable. For the critics of neoliberal interpretation, the crisis was the occasion to replace a capital-oriented equilibrium model with one in which the rights of workers and citizens have gradually been eroded. For Savona (2012), until the fall of the Berlin Wall, Italian society had been driven by a scheme that aimed at rebalancing the forces between capital and work; such a balance then failed, in favour of a return to an older capitalism.

In the 1980s, the denunciation of Italian public spending began; it was considered excessive and a source of corruption (which it was). However, the unilateral insistence on the corruption of the political class and public spending waste has become a way to legitimize the destruction of State intervention with the aim of undermining the country's sovereignty. All public industries were dismantled to prevent the corrupt political class from making further public investments. The 'noose' put around Italy through adherence to the Maastricht Treaty in order to encourage it to discard its defects – as Savona (2014) incisively explained, remembering the words of his teacher Guido Carli – would make sense if the public hand had checked that the process was happening for the good of the country. Instead, only a 'Eurocratic' automatic pilot is establishing the direction of national policy.

Austerity was a way to reduce the rights that democracies had guaranteed.

> […] Behind the Euro was a geopolitical, strategic, and financial project; the ruling Italian class of the past, and worse, that of today, did not understand this in all its ramifications which were indeed, geopolitical,

> global, and strategic. The single currency […] was a way to move domestic competition to another higher level and not a way to achieve economic cooperation and synergy between the EU countries (Valori 2014).

For Sapelli, denying States the possibility of minting money represented «a coup d'état carried out by commissions […], transforming a European growth project into a draft European deficit control, i.e. an exportation of the Teutonic model throughout the European area» (Festa, Sapelli 2014 94).

From this point of view, the single currency was the last piece through which the possibility of the State to carry out autonomous economic policies was taken away. «This project, "One Money, One Market", instead of making us fly high, has built the foundations for a Europe in a cage, in the Euro trap. […] It has produced growing divergence; it has furthered the strong countries and relegated the weak ones to the margins» (Pini, Somma 2015).

This 'forced union' has nothing to do with the creation of 'a closer union'; on the contrary, it produces aversion when the result is that 'free mobility' serves to produce cheap manpower obtained through social dumping and 'welfare tourism', destabilizing both the trade union and bargaining systems of individual countries and the functioning of institutions and welfare. (Amoroso, Jespersen 2014: 36).

Labour reforms – from the 'Treu package' to Renzi's Jobs Act – are tending to devalue and commodify work (Barra, Caracciolo 2013 178 e ss). The flexibilization and precarization labour policies are inclined to reduce workers' rights. There is no relation between unemployment reduction and work reforms, as the former head of the International Monetary Fund Blanchard recognized (2006) (see also Brancaccio, Garbellini and Giammetti 2016). For Sapelli too, «it is not acting on the job market that creates employment […] it is investment that creates employment».

That besides, for Amoroso, the underlying problem is choosing a non-predatory kind of economic growth, but one that is respectful of all the planet's populations. In his view, insistence on an 'economic growth' is a 'mystification' unless a different kind of economy is planned: «economic growth as a synonym of employment is the mantra through which one seeks to obtain the consent of workers and trade unions to create forms of development aimed at making existing work precarious and deterring or destroying jobs that could be created with a different economy» (Amoroso 2013).

5. The role of the concepts of employability and competence

In his numerous publications on this subject, Hirtt (for example: 2000; 2014) has drawn our attention to the pressure exerted by the 'Work-

group on Education' of the 'European Round Table on Industrial Policy' (ERT) on education policies in Brussels. The ERT is a lobby of business executives founded in the early 1980s with the aim of helping to strengthen and develop Europe's competitive capabilities by encouraging the creation of a single European market. In 1989, the ERT published *Education and Competence in Europe*. The opinion of industrialists is that «responsibility for education must, ultimately, be taken over by industry [...] Education must be regarded as a service rendered to the economic world» (ERT 1995).

Another fundamental game played in the '70s and '80s, as we have said, was the redistribution of wealth. Industrialists feared an increase in wages and the welfare level. One of the founders of the ERT, Dekker, stated that in those years «the combined results of the largest 100 companies in Europe, excluding the oil companies, showed a profit level of 0%. [...] The Community's relative competitive position deteriorated because growth in productivity lagged behind wage increases» (Stone 1989: 93).

The theme of the education-industry approach was further developed in Edith Cresson's *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995). The ERT participated directly in the *White Paper* work, and, meanwhile found an easy back-up in Cresson, one of those Socialists who, in the wake of Jacques Delors, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, had quickly abandoned nationalization and measures to safeguard wages to embrace neo-liberal logics. It should be no surprise to read in the White Paper on education about the close link between education and enterprise (pp. 4-38) and that the priority of the economy (pp. 27-28) was assumed as a stringent criterion to impose «the end of the debate on educational principles» (p. 23). The White Paper enjoyed complaining about the reasons for innovation, competitiveness, priority to technical-scientific disciplines (pp. 6-9) against the «pre-industrial ethos guiltily prevailing in schools» (Ravaglioli 2010: 14). While apparently continuing to give importance to those cultural aspects at the heart of traditional education, the White Paper placed them in a context which, in reality, made them obsolete in favour of technical rationality.

Once the end of the debate on educational principles had been declared, the White Paper stated that the cybernetic-cognitivist culture, in which the concept of competence (as a meta-regulator of interaction between organism and environment) was legitimized, and must prevail. How much difference was there, incidentally, between this pedagogical anthropology (fundamentally anti-humanist, being centred on a mechanistic idea of humankind and its relation to the environment) and Dewey's humanistic pragmatism, which also stressed interaction between individuals and the environment (but without radicalizing the concept of competition, nor the acquisition of individual schemes

of efficacy [skills, competences])? Instead, Dewey emphasized the expansion of meaning that happens in the vital transaction between the individual and the environment, where individuals are never really distinguishable from the environment and the society of which they are a part. This enables thinking of humanism and technological innovation, school, and society together. It is important to emphasize that there is no antithesis between these dimensions, indeed, culture precedes and also sustains economic action. It is true that, today, «school and work are two strange worlds» (Ravaglioli 2010: 14); but we cannot relinquish humanism in the face of the «primacy of technology or instrumental rationality» (p. 32). Neither should the 'other' dimension of education be sacrificed to the altar of modernization, because this represents a defence against the technicalization that governs our culture, as Magatti (2010: 319-320) stated, re-introducing McLuhan's concept of 'counter-environment'. The technical rationality that feeds the culture of skills believes that cultures are worthwhile only if they can increase efficacy to reality – reducing efficacy to measurable skills and competences. The primacy of practical reason, the centrality of the economy and the neo-liberal credo are aspects of a single vision of the world, whose reductive anthropology «perceives life as a means to serve the economy», as Gallino argued (2003: XI).

The White Paper also contained the elements of that technocratic framework today characterizing our higher education: we refer to European-recognizable credits (ECTS); to skills, and to «personal skills cards» for one's recognition (p. 35); to employability; to «on-and-off-the-job training» (p. 25); to the granting of educational institutions autonomy but in the context of increasing evaluation policies (pp. 26-7).

Incidentally, the way in which the White Paper's parameters have been implemented in the Italian university is of particular concern. Beyond the strictly didactic assessment of the benefit of '3+2' and CFU study course reformulation, we must stress that, contrary to the objectives of increasing the funding of universities foreseen by Europe 2020 and in contrast to the European landscape, in Italy, the university reform process has been combined with a sharp reduction in resources (more than 20% since the 2008 crisis) and with an increase in competitive funds, tied to the delivery of a certain performance, with the obvious risks of destabilizing the system, in sharp divergence from the indications of the 'European University Association' (EUA) (Viesti 2016: 47), in particular as regards Southern Universities. In fact, the EUA allows competitive funding only if there are public funding increases. Moreover, as Viesti observes, the indicators that should be the criteria for distributing the competitive fund have been constantly changing, preventing any financial programming (p. 48). In the light of these data we must ask: what political project is following the Italian University?

> […] [it] is not the result […] of a transparent project; that was carefully evaluated at least by the leading classes of the Country […] It derives instead from a patchwork of regulations and implementing measures; of regulations […] A largely obscure process; so structured as to escape […] to the understanding not only of citizens or of 'ruling classes', but also to the most directly interested ones. A process which is quite independent from politics; but that, at the same time, has had a substantial continuity also with quite different executives. […] A kind of implicit single thought (Viesti 2016: 9).

Returning to the theme of employability/competence, we should note that we need to focus on the overall scenario within which these concepts acquire sense. Along with the cultural aspects, we have highlighted how the concept of competence/employability facilitates downward competition among workers. It is no coincidence that such a reduced level of competitiveness has resulted in greater inequality, as the OECD has acknowledged in some of its reports (*Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising* [2011]; *Growing Unequal* [2008]). Competitiveness works top-down and produces wage and welfare shrinkage. For Amoroso, the theme of inequality is global, and we are heading towards a *Global Apartheid* (1999), where only a part of humanity will be the winner in a global competition with the hope of accessing higher incomes and quality services.

