

Teaching and Learning in The Society of Continuing Education and Training

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Abstract Here we propose a conceptual distinction among *educazione*¹, *istruzione*² and *formazione*³ on the basis of the Italian socio-cultural heritage and we consider the role that teacher has historically assumed in this context. Then, we analyze the competences ascribable to the *teacher* today. Finally, we highlight how the relationship among concepts of increasing importance in the actual learning-teaching process, such as *active citizenship*, *self-formation* and *accompanying*, is determined by different attitudes and postures towards teaching and learning.

Keywords Accompanying, Active Citizenship, Education, Educational/Training Postures, Learning, Lifelong Learning, Self-Formation, Teaching, Teaching Professionalism

1. Introduction

“The citizens of Europe take advantage of one of the highest levels of education and of systems of instruction and training among the best in the world” (Consiglio dell’Unione Europea, 2001). Thus we read in the introduction to the report of the (Education) Council to the European Council in 2001. And furthermore: “The Council [...] took into account the general aims that society attributes to education and training, namely: the development of the individual, who can thus realize its full potential and lead a good life; the development of society, in particular by fostering democracy, reducing disparities and inequalities, both among individuals

1 The meaning of the term used herein may refer to *Education* in the sense of “the act or process of acquiring knowledge, esp. systematically during childhood and adolescence” (Collins Concise English Dictionary © HarperCollins Publishers). Retrieved from: <http://www.wordreference.com/>.

2 The meaning of the term used herein may refer to *Instruction* in the sense of “the process or act of imparting knowledge; teaching; education” (Collins Concise English Dictionary © HarperCollins Publishers). Retrieved from: <http://www.wordreference.com/>.

3 The meaning of the term used herein may refer to *Formation* in the sense of “the act of giving or taking form, shape, or existence” and to *Training* in the sense of “the process of bringing a person, etc, to an agreed standard of proficiency, etc, by practice and instruction” (Collins Concise English Dictionary © HarperCollins Publishers). Retrieved from: <http://www.wordreference.com/>.

and groups, and promoting cultural diversity; the development of economy, ensuring that workforce qualifications correspond to economic and technological evolution” (Consiglio dell’Unione Europea, 2001).

Given meaningful goals such as those set out above, here we propose some reflections on what characteristics a teacher must possess today, what are the basic and essential components of his craft, how his figure is placed in a professional setting who has gone and is still going through many changes, and that has changed in the changing of society itself. Moreover, we highlight that, also the profile of the learner has changed, and therefore the relationship, the process and the sense of teaching and learning.

To do so, having as prevalent reference the Italian socio-cultural context of development, we intend to systematize some interesting conceptual cores taken from the Italian and European literature of recent days.

2. Terms

In the framework of lifelong learning, what does it mean to *educate*, *instruct*, *form*? Borrowing the words of Riccardo Massa, “the starting point can only be, once again, that regarding the terms with which conceptually you define these issues” (Massa, 2000). The concept of *Education* has an idealistic and spiritualistic legacy. It favors the transmission of values and is always at risk of being “unrealistic exercise of power over consciences.” (Massa, 2000). The concept of *Instruction* is focused on the mode of transmission of content and *cognitive behaviors* and is located in the dimension of skills and results. So, giving primacy to *Instruction* can mean neglecting the emotional and psychosocial aspects inherent the learning processes and the impact that teaching has on the existential and cultural level, while assigning the primacy to *Education* can conjure up the ghosts of ideology and immobility.

Seems to overcome this conflict, “both in pedagogical tradition and in cultural practice” (Massa, 2000) the concept of *Forming*. Beyond any determined intention, each person is *formed* in a social context, in family life, in relationships with others, in personal vicissitudes, in the widening of the

experience, in travel and adventure, in cultural acquisitions, in the integration into the adult world. On the other hand, each person is also *formed* in a process institutionally oriented, aimed at acquiring the foundations of culture or some of its areas, or even certain types of behavior or personality traits.

Currently, the term *Formazione*, integrated in the expression *Formazione Professionale* (corresponding to the English *Professional Training*), has carved out an area of more specific meaning of “oriented, sectoral and organized practice towards targets deemed strategic for social and productive consequences” (Massa, 2000). This seems to bring back directly to the objectives outlined by the European Council in 2001.