6. Final remarks

The Eurozone is in crisis. The unilateral insistence on the skills and employability of graduates – in the face of increasing job competitiveness and flexibility as measures to regenerate the job market – is in sharp contrast to the growing contraction in employment and to the scientific evidence that reforms of the job market alone do not produce an increase in employment. To 'unload' the burden of economic growth onto individuals' abilities is not only economic-political mystification but also ethical-cultural, since it contains the idea that the lone atomized individual, competing with others, can be an actor of change for society. This inevitably produces a reductionist and guilty anthropology; it supports the (false) idea that humanistic and technical cultures are at the antipodes, splitting the unity of the person; it eradicates the awareness that a better economic development is impossible by putting graduates in unruly competition with their peers, and that a more just and habitable society is impossible without inclusion, solidarity and cohesion. Therefore, the concepts of competence and employability must be rethought within a framework different from the neoliberal one, one that is capable of combining culture and development, humanism and

technique, solidarity and competitiveness; otherwise, competence and employability will act in a pedagogically reductive manner, simplifying the complexity of human education in the direction of an efficacy that can be spent on the purely economic side.

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THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD: WHY EMPLOYABILITY MATTERS

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Abstract: The transformations of work are increasingly introducing new scenarios at a global level. In fact, the disruptive importance of innovation in all workplace contexts anticipates the challenge of skills and capabilities for the work of the future. In this sense, education has a crucial role in supporting the development of students and future workers. This paper analyses in depth the link between education, work and the pedagogical instrument of work pedagogy that is derived directly from John Dewey's thought. This theoretical standpoint represents the base for the development of employability in higher education and its future challenges of innovation, development, and social inclusion.

Keywords: work pedagogy, employability, innovation, higher education.

1. *The transformation of the world of work*

> In the coming decades, global competition will be about attracting innovative human capital and innovative companies. The importance of geography and the forces of agglomeration in determining the location of human capital will keep growing. The number and strength of a country's brain hubs will determine whether it will prosper or decline. Physical factories will keep losing importance, but cities with a large percentage of interconnected, highly educated workers will become the new factories where ideas and knowledge are forged (Moretti 2012: 2900).

This is one of the main conclusions of the economist Enrico Moretti's famous book *The Geography of Jobs*[1] (Moretti 2012) that illustrates the changes in the United States job market. «The New Human Capital Century» (Moretti 2012: 2900), as he calls it, represents the result of a global

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[1] In his volume *The Geography of Jobs*, Enrico Moretti, Professor of Economics at the University of California-Berkeley, analyses why some places are more prosperous than others. He explores the factors that create a concentration of innovative industries in specific hubs. Through a study of the increase in economic differences among 300 areas in the USA over the last 30 years, he points out the main reasons for the birth of those clusters (such as labour market effectiveness, availability of intermediate services and human capital spillovers). From this, he states that the innovative economic sectors (i.e. high-tech or pharmaceutical) generate a multiplier effect that can create in the long-term, for each new job in these sectors, five new opportunities in non-innovative sectors (i.e. services and non-traded activities).

shift from a traditional manufacturing economy towards a knowledge-intensive one. This trend has potent effects on job markets and people's professional pathways. As Moretti analyses in his volume, the transformation of work is shaping not just the size and location of industries but the structure of cities as well. In the past, good jobs and high salaries were directly linked to large-scale manufacturing. Industries were the places where economic value was created. Today, the globalization of markets and the relevance of innovation in the creation of products and services has led to a revolution (Ito, Howe 2017): the quality of employment and wages are increasingly related to the realization of innovative ideas, knowledge, and technologies (Moretti 2012).

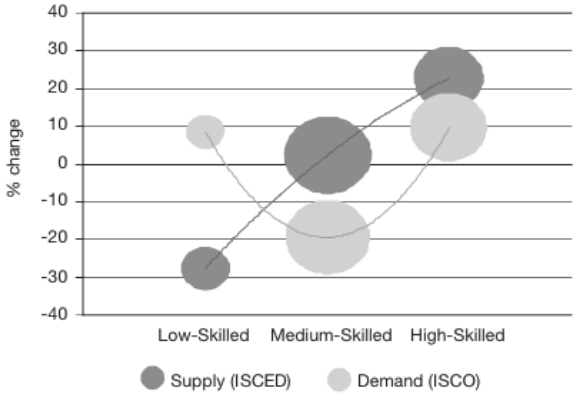
These trends are producing a «Great Divergence» (Moretti 2012: 76) between cities with a high percentage of innovative firms (and skilled workers) and ones that are unable to attract knowledge-intensive ones. However, this phenomenon impacts not just the development of inventive companies, but also the environment: «the presence of many college-educated residents changes the local economy in profound ways, affecting both the kinds of jobs available and the productivity of every worker who lives there, including the less skilled. This results in high wages not just for skilled workers but for most workers» (Moretti 2012: 80).

In this framework, cities become the fulcrum of opportunities for the development of social interactions that can generate innovative ideas. The agglomeration of smart jobs in the same environment can enhance innovation as well as life quality at all levels: moreover, it can attract further innovators and high-skilled workers (Moretti 2012: 232).

The Great Divergence of territories, which could be highlighted both in the USA and Europe, is reflected in employment too. As Paolo Federighi stated, «the changing structure of employment, together with the growing number of jobs that are more knowledge- and skill-intensive, increases demand for professional growth among the employed» (Federighi 2013: 13). The study by Ilaria Maselli effectively explains the Job Polarization trend within European job market: indeed, Figure 1 shows that «there is a trend towards polarization on the labour demand side with respect to occupations in most European countries, whereas on the supply side, the trend is towards a linear upskilling of the population. Depending on the speed of these changes and on the skill content of current demand and supply, there is a risk that in some countries a skill mismatch problem will arise» (Maselli 2012: 26).

Furthermore, the complexity of this new scenario has been increased by the development of Industry 4.0 (Smit, Kreutzer, Moeller, Carlberg 2016) and will further expand with Industry 5.0 (Rai, Rai 2015). These latest trends impose a crucial role for adult education, conceived as a discipline that «goes beyond the boundaries of the school system and professional training» (Federighi 1999: 5).

Figure 1 – Demand and Supply of Work with Respect to Skills/Tasks in the EU27, 2010-2020. [Maselli 2012: 26]



Facing the evolution of work requires the capability to critically analyse the context and its evolution, interpreting future tendencies and unrevealed challenges. In this framework, staying in the job market does not mean creating a skills supply that can match the skills demand (or, at least, no longer). The speed at which production settings change drives organizations and individuals to continuously renew their aims, projects, and competences. From this perspective, it could prove inadequate, if not ineffective, to create formative pathways that simply answer the present skills demand. In fact, the new creation of value is characterised by ongoing transformation, mobility of space and contents and a capacity to innovate products, internal relationships, and organizational structures (Ito, Howe 2017).

The brilliant research by Enrico Moretti, which directly reveals the relationship between the presence of innovative firms and the development of cities and employment, suggests a crucial point for adult education. Indeed, given that innovation has immense importance for high-, medium- and low-skilled workers, the centrality of skills growth, both in firms and at an educational level, become a vital challenge for the whole of society. Contributing to increasing the educational rates, skills, and capabilities of people is not just a matter of one part of the workers. On the contrary, the challenge of up-skilling is a task of the production and educational systems, especially in this knowledge-intensive context which is, today more than ever, centred on human added value (Samans, Davis 2017).

Care of these processes is one of the aims of adult education, not just in the workplace, but also within schools and higher education facilities (Boffo 2015, 2017) where it seems more complex. University is not simply the place where people acquire competences for entering the job

market. It is a space for human education that allows students to grow up globally as subjects, citizens, and workers (Boffo 2012, 2015). However, what matters most is the new relevance of higher education in the advance of innovation. Given the capability of creating better work opportunities and higher wages (Moretti 2012) increasingly related to the value of humans' creativity, the future of our communities is increasingly linked to skills development and entrepreneurial attitudes. Which is why, over the last decades, educational institutions have been charged with the new mission of creating new relationships with multiple stakeholders such as public bodies, companies, associations, and non-profit organizations. The Third Mission of Universities (ANVUR 2015) is intended to enhance and disseminate knowledge and technologies to local, national, and international socio-economic contexts to improve the quality of the economy, work, and human life. These efforts could generate great benefits to all the actors involved: graduates could be equipped with skills to enter the job market and contribute with innovative work; industries could integrate new knowledge into their production processes; communities could take advantage of the presence of innovative firms that can also create opportunities for the low- and medium-skilled.

2. The relationship between education and work: why employability matters

In this framework, the debate on the development of students' work capabilities arises as a key issue for the growth of our countries. The specific contribution of adult education could inform the processes through which young adults acquire capabilities for their personal and professional life. In this sense, it seems interesting to highlight the specific added value of a pedagogical and educational perspective on this relationship alongside the traditional approach elaborated by economic and sociological studies (Gazier 1998).

The connection between education and work originally referred to John Dewey's studies. The American philosopher laid great stress on the relevance of this relationship. In his volume *The School and Society* (1899) he suggested going beyond the conception of school through the mere standpoint of teachers and children. As he clearly showed, school has been transformed by the new patterns of economy and society in broader terms: «the modification going on in the method and curriculum of education is as much a product of the changed social situation, and as much an effort to meet the needs of the new society that is forming, as are changes in modes of industry and commerce» (Dewey 1932: 4). In this sense, the innovation in education can be considered «as part and parcel of the whole social evolution, and, in its more general features at least, as inevitable» (Dewey 1932: 5).

This is why nowadays it is extremely crucial to understand the new trends in the economy and job market: through these analyses educators could better plan pathways to offer students the opportunity to acquire capabilities for their future lives. This is crucial since, as Dewey had already illustrated in 1899, the first transformation that impacts the structure of education is the economic and industrial one:

> the change that comes first to mind, the one that overshadows and even controls all others, is the industrial one – the application of science resulting in the great inventions that have utilized the forces of nature on a vast and inexpensive scale the growth of a world-wide market as the object of production, of vast manufacturing centres to supply this market, of cheap and rapid means of communication and distribution between all its parts (Dewey 1932: 5).

It is almost indispensable to point out that these factors have become vastly more disruptive in the current situation, considering the innovations in technologies and industries. Following Dewey's standpoint, these trends have progressively generated a radical metamorphosis of society. We could spend a long time discussing how the past structure was able to better create social and community links or a more settled relationship between people and the world, «but it is useless to bemoan the departure of the good old days […]. It is radical conditions which have changed, and only an equally radical change in education suffices» (Dewey 1932: 9). We must take note of those in progress to give people the right tools to avoid suffering from their effect.

Work completely permeates human life, in its deepest meaning and its organization of time (Boffo 2012). In line with this, Dewey suggested including manual activities within the school curriculum, to integrate life into the educational process: in fact, «we must conceive of work in wood and metal, of weaving, sewing, and cooking, as methods of living and learning, not as distinct studies» (Dewey 1932: 11). These kinds of activity must be considered «as instrumentalities through which the school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons» (Dewey 1932: 11).

What are the implications for pedagogy? How could we plan formative pathways, at all levels, that can «consider the relationship of the school to the life and development of the children in the school» (Dewey 1932: 31)? This is a tough task for the whole discipline, especially for adult education, which is fundamentally based on subjects' growth in their working and living contexts. This challenge reflects the research into the most effective ways through which to generate learning linked to human life needs (in any individual, personal, or social scope considered).

As Dewey lucidly stated in *Experience and Education* (1938),

> it is part of the educator's responsibility to see equally to two things: first, that the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present, and that it is within the range of the capacity of students; and, secondly, that it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. The new facts and new ideas thus obtained become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented. The process is a continuous spiral (Dewey 1976: 79).

The relevance that the American philosopher assigned to the generation of innovative ideas is extremely relevant in our contemporary context. The new patterns of global economies and job markets (Moretti 2012) outline the vital role of creativity in work. The ability to imagine innovative projects, to face new situations, and to renovate the plans of individual careers or organizational business plans are progressively strategic characteristics (Ito, Howe 2017). Education has the task of supporting the development of those skills, both in school and in other learning contexts. How can we do this? How can we integrate the free and disruptive dimensions of play and creativity with the structure of adults' learning pathways? We are in front of a changing paradigm.

Traditionally, the ancient philosophers divided the meaning for these actions through different words: public affairs and work (*negotium*) were separated from free time (*otium)*, where play could happen. It seems that they were referring to different fields of life, quite clearly separate. On the contrary, what Dewey outlined reveals a unique perspective on the relationship between these two aspects: «in their intrinsic meaning, play and industry are by no means so antithetical to one another as is often assumed, any sharp contrast being due to undesirable social conditions. Both involve ends consciously entertained and the selection and adaptations of materials and processes designed to effect the desired ends» (Dewey 1930: 237).

In this sense, the integration of these dimensions in education could generate new patterns for the development of skills and capabilities. The active occupations represent interesting forms of generating learning, including work-related learning. In fact, if work permeates people's lives and their meaning, and this work is increasingly characterised by creativity, mobility, and other forms of innovation (both for business and career), it is meaningless to maintain this separation. Dewey's contribution to pedagogical reflection clashed with the antithesis «between education in preparation for useful labour and education for a life of leisure» (Dewey 1930: 293). Furthermore, it added that «the bare terms useful labour and leisure confirm the statement already made that the segregation and conflict of values are not self-enclosed, but reflect a division within social life» (Dewey 1930: 293). In the present situation, in which

work feeds on creativity and resourcefulness, this division wanes immediately. How can higher education support this process within its specific pathways? This is one of the key points for present and future research.

What we should be focusing on is the deeper meaning of work, conceived as profession and career, and its relationship with the formation of the self. Dewey provided a precious reflection on this in *Democracy and Education* (1916):

> A vocation means nothing, but such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish, and also useful to his associates. The opposite of a career is neither leisure nor culture, but aimlessness, capriciousness, the absence of cumulative achievement in experience, on the personal side, and idle display, parasitic dependence upon the others, on the social side. Occupation is a concrete term for continuity. It includes the development of artistic capacity of any kind, of special scientific ability, of effective citizenship, as well as professional and business occupations, to say nothing of mechanical labour or engagement in gainful pursuits (Dewey 1930: 358-359).

The concept of 'employability', which is going to be analysed in the next chapter, slots neatly into the pedagogical framework traced by John Dewey throughout the nineteenth century. What is the relation between school and work? How can we help students develop skills and capabilities to better create their own personal and professional pathway? What are the global changes that people need to tackle in their career? How could higher education support both economies and citizens, while increasing the quality of life? These questions, and many others, represent the foundations of the educational reflection on the concept of employability based on Dewey's pedagogical instrument.

3. Higher Education facing the challenge of work: the concept of employability

The category of employability arose along with the evolution of job market trends at a global level. It has been considered a new construct for the development of students' and graduates' work capabilities, especially in countries with high levels of unemployment. In this sense, it represents a reaction to the mismatch between education and employment to increase the support to transitions towards the job market (Boffo, Fedeli, Lo Presti, Melacarne, Vianello 2017). Economists and sociologists were the first who already discussed employability as a way to reduce mismatches in the twentieth century (Gazier 1998). However, these forms ignored the development of the subject and the deep perspective of the construction of skills and capabilities within the course of life. In 1998, Hillage

and Pollard recovered the individual perspective, focusing on subjects' capability to stay in the job market thanks to their knowledge, skills, and aptitude: «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 job market to realise potential through sustainable employment» (Hillage, Pollard 1998: 3).

Anyhow, the pedagogical elaboration of the concept mainly refers to important scholars who operated within the *Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team* (ESECT) research group at the Higher Education Academy in York (UK)[2]. Lee Harvey, Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight guided the team that intensively analysed many aspects of employability. In fact, the ESECT traced an interesting didactic and pedagogical approach aimed at transforming higher education to tackle innovation and the changes in the current social and economic situation.

The problem is not merely the power distribution within the university-economy relationship, or an instrumental view of higher education. On the contrary, the added value of the pedagogical standpoint on employability concerns the university as a place where young adults can develop critical and reflective thought: this may help them deal with the challenges of their lifespan as global citizens, workers, and active participants in the learning process as well (Harvey 1999). Lee Harvey clarified this point thus:

> 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. Despite appearances to the contrary, the real challenge is not how to accommodate employability but how to shift the traditional balance of power from the education provider to those participating in the learning experience (Harvey 1999: 13).

This is why Harvey emphasized how the conception of employability, as a simple indicator, is reductive in measuring academic performance. Yorke & Knight found themselves within the same framework (Yorke, Knight 2006). They described a competence-centred approach (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2014) that has been widely adopted as a reference point for the creation of specific programmes.

[2] The Higher Education Academy started working on employability in 2006 through a series of papers. These works, coordinated by Prof. Mantz Yorke, were carried out by Professor Peter Knight (Open University), Professor Lee Harvey (Sheffield Hallam University), Professor Stephen McNair (Surrey University), Dr Brenda Little (CHERI), Professor Kate Purcell (University of the West of England), Mike Hill (Graduate Prospects) and Val Butcher from the Higher Education Academy.

From their perspective, employability meant: «*[…]* 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: 8).

This definition outlines a crucial connection between learning and employability and can determine innovative methodologies. This point considers not just the students' perspective, but calls into question the construction of curricula, didactic methods, interdisciplinary contents, but also career services. In fact, it is a learning process, curricular and extra-curricular, that connects, within educational action, concrete experiences, and key aspects for personal and professional growth. In conclusion, the category of employability is extremely disruptive in the pedagogical field since it highlights the formative process of subjects in relation with the social value of traditional university missions such as research and didactics in conjunction with the Third Mission.

4. Final remarks

The job market is changing extremely rapidly. If we acknowledge the trend of the last ten years (especially since the 2008 economic crisis), we can only imagine the extent of the changes we are going to meet in the next decades (Moretti 2012). Today's challenge for the university is not simply the ability to answer the mismatch by strengthening the skills supply. In fact, the timeframe of education does not coincide with the current work demand, which is constantly changing: the risk is to continually (and ineffectively) chase after the economy and the market. Besides, this is not the role of the university, even today when it is being asked to bring more and more added value in terms of innovation (Ito, Howe 2017). As Ulrich Teichler stated, «Higher education has to take care primarily to avoid the danger of «ivory tower knowledge delivery». It does not express warnings against the opposite possible disaster of higher education, i.e. to subordinate itself simply to the presumed demands of the employment system» (Teichler 2004: 7-8).

The Academy should look to the future, trying to understand the current trends also in terms of skill (Davies, Fidler, Gorbis 2011), and above all training people able to always deal with different challenges at personal, social, and political levels.

The change, for the future of countries, starts from higher education's ability to prepare people who can contribute to innovation, development, and social inclusion (Boffo, Gioli, Terzaroli 2017). If work really does represent the tool by which people build sense and their place in the world (Boffo 2012), then people should progressively develop the ability

to create new and better opportunities, for as many people as possible, to increase the quality of their life. This is primarily the task of Universities, for today and for the future as well.

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THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR YOUNG GRADUATES AND THEIR EMPLOYABILITY

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Abstract: Certain young people are being propelled towards a more promising future than in the past, due to – amongst other things – continuous learning, which guarantees their productive capabilities. Employers are called upon to arrange a cogent value proposition to support young people in their constant growth that would also help them create an autonomous professional identity.

Keywords: employee learning value proposition, youth transitions, professional identity.

1. Introduction

In this contribution, we consider the pedagogical dimension of organizations linked to the definition of policies, levers, and instruments whose combination can be a *value* for young people passing through them, from work experience and apprenticeship to normal working relationships.

Consequently, we are going to look at the results of the PRIN Emp&Co research (Employability and Competencies, 2012-2016) using the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) paradigm, i.e. everything that people experience and receive within a working relationship (Pavar, Charak 2015; Minchington 2010; Michaels *et al.* 2001), to understand how young people build their own set of *values,* from those offered by the organizations where they pass through the management of training processes and to which they are exposed (in transitions prior and subsequent to graduation). This is because EVP includes not only pay and economic benefits, but also – amongst other things – the ELVP – *Employee Learning Value Proposition,* i.e. the provision of learning actions – above all informal – contextualized and aimed at the acquisition and development of skills and knowledge of all kinds, as well as certain behaviour and attitudes. Such opportunities can be directly created by the factors of *value proposition* of the organizations or simply stimulated by them. It is the young person's task to seize them to build their own growth path.

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The research set out to investigate the educational or disadvantaged valency of learning processes as a result of the *value proposition* of working contexts, especially in view of the number of organizations through which young graduates pass just after graduating. In the research we did not investigate personal and social factors, which also affect the professional future of individuals, to focus on the educational dimension of factors that promote or hinder transitions.

Our hypothesis is that a *value proposition* structured in instruments that create affiliation and quality in the required work promote recognition and benefit – as well as learning – career development; that they provide transparent pay policies (Browne 2012), as well as attracting talented young people and expressing high potential for keeping their job; that they stimulate individuals, inducing them to make the best of themselves, to build (also autonomously) sense in their work actions, starting from reactive learning opportunities (Eraut 2000), dependent on the growth and development paths of the professional self to act in the context of work. Conversely, a poor *value proposition*, lacking in learning valency risks re-routing such paths and adversely affecting the management of internal and external transitions to the job market.

The contribution is subdivided into an introductory part that illustrates the adopted paradigm (paragraph 1), followed by paragraph 2, which provides brief notes of a methodological character, further elaborated in Chapter 4 of this volume.

In paragraph 4, we describe the types of transitions that emerged during the research as typifying the period immediately following graduation. Paragraph 4 provides the empirical evidence that we have read and interpreted through the *learning value proposition* approach, on which we finally founded our conclusions (paragraph 5).

2. The first transitions of young graduates towards work found in the research

2.1 Methodological nods

During the research the data was collected using records of semi-structured interviews, according to a rigid research protocol (see Gaia Gioli, *Employability-Oriented Curriculum: Strategies and Tools to Train Young Graduates. The PRIN EMP&Co. Project*). The analysis unit was the learning (adverse and favourable) action directed at young people during their work experience.

2.2 Descriptions of the first transitions

Starting from the analysis of the interviews, we show the main data, referring to what we might define as the first three transitions towards work:

1. internships and work experience during the university course
2. the first work experiences after graduation, not necessarily consistent with preparation or professional aspirations
3. the first work activity consistent with the higher education received and with the professional family corresponding to the aspirations of the young graduate.

The succession of the three transitions is indicative of a path that we might consider virtuous, but not generalized. In fact, the third transition – which usually occurs at least 12 months after the end of studies – was only found in a part of the young respondents. There are, in fact, two other groups that were distinguished by not being a part – after one year – of any work environment or for not having reached any form of *stabilization* of their work.

Below we provide some basic information on the basic features of the *value proposition* which characterised the work experiences encountered by the respective professional paths. The aim is to understand whether there could be a correlation between the professional results achieved in the third transition and the *value proposition* of previous work experience.

Cluster 1 –Young people not in any business environment by the end of the Third Transition.

First transition	*Second transition*	*Third transition*
The *value proposition* of internship experience is poor: young people are looking by themselves for opportunities to acquire further areas of specialization (e.g. Master in Clinical Pedagogy, research PhD). Transition to internship and closure of the university course are accompanied by work experiences non-coherent with young people's projects for work placements, for a variety of reasons (desire to know the contexts of work, activate compensation measures independently and construction of professional networks).	Job or opportunity research is focused on small localities and local markets and is not guided by an analysis of demand in the job market. Failures also in non-relevant job search with their own aspirations and professional paths follow each other. This does not always result in discouragement. In some cases, there is a strong motivation to complete specialization interventions because of a more favourable professional future.	Component management of *value proposition* is predominantly in the hands of the young person due to the absence of an involvement in an organization. For extended periods of time there are seasonal work experiences that are repeated without stability over the years (e.g. being educator in summer centres). They contribute to the development of a professional identity and skills that organizations are not interested in stabilizing internally.

Cluster 2 – Young people in a precarious/casual working environment at the end of the Third Transition.

First transition	*Second transition*	*Third transition*
Internship experience conducted in an activity that is consistent with personal interests, in conjunction with non-homogeneous work experiences, neither with personal interests nor with career paths and career expectations (waiter/ress, host/ess). The *value proposition* activated by the organization sometimes serves to develop some skills, especially transverse (relational, managerial). On the other hand, it is not very decisive in terms of professionalism and attractiveness.	Higher education experiences compensate for the skills not acquired in previous experiences. At this stage young people have job opportunities and are engaged in activities whose content is highly professional. There are still no compensation, career development, and reward instruments.	Young people still have casual employment relationships. In many cases they are simultaneously engaged in multiple activities and with various organizations. Professional growth and new perspectives often result from the networks of relationships that young people build. It is through "small jobs" and the networks that young people deepen their knowledge of the specific job market (e.g. third sector, international cooperation) and their potential future employment opportunities.

Cluster 3 – Young people in a work context in a structured way at the end of the Third Transition.

First transition	*Second transition*	*Third transition*
Internship experience conducted in an activity that is consistent with professional aspirations (e.g. training officers and managers for private organizations, nursery educators, family pedagogues, ministerial advisers for innovation policy in education), along with casual work experiences, consistent and not (leaflet delivery, classroom tutor, babysitter, back office in bank).	Consistent work experience in the same field of training; in some cases, the indicator of compensation is built on the initiative of the young person who continues in parallel with multiple, inconstant work experiences. The indicator of the *value proposition* on the content of work and on professional challenges is often developed autonomously by the young person who builds on own initiative opportunities for growth of skills (Master's degree, elaboration of research projects for PhD candidates).	Organizational behaviour supports the professional growth processes of young people, for whom organizations provide challenging tasks (e.g. the creation of an HR office for early childhood services), relationships networks, career prospects and, at times, rapid development paths and consequent rewarding instruments. In other cases, pathways aimed at building self-employment projects are being developed.

3. The 'employee value proposition' for managing the transitions of young graduates

We now analyse how the EVP's educational dimension affects organizations in the progression of transitions.

3.1 The EVP in general terms

In recent years, we have witnessed a change of approaches, terms, and contents that help to expand an organization's offerings to the people involved. The concept of EVP, initially used in managerial literature and human resources, and today of interdisciplinary interest (marketing, communication, etc.), generally includes (Minchington 2010): Compensation (remuneration policies); Benefits (incentive schemes including monetary and non-monetary elements, fixed and variable remuneration, incentives to increase the baggage of skills, etc.); Work content (recruiting, training, assessment, growth policies that affect the more or less challenging and attractive content of the work assigned to each worker); Career assistance (career development policies); Affiliation (loyalty policies to the organization). It has a direct impact on the proposed learning value, as we shall see in the paragraphs below.

EVP therefore incorporates, but goes beyond, the benefits of monetary compensation (from compensation to total reward) that an organization provides to its employees in exchange for their time, commitment, talent, and performance. The focus is on attraction and retention towards those who help organizations achieve their missions and business goals. This is from the perspective of the organizations.

The theme, analysed from the perspective of young people looking for work, raises questions of pedagogical importance since they are bound to identify actions that allow young people to build and manage themselves, to employ their talents, to act on knowledge, skills, and behaviour – hidden or lacking – with the support of the organizations to which aspirations, knowledge, attitudes, and time are available. In other words, pedagogical problematics lie in the way young people are able to build a proposal that is valuable in terms of positioning within companies, organizations, and the free market. This means analysing the meaning of EVP for a young trainee, apprentice, worker, i.e. the educational dimension of the EVP (*i.e.*, the ELVP), depending on the transitions into and out of the job market, the way the learning actions which take place during a work experience support young people or not in managing transitions and building their own professional life project (aware that the process of 'employability' begins much earlier, Boffo *et al.* 2017).

3.2 The pedagogical dimension of the EVP

Pedagogical reflection relates to the way in which a work experience (an apprenticeship, internship – of any form – and more or less regular work experience) are learning opportunities through which young people capitalize on their 'achievements' (Yorke 2006) for the autonomous construction and implementation of their professional project through interaction with the contexts they are a part of. In fact, the growth and construction of one's own realization depend not least on the confidence that young people feel to be what they want, and the actions they plan and set in order to become what they want to be.

It is essentially to conceive the *value* produced by organizations as an opportunity for young people to reflect on their identity – professional and personal – and to bolster this based on the experiences that they are offered by life, or slowly build freely through a conscious integration of every aspect of the professional and training experience (networks, Master's courses, professional tasks, etc.). Young people on a first work experience, before being competent in productive action, learn to be competent in reflective and learning action and can bring about transformations that influence the definition of even short paths to explore organizations. Through the various experiences that the job market offers (not always fulfilling), young people acquire knowledge, grow, transform their behaviour, nurture proactivity or resistance (influenced by the contexts and the way they live). Especially through these, young people learn to read the *here* of now and define the *here* of tomorrow. In other writings, we have dealt with the subject in the penitentiary context (Torlone 2016). Here we analyse the role that organizations – not just penitentiary – have, through EVP and ELVP, to promote processes of awareness, self-development, self-design, research, and development of the professional self into a renewed social context in which family membership/ professional profiles and identities are no longer immutable as in the past or guaranteed by enduring lifelong work, but constructed in a more modest and negotiable way (Bauman 2005).

It is indisputable that being part of an organizational context, influences an individual's private and personal sphere in various ways, their ability to give a sense and unique meaning to experiences, even sooner than the ability linked to working productively. In this context, an ELVP is successful whenever it prepares young people – at least the most ambitious and those likely to initiate change – for the autonomous and targeted management of their transition into the job market (Tab. 1) through involvement in learning actions be they 'favourable' or 'adverse' (Federighi 2016), re-worked autonomously by the young person, in tune with their new career aspirations.

Table 1 – The effects of EVP on the progression of the transitions of young people in the construction of a professional identity.

Effects of EVP / ELVP on young people Types of EVP / ELVP	Young proactive, ambitious in looking for employment.	Young little proactive, little ambitious in looking for employment.	Young not proactive nor ambitious in looking for employment.
Rich, positive EVP (referring to all components of the EVP)	Attraction. Retention. Vertical mobility (internal/external).	Attraction. Resistance to transitions.	Attraction.
EVP poorly rich, negative (in reference only some of the 5 components, they satisfy the young person)	Attraction. External mobility.	Attraction. Retention. Resistance to transitions. Possible external mobility.	Attraction. Retention. Resistance to transitions.
EVP poor, negative (referring to all components of the EVP)	Attraction. External mobility.	Attraction. Retention. Resistance to transitions. Possible external mobility (immediate/ postponed).	Attraction. Retention. Resistance to transitions. Possible external mobility (immediate/ postponed).

The quality of the organization's value offering affects the professional future of young people in terms of mobility for further professionalization and employment, sought elsewhere. In this regard, the first transition (to 'small jobs' not relevant to the study path or career aspirations, see section 2) is important because it gets young people used to seeking what satisfies them elsewhere, to seizing learning values in every context they travel through, to build paths and abilities in analysis, reading, and selecting organizational contexts.

Conversely, a negative or only partially positive EVP/ELVP may activate external mobility paths or hold on to those who have poorly defined professional projects and little attention to the discovery of alternative occupational contexts.

The young person, in management of the EVP/LVP offering (whether positive or negative), faces the need, not always properly accepted, of thinking personally while something changes, meanwhile transforming within the context of the job, to become 'another professional'. The need, specifically, is to steer the change going on or about to be activated and of which they must be protagonists right from the start, triggering the set of abilities and skills possessed. It is in this way that the young professional worker who acts, communicates, interprets, seeks, studies,

takes interviews and asks questions, leveraging his transformative reflexivity (Mezirow 2003).

Of the five components of EVP, we shall now consider the most important ones from a pedagogical point of view.

3.2.1 The educational dimension of incentives for growth

Talented young people, with a high degree of agency ability (Bandura 1977) and the desire to make things happen, reveal a high capacity to recognise and exploit the (reactive, deliberative, intentional) learning generated by (all) living contexts, from meeting others and using them to build one's own professional life project. Young people can cultivate experience and relate to people in their Zone of Proximal Development, which is expanding as new acquisitions stimulate new learning; they are able to invent their own professional identity, solicit and create it by activating decision-making processes constructed autonomously or through the available networks. By means of these processes, identity can also change in advancing experiences; professional itineraries are hypothesized and defined and experienced in the light of the learning experiences that the young person creates and lives critically, if not made available by the working contexts they are travelling through. All of which requires a young person to have a high capacity to «imagine and desire something that is not yet given; to identify goals for achieving it, starting with what is available; to give rise to something new; to reconstruct strategies and aims discursively» (Costa 2013: 111). Otherwise, the value creation process loses its advantages and benefits.

Young people, independently – if not accompanied by organizations – have their own learning resources, and differentiate their training and learning experiences (also with personal and economic sacrifices and renunciations), enhancing their ability to translate negative or little challenging ELVPs into opportunities to grow elsewhere.

3.2.2 Challenging work contents

Opportunities for growth and wellbeing for young people in the workplace can be produced directly by the value proposition of organizations. Nowadays, the jobs available are many, varied, increasingly rich in intellectual content, and fewer physical and varied efforts in the world. Young people have the opportunity (unknown to young people in the past) to travel, to specialize, frequently change work and organizations, to deepen their knowledge and enrich their relationships (Federighi, Torlone 2013). They are, however, called for a commitment to become autonomous, to grow, become involved, to define their own professional aspirations (not necessarily identical to those built on their

university course), to improve in their work and the jobs they are doing, or to seize the growth potential that each organization offers (Learning Value Proposition). The more solid and rich the learning potential of the workplace that the young person experiences (Federighi 2013), the greater the potential for building professional advancement because of stimulation in discovering the path and a search for *the* work (rather than *a* job) or activities suited to their professional expectations and consistent with who the young person is and wishes to be. This is the time when, both in work and through it, young people can exalt their creative and propositional abilities, experience restricted ambitions of autonomy, challenge their imagination, turn to success and professional conferment, encourage and be encouraged, exalt their sense of entrepreneurship in terms of a personal interpretation of the role being played, steer organizational behaviour towards value creation. Young people who have unclear professional development, poor motivation, and little ambition, are limited to living the working environment for what it is and can give.

The success of young workers at work is not without its obstacles, suffering and difficulties, but it can be accompanied by a process of sense-making that relieves them and helps them rediscover the work environment as a place for self-improvement, for 'self-increase' (Rossi 2009: 75), and self-realization, according to the professional goals in evolution.

Job growth opportunities – wherever we look – can also be stimulated, driven by the ELVP of the organizations where the work experience is taking place. In this case, it is the young people who are responsible for evolving their professional self, seeking other experiences with greater challenges and learning content. The difficulty, in these cases, is to recognise a lack of learning gains, learning disadvantages, damage and losses to internalize and implement change, the transition to a new occupational status. When the acquisition takes place, the young person looks for further work with more attractive ELVPs, considering the first too restrictive, unattractive, and promising experiences compared to a job insertion plan that is increasingly defined or requires additional stimuli (internalized by the young person). The preparation of vocational curricula and job interviews are experienced differently each time and waiting becomes educational, all critical processing opportunities for a prepared path. To avoid involution, cognitive decline, loss of acquisition, impersonal slightly improper awareness, young people can choose between staying in saturated organizational contexts of knowledge development and new learning, less likely to build a professional identity to experience and enrich in full autonomy, and the opportunity to open up to the future and venture into the (re)construction of their own working history – often with investments to be made.

3.2.3 Recompense

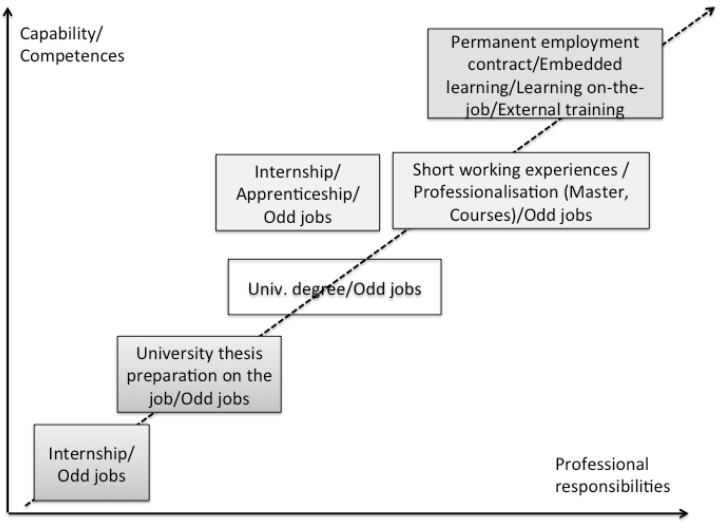
In some cases, a poor ELVP allows young people to find employment opportunities that are economically more fulfilling than those in the past. Usually it is not until the third transition that a level of compensation in line with the salary expectations the young person has matured is achieved.

3.2.4 Career development

In the absence of advancement and security prospects, it is the young person who must build these to meet the skills demand that they begin to discover in the field, to know how to look at and select more than in the past. Commitment to career development and continuous improvement (Fig. 1), with different and non-generalizable results and timeframes, is the result of young people's individual choices – sometimes influenced by personal situations, and not least by suffering – which matures with creativity, intelligent awareness, adaptability, knowledge management skills within networks that are created and available; innovations compared to initial experiences (internship).

In some cases, this is the time when the young person enters a long-term occupation (third transition), with satisfactory remuneration.

Figure 1 – The career progression of the young graduate.



The pursuit of a professional position coherent with personal aspirations is often intertwined with learning activities that the young seek for

themselves (e.g. a post-graduate or Master's degree), or receives from the contexts they are passing through (e.g. on-the-job training, or courses).

The relevant work experiences accumulated by young people take on more importance than unobtrusive or unsuccessful university pathways with vacancies (Humburg *et al.* 2013). Those more careful understand this in time and set to work to make their career path attractive.

4. Final remarks

Based on the data presented, the following becomes apparent:

1. The employment prospects of young graduates are related to the type of work experience of young people. This depends on the learning value of the professional and the relational content present in such experiences, which help to develop the individual's 'calling'. Aspirations and interests change and alter due to work experiences.
2. Young people cannot expect to immediately begin a professional career consistent with their aspirations and studies. In all cases, completing their basic skills and knowledge of job demand require a commitment from young people to improve, both through positive work experiences and through a further post-graduate commitment. Young people are required to be «active, inventive and resourceful, not just on one occasion, but constantly, day after day» (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 23-26), during the paths that are built and experienced. The less active, proactive, and ambitious are those most penalized.
3. The differences between young people in terms of professional outcome, which can be traced back to one year after graduation, are patently obvious.The professional future of young people affects personal and social factors that we have not investigated in depth in this research. In all cases of failure or partial fulfilment of aspirations, there is a persistence of working experiences with poor educational content.

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EMPLOYABILITY AND TRANSITIONS TOWARDS WORK: MSC DEGREE PROGRAMME IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF THE SACRED HEART OF BRESCIA

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Abstract: The acceleration of changes underlines the need to enhance our efforts to adapt education to the dynamics of the current economic situation and the issue of employment. In the framework of the *circular economy,* pedagogy, which is based on the educability of individuals, takes into consideration forms of educational planning to identify a long-lasting balance between economic prosperity, social wellness, and environmental development. The challenge of the future is the possibility of increasing youth employment; this calls for pedagogical expertise and organizational planning to ensure that everyone's development is authentic and holistic. To this end, the MSc Degree programme in Educational Planning and Human Resource Development offered by the Catholic University trains graduates to become professional figures with expertise in coordinating and managing the development of human resources (guidance, selection, personal services); the professional training and retraining of *project managers* in social and educational contexts for both academic and corporate spheres. The guiding vision behind the MSc in Educational Planning and Human Resource Development is fully in line with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart's educational project, to support a culture of responsibility and creativity, entrepreneurism and collaboration, multi-disciplinary knowledge and skills, and scientific research for the purpose of holistic human development. Educational planning, in a period of socio-economic and social change, involving the whole planet in many respects, can relaunch an 'integral model of development', based on long-term wellbeing, technological innovation, 'human development', and the dignity of work.

Keywords: employability, educational planning, work.

1. *The circular economy, work, educational planning*

In response to the current socio-economic situation in Italy, marked by a high rate of unemployment (ISTAT 2016), the education sector must reflect on the employability models and interventions adopted by universities.

The acceleration of changes highlights the need to enhance our efforts to adapt education to the dynamics of the current economic situation and the issue of employment. The debate on education, which is based on the educability of individuals, takes into consideration forms of educational planning that can characterize a long-

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lasting balance between economic prosperity, principles, and human achievement. The value of education is undeniable, since «development is now complicated to an unprecedented degree, and requires multiple approaches and interpretations, which must come together in a humanist and pedagogical cultural synthesis, essential for authentic implementation» (Maritain 1947: 30).

An ethical and educational interpretation of the transitions to work and employability, seek the identification of a positive relationship between socio-cultural processes and individual development. According to the available data, which, accompanied by an ongoing increase in registration figures, reveal high placement rates, the educational 'construct' of the MSc Degree programme in Educational Planning and Human Resource Development is a relevant case in point for this issue.

We must make people capable of expressing their own talents and making the most of their knowledge to create innovation; we must ensure that policies are designed to pursue sustainability, both locally and globally, and are connected to and based on principles of collaboration and responsibility, so that the financial resources invested generate human value and not short-term profit.

The challenge facing Italy and the international community is to reduce unemployment and facilitate economic growth, while encouraging wellbeing and care for the environment. The importance of education arises from this perspective, especially the education of young people, as a means of teaching them how to enjoy responsible freedom in pursuit of justice and the common good. *The Europe 2020 Strategy* (<http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020>) aims to create the conditions for a more competitive economy along with *smart* growth, by investing in teaching, research and innovation; *sustainable* growth, by protecting the environment and encouraging responsible choices; and *supportive* growth, to increase employment and reduce poverty. Educational expertise must be applied to the question of the heuristic scope of transformations underway, the *governance* of which require economic, cultural, and ethical changes, in which universities, professions, and businesses must play their part.

The professional sphere contributes to achieving long-term integrated development objectives, reinforcing social dialogue and public/private partnerships, while encouraging the sharing of responsibility with regard to sustainable production and consumption methods. Organizations as educational contexts, work as a means of 'taking care' of one another, and the talent and experience of individuals, can all serve as the matrix upon which to establish new forms of *governance* and professional responsibility, which recognise the ontological value of human beings. To encourage individual development as much as

possible, we must be aware that a «gradual investment in humanity as a strategic resource goes beyond simply cognitivization of work»; it means appealing to the human resource within a culture of work, through which people «operate, learn and collaborate in redefining the entrepreneurial systems of the global market, with an ever-closer connection to the deepest meanings of the ego» (Bocca 1998: 101). This postulates an ethical convergence towards the 'good' of the organization, which requires long-sighted, strategic planning that is informed and imaginative and involves economic consensus, with the enhancement of personal competences and training-related elements as an opportunity to spread and share workplace culture.

Within the framework of the *circular economy*, an economic model targeted at «using resources in the most efficient way to guarantee the continuation of such efficiency, so as to bring important economic benefits», Europe issued the communication: «Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe» in order to raise awareness among citizens and promote interventions for the gradual elimination of waste, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy. Please see: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52014DC0398R(01)>.

In this context, of note are the so-called *green jobs*, which either involve new professional profiles, purely technical in nature, or a retraining in existing competences within existing professional fields, as long as these relate to sustainability in the broad sense. According to the *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low Carbon World* 2008 report promoted by the United Nations Environment Programme, *green jobs* can be defined as jobs in various fields, from agriculture to transport, energy efficiency and construction, that address environmental impact, avoid all forms of waste and protect biodiversity and ecosystems (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/jobs/>). In Europe by 2012, 3.4 million people were employed in green jobs and the figure is continually increasing; in Italy in 2015, there were 2,964,000 with competences relating to the *green* sector, corresponding to 13.2% of the employed population in the country as a whole. Please see: <http://www.symbola.net/assets/files/GreenItaly%20.Presentazione%20(con%20testi).DEFINITIVA_1476974725.pdf>.

Despite the positive impact of *green jobs* within the professional landscape, we are obliged to focus our attention on the critical question of youth employment: in Italy, in July 2016, the level of unemployment fell overall by 11.4%, a decrease of 0.1 percentage points since June, however, the number of employed people also fell at the same time. While in June there was an increase (+1.3%), in July, the monthly estimation of unemployment levels fell by 1.3% (–39 thousand). This fall concerned both men (–1.4%) and women (–0.2%),

and all age groups except the 15-24 (+23 thousand) and 25-34 (+38 thousand) (See <http://www.istat.it/it/>). The reduction seems to be related to an increase in inactive people, i.e. people not engaged in seeking work, categorized as NEET (Rosina 2015), i.e. young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who are not working and are no longer enrolled on a study course (Not in Education, Employment or Training). There are more NEETs in Italy than in any other European country. The OECD, which analyses social wellbeing and its trends in the 34 industrialized countries each year, found the percentage of NEETs in Italy prior to 2007 to be around 20%, or 4 points above the average, as published in their *Society at a Glance 2016 – A Spotlight on Youth* report on Italy (see <https://www.oecd.org/italy/sag2016-italy.pdf>). Between 2007 and 2014, this rate increased to 27%. Since 2015, the rate has fallen slightly, to roughly 2.5 million NEETs, however it remains above pre-crisis levels and almost double the OECD average (15%). Italy has the highest proportion of young people with low literacy skills (20%) and the second highest rate of young people with low numeracy skills (26%); another factor behind the increase in NEETs is a lack of jobs: 11.4% of NEETs in Italy are unemployed. The number of young people who have left the education system and are without work constitutes a 'significant economic cost' – emphasises the OECD – of between 360 and 605 billion dollars, or 0.9%-1.5% of the global wealth.

The challenge of the future is to address the NEET phenomenon and the possibility of increasing youth employment; this calls for pedagogical expertise and organizational planning to ensure that everyone's development is authentic and holistic, *smart* and specialized, *green* and supportive. Educating the younger generations today involves recognizing the importance of creating educational models and processes to develop not only the competences currently required, but also critical awareness within a culture of sustainability and responsibility.

With a view to increasing employment, also in Italy, in 2014 the European Union Council launched the Youth Guarantee plan, through which the state and regions undertook to make young people under 25, who neither study nor work (NEETs), a high-quality offer of work, further study, apprenticeship, internship, or another form of training within four months of the beginning of their unemployment or of their leaving formal education. There are two targets within the NEET group: young people registering as unemployed or first-time jobseekers, who are not following a course of education or training, totalling 537,685 for young people between 15 and 24, and 906,694 for young people between 15 and 29; and young unemployed people who leave a course of education or train-

ing early and do not register as unemployed or first-time jobseekers, but are seeking work (even if not actively) or are unavailable for work, amounting to 390,282 for young people aged 15-24, and 659,247 for young people aged 15-29: For details on Italy (*Garanzia Giovani*), see: <http://www.garanziagiovani.gov.it/Documentazione/Documents/Piano-di-attuazione-italiano-della-Garanzia-per-i-Giovani.pdf>.

The plan is also an important opportunity for companies, who, benefiting from the subsidies allocated to the various Italian regions, can invest in motivated young people, offering on-the-job training and self-entrepreneurship opportunities to achieve the programme's objectives. The Ministry is also involving companies through agreements with the main trade associations to promote internships and apprenticeship contracts, as well as publishing job and workplace-training opportunities on Italy's Youth Guarantee national portal (*Garanzia Giovani*).

Recent Italian legislation on the right to work emphasizes the importance of supporting young people, either school- or university-educated, throughout their first professional experience; work-based training and encouraging the 'talents' of individuals, including those who struggled in the traditional education system, are now key objectives.

Schools and universities, together with institutions and companies, have a responsibility to promote the acquisition of competences, with a view to engaging young people in the world of work; this must become an educational context in which individuals can express their own creativity and productivity in the form of ideas, actions, and products. «Work-related learning can bring about effective improvements in professional contexts, with a particular focus on youth cultures» to combine professionalism and responsibility, «embedding education and training in the job itself» (Alessandrini 2010: 266).

Investing in the education of individuals and developing a specific culture of initiative in an integrated way is currently the most eagerly awaited mid- and long-term project to take advantage of the negative experiences behind the current economic crisis and navigate towards promising entrepreneurship and an ethically sound horizon: «Old models are disappearing, but promising new ones are taking shape on the horizon» (Benedict XVI 2009: no. 40); we must «place training at the heart of innovation» (Margiotta 2016), along with knowledge, professions and productive processes. Managerial creativity, inter-generational responsibility, and values shared by both companies and stakeholders are all key elements for encouraging socio-cultural progress, the benefits of which are supportive and long-lasting for the younger generations of today and tomorrow.

2. Educational planning, human resource development and employability

In recent years, the world of work and the education professions (Federighi 2010) have undergone significant transformations; working environments, characterized by rapid technological innovation and high levels of uncertainty and precariousness, are calling for a brand-new approach to educational planning to promote the development of organizations along with new competences.

The Catholic University of the Sacred Heart has increasingly focused on the challenges of the job market in a cosmopolitan context, by means of academic courses and scientific research, networks throughout the region, and an international outlook.

To this end, the MSc Degree programme on Educational Planning and Human Resource Development offered by the Catholic University: (<http://brescia.unicatt.it>) trains graduates to become professional figures with expertise in coordinating and managing the development of human resources (guidance, selection, personal services); the professional training and retraining of project managers in social and educational contexts for both the academic and corporate spheres. This programme, classed as LM 50 under the Italian degree classification system, is multidisciplinary in nature, combining theory and practice, planning activities, and the development of competences.

In agreement with local organizations, this programme provides graduates with expertise in: the educational coordination of services targeting children, adolescents, young adults, adults and the elderly; human resource development and management in for-profit and non-profit organizations; educational planning in the region (project management) to promote and manage a network of interventions involving various stakeholders (schools, business, entities and associations); combining relational skills with knowledge of innovative techniques in educational and vocational guidance interventions, empowerment and professional retraining; valorizing gender-based differences and participatory leadership in welfare projects in the field, from needs analysis to the assessment of changes in an ever-changing context, be they socioeconomic (*Circular Economy*, *Smart City*) or legislative (extended work-related learning,) in nature. The programme lasts two years. To pass the programme, students must gain at least 120 university credits. For each module students achieve a certain number of credits and a mark out of thirty, which is determined by means of an exam. The integrated teaching programme includes curriculum-based apprenticeships and workshops: on the two-year course, the curriculum-based apprenticeship consists of 200 hours in total, of which 140 are carried out in an organization outside the university, and 60 inside the uni-

versity, including group sessions and individual meetings. These activities have been taking place in the Faculty of Education since the academic year 1992-1993 on the Degree programme in Education, at the time the *Facoltà di Magistero* or Teaching Faculty, and has always been considered an integral part of the university curriculum and «in order to meet requirements, must maintain a sound and ongoing connection with the theory and discipline of the Degree programme to which it belongs» (Pati 2012: 7). Activities related to apprenticeships require the university to «update the system governing its own educational offering, learning to skilfully combine theory and practice», and meanwhile local organizations define the practical knowledge, offering students an experience of «the culture of educational work/training» undertaken (Pati 2012: 11-12). Workshop activities, which consist of one workshop in the first year and one in the second year, are led by experts from the working world, enabling students to learn about specific issues in a practical way.

Graduates of this programme, benefitting from knowledge across several disciplines, find employment in the following fields: social and educational, human resources development, professional guidance and training; consulting and supervision services for local organizations, companies and training providers; and educational planning, both on a local and international scale. They enter and grow professionally within organizations (for-profit, non-profit and public) as experts in educational planning; educational coordinators; training managers; educational consultants for public and private organizations; directors and project managers of educational and cultural interventions (conception, planning, implementation and evaluation); human resource managers in corporate settings; inter-institutional coordinators working between social areas covered by public and private organizations; experts in assessing educational and socio-educational interventions; tutors in professional training and on staff-training courses; and directors in the area of public-sector staff management.

The placement rate for graduates is high: within a year of graduating 84.3% of graduates have found work, rising to 91% within three years; 80% of the graduates state they are satisfied with the Degree programme and would re-enrol, while 100% confirm that the workload is manageable.

Beyond ministerial obligations, this programme maintains a constant relationship with its social partners, through events held at least three times a year dedicated to the target professional role/s and professional competences, in order to remain up to date and meet the demands of the job market: the inaugural event *Sogni e Bisogni* ('Dreams and Needs') in October, the Career Day in spring and Graduation Day in July.

The first event – *Sogni e bisogni* (Dreams and Needs) is a seminar on sharing routes and experiences, takes place in the month of October during the first week of lectures, and sees the participation of local organizations from the for-profit and non-profit sectors, as well as institutions. The university, represented by the professors and students from the Degree Course, meets and engages in dialogue with stakeholders who, for their part, collaborate with the training course in question.

Following a well-established and respected tradition, an orientation and networking event is also held: the Career Day. This event is intended to facilitate the transition to work from higher education and as a contribution to offer new professional contexts by creating networks between the local culture, the city, the region, and the students of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. The Career Day is addressed to those who have already enrolled, those who are about to enrol, and those who wish to do so, in order to build their own career paths by playing a central role in a dynamic and innovative professional field.

The course delivers knowledge and skills across several disciplines, and actively engages first-year students at all stages, combining relational competences and techniques for interventions in services across all ages, from children and adolescents, to adults and the elderly; and within for-profit and non-profit contexts, which are collaborating increasingly often these days. All within the field of educational planning and human resource development. Graduation Day takes place in July outside the university: this is a day of festivities and celebrations, but at the same time an important opportunity for reflection on the themes of education, pedagogical planning, and economic and social development.

The representatives of the social partners, who contribute to the study course in numerous ways, show appreciation for the professionality demonstrated by the educational planners, whose energy has enabled them to enter multiple professional areas, from for-profit to non-profit or public administration. These representatives, from the main entrepreneurial and non-profit organizations in the region, emphasize how important it is to further enhance the collaboration between the educational and production spheres, in order to continually improve opportunities for networking and planning training activities and workshops for the benefit of the community. Companies require a professional figure capable of noticing and bringing to light the developmental needs of the organization and the demands of the region with the intention of drafting targeted interventions for change.

The guiding vision behind the MSc in Educational Planning and Human Resource Development is fully in line with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart's educational project, to support a culture

of responsibility and creativity, entrepreneurism and collaboration, multi-disciplinary knowledge and skills, and scientific research for the purpose of holistic human development (Giuliodori, Malavasi 2016).

The results achieved demonstrate the efficiency of its governance choices: models and interventions that the course pursues to improve the employability of its students in numerous ways (Boffo, Federighi, Torlone 2015). It is equally important to further reinforce the dialogue between universities and the world of work, in order to identify new patterns of research and partnerships, thereby ensuring that the course framework (teaching modules, apprenticeships, workshops and public events) is constantly improving in terms of how integrated and strategic it is, against a dynamic and uncertain socio-economic backdrop.

«Planning is a key issue for all professions involved in education and training, obliging us to remember the past and commit to the future, taking into consideration the roots of the problems, the demands, the desires, and the changes of the interlocutors involved, referring back to imagination and ideals that are the drivers of pedagogical action» (Birbes 2012: 132). Educational planning, in a period of socio-economic and social change, involving the whole planet in many respects, can relaunch an integral model of development (Pope Francis 2015), based on long-term wellbeing, technological innovation, human development (Gennari 2001), and the dignity of work.

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INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER OF THE RESEARCH. FINAL REMARKS

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The PRIN2012LATR9N project began more than 5 years ago, when we found ourselves drafting the research map in a cultural and pedagogical context rather far-removed from the themes we wished to address.

In fact, to speak of Work-Related Learning, widespread apprenticeship programmes, callings, the relationship between education and work, and employability, could have seemed to be steering the project's reflection away from the pedagogical-educational contexts in question. What we can say is that the development of the project began as a challenge: starting to deal with matters seldom investigated and uncommon in the university community of Italian pedagogy meant stubbornly tackling content that belonged to other disciplines – according to the academic and cultural traditions.

Therefore, in terms of innovation, this could be considered the first step: dealing with themes partially adhering to pedagogical disciplines with the intention of expressing full membership of the paths on skills and *employability* in the contexts of educational and training knowledge.

The project title already contained the fundamental points of the research design: «To design innovative programmes for higher education, to promote personalized learning, to build on job competences, to valorize talents to create new work opportunities. Positive strategies in higher education to support young adults during their employment emergency, as a response to the socioeconomic crisis and as a citizenship action». We broke it down into five consecutive lines. We dealt with higher education, indeed, with learning in higher education, and we tied together themes and reflections in a much-frequented international context. In recent years, these themes have become familiar, the problem of the transformation of the university and of its role *in* and *for* civil society has

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become crucial. The debate is ongoing, inspired especially by numerous micro-changes that have occurred through MIUR Directives and ANVUR Assessments. We could say that the change has become manifest in the details of the Decrees, in the assessment regulations of the study courses, or in the indicators that monitor PhD courses. In this context, year after year, cultural change has taken shape and has become part of a debate which is increasingly acknowledged. In the light of the epochal changes in which we are immersed, Work, Job Placements, Professions, and Professionalism become the fulcra to reflect on higher education's role today. From here, Didactics, Guidance, Calling, Traineeship, and Employability become focal points for the development of education, but above all to define a matrix of innovation and renewal for the university system.

Accordingly, we could say that this chain of reflection represents the second passage for process innovation that even basic research can produce.

The research that we put together aims to present the results along three main lines:

- the study of developments and changes in university students' subjectivity in relation to their personal formation (non-formal and informal contexts) and university education and training (formal);
- the impact that the teachings at university - meaning a structure providing knowledge, practice, reflection, and experience - have in accompanying and developing the necessary skills for people to enter professional and life contexts and self-orient their formative process
- the organizational dimensions and the university practices of placement, in the conviction that altering the system context is one of the engines for change that can respond to the new requirements that the world of professions and work demands from young graduates.

The research project was split into six phases. The research addressed the main moments in the students' academic life: career guidance upon entry, personalized teaching, formation of the professional vocation, profession-building activities such as internships and work experiences, and lastly job placement. Within the areas shown hereafter, each unit developed and investigated each of these topics in parallel.

The research also dealt with the micro, macro, and mega dimensions, and this takes us to the third point of reflection on the outcome of the innovation achieved. Along with reflection on the subjects, students, graduates, and young adults, we elaborated reflection on the educational structures – where normally only traineeship is recalled, and in addition, we explored the potential of educational transformation which the university can and must look to through reflection on competences and *employability.*

As three distinguished colleagues pointed out at the closing conference on our work, the prospects from which to depart are many. We

shall summarize these by using these reflections which can also take us into an international scenario.

In the first instance, John Dirx, of Michigan State University, on the line of *Teaching* and *Learning* has emphasized the centrality of a change in perspective and focal point in the contexts of Education: students ought to be put at the centre of the learning process, but above all, of the teaching processes. The role of university teaching is key if we really wish to propose a future for this institution which is supposed to be the engine of a country's knowledge:

> Over the last half-century, teachers in higher education have gradually begun to incorporate active and engaged forms of learning in their practices. They have found that shifting from passive learning and a reliance on recitation and lecturing to more student- and learning-centred approaches actively involves students in the learning process, enhances their motivation to learn, fosters higher-order thinking skills, and creates more meaningful learning experiences for them. Changing from a long tradition of passive learning, however, to more student- and learning-centred approaches takes time, knowledge, skill, and commitment It will be necessary to highlight research-based principles to actively engage students in the learning process and to explore strategies for promoting change in teaching practice at individual and organizational levels in higher education (Emp&Co. Conference 2017).

Instead, if we observe the exponential change arriving from the worlds of scientific research and industry, might we ask ourselves how to promote such a change in the global university? What can be done to give all the universities in Italy the same possibility to better prepare their students. According to Soong Hee Han of the University of Seoul:

> Higher education, different from others, develops and delivers cutting-edge innovations in setting new societal visions, restructuring, technologies, and professional skills development to implement and maintain them. It includes not only high-tech industries but also fundamental and structural changes in society and economy, as we would expect from the Fourth Industrial Revolution. I argue that the macro changes in industry and the labour market will further rely on the active role of higher education in both long-term academic competences, and 're-skilling' continuing education for current employees. Also, as recently basic income, robot tax, or jobless growth gain keener attention, the issue of employability and transition should be actively combined with new social platforms like the shared economy, and the new way of combining work and life, which will also dramatically change the role of higher education in weaving new social textures of the issues of employability and social inclusion, as well as personal development. I will deliver three key changes to consider, from the international perspectives, that

> (1) the ecosystem of higher education, both in Europe and Asia is being quickly reshaped; (2) Key competences in the workplace, facing the emergence of Super-Intelligence and Super-connection, are increasingly seeking the values of liberal arts and pure sciences, cultivated in higher education, which are being fused and interconnected to meet the complex world; (3) The emergence of artificial intelligence will diminish job opportunities, and 'employability' and 'social inclusion' will not be separate from one another, creating a new social and economic platform where the concept of 'employment' will be dramatically re-conceptualized (Emp&Co. Conference 2017).

Future perspectives on this issue tell us that Eastern Asia, unlike Italy and Europe, is building new higher education models precisely to anticipate the complex social changes that we shall shortly have to face. The question has to do with the development of individual skills through new curricula to initiate the creation and development of new higher education ecosystems.

From a political perspective, Maria Slowey of Dublin City University has asked us to reflect on the role of the university for the development of a country in the light of the last ten years of economic-financial crises and social, civil, and political austerities, which have fuelled the debate on the guidelines to be given and on the value of higher education:

> Higher education (comprising not only universities but also a diverse range of other tertiary institutions such as specialist colleges, polytechnics, and professional institutions) is increasingly expected to fulfil a wide variety of roles for society and, more narrowly, for the economy – such as widening access, meeting labour market needs, technology transfer, contributing to regional development and civic engagement. It is possible to explore a central paradox – or, as Collini (2012) interprets it, a 'Faustian pact'. To the extent that universities succeed in offering a 'service provider' role to important stakeholders (in particular, the state and employers) is this at the cost of effectively abandoning its transformative mission? This mission has traditionally involved generating new knowledge and reflecting critical analytic, independent perspectives back to the society of which universities are a part. As Collini put it: One begins to wonder whether societies do not make a kind of Faustian pact when they set up universities: they ask them to serve various purposes, but if they are to be given the intellectual freedom necessary to serve these purposes, they will always tend to exceed or subvert those purposes. (Collini 2012: 7). There are fundamental questions about the role of higher education in contemporary society: in particular, the balance between private and public good. The global expansion of higher education coupled with the development of the 'knowledge economy' or 'knowledge society' has led to higher education being increasingly at the centre of policy interest at both international levels (through bodies such as the EU, OECD, World Bank, and UNESCO) and national lev-

> els. The paradox is thus that while Higher Education is seen as increasingly important for the successful development of society, its core values and purposes are, arguably, facing unprecedented threats (Emp&Co. Conference 2017).

In conclusion, we could say that we need to think about the research results precisely to interpret tomorrow, and what will happen *in* and *for* university contexts.

The educational and pedagogical sense of our work lies in the fact of having conducted our disciplines in unexplored territories to try to combine the speed of change and stay within the innovation and prospects for a future that is already 'today'. If the research has taught us anything, it is that a large dose of courage is necessary to remain dissatisfied. In fact, in the face of so many changes, we need to be able to transform our way of being. While some styles of thinking, language, and professions are disappearing, others are appearing. We must be able to understand and model the transformations, to avoid producing 'injustices and creating new marginalization'.

This is the task of the research and this is the task of the transfer of knowledge and learning.

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Studies on Adult Learning and Education

Employability & Competences

The book is the final report of the researches, discussions, conversations around and about the Project PRIN *Employability & Competences* which took place on March 9th--11th, 2017 within an International Conference at the University of Florence. It was the final event of the project PRIN2012LATR9N which aims were: «to design innovative programs for higher education, to promote personalized and learner-centered teaching and learning, to build on job competencies, to value talents to create new work--opportunities, to support young adults during their employment emergency, as a response to socio--economic crisis and as a citizenship action». The research activities concerned the main phases of the students' academic life: career guidance upon entry, personalized teaching, career calling, professional vocation, profession--building activities such as internships and work related experiences, and lastly job placement.

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