3. Roles

The teacher has moved among the meshes of *educating*, *instructing* and *forming* in the century just ended. At the beginning “teaching is [...] a form of educating” (Cortini, 2008) and the teacher is “the one who in the world, from hour to hour, in the words of Dante, teaches us how man perpetuates” (Cortini, 2008).

It is in the mid-century, that the focus shifts gradually on the learner. To simplify, we could say that the philosophical attention paid to the teacher is replaced by a growing psychological attention paid to the learner and to his participation in the teaching-learning process.

In the following years it is also understood the importance of the socio-cultural setting as a conditioning factor in the educational processes. Teaching is intended to produce a smooth assimilation of knowledge and the teacher is configured as a *guarantor of civilization*.

The rationalization of educational processes grows in the 70s and so, the figure of a teacher, informed and updated programmer and result oriented, returns in the foreground.

The diffusion of information and communication technologies further transforms the role of the teacher from a dispenser of information in a purely transmissive sense, to a barrier against the disorientation and the confusion caused by the excess of information, and to a doctrine and knowledge mediator.

To this conclusion comes Cortini (referring to Laneve), which considers the teacher today, not so much in the etymological meaning of “the one who shows”, but as the one who translates reality into representation and thus provides an effective cultural mediation to the learner. It is a type of *secondary learning*, which comes up beside the *primary* one, arising from direct experience (Cortini, 2008).

In the current knowledge society, however, this distinction appears, nuanced. Learning extends along the entire course of life and embraces all dimensions. The complementarity of *formal learning* (which involves the release of a qualification), of *non-formal learning* (that however responds to specific objectives) and of *informal learning* (from which we derive meaningful experiences) is

by now proved: school, work and life experience are the pillars of the person's *formation*, which is not realized in subsequent phases or separated segments, but in an integrated and interactive process.

Due to its pervasiveness and to the global involvement that it entails, there are those, like Alberici, that prefer to talk about *Permanent Education*, meaning with that “a process that goes far beyond the specific activities carried out in schools and in training institutions, involving more and more, the same subjects in adulthood, or at least, the individuals outside the so-called *formal seats of Instruction*” (Alberici, 2010).

4. Basic Professional Competences

Franco Frabboni (Frabboni, 2003) with the aim of defining the professional skills of the new teacher, distinguishes:

- the disciplinary competence (knowledge)
- the teaching competence (didactic) (know-how)
- the relational competence (knowing how to be with others)
- the deontological competence (knowing how to be).

The *disciplinary competence* is related to the cultural mastery of the subjects taught (a historical-epistemological mastery) and to the ability of comparison and contamination with other disciplines.

The *teaching competence (didactic)*, with regard to the *general teaching*, is the competence of the methods of designing, innovating, monitoring, evaluating the teaching-learning process. The *teaching competence* as regards the *disciplinary teaching*, is the competence concerning the statute and the teaching and learning strategies typical of the discipline and its relationship with other disciplines (interdisciplinarity).

Fall within the *relational competence* skills, attitudes, aspects, related to the processes of communication and socialization; while the preservation of the uniqueness of the person is a part of the *deontological competence*.

These last two aspects, not at all negligible, flow together in a *Posture of Education* that is widely spreading in the current landscape of lifelong learning: the *Accompanying*⁴.

5. The Educational / Training Postures

According to Le Bouëdec (Le Bouëdec, 2007), in education and training we can identify four basic relational postures:

- the Authority Posture
- the Contractual Posture
- the Animation Posture

⁴ We preferred to use the term *accompanying* (l'accompagnare), but we used also the term *accompagnement* (accompagnamento), to translate the Italian *Accompagnamento* of national widespread use in this context. The semantic boundaries of the terms will be clarified in the following lines of text.

- the *Accompanying Posture*.

The author argues that in the *Authority Posture* the teacher stands at the top and acts in a directive way. The main purpose is control. It is the role often assumed by the therapist, the expert, the conductor. The risk you take by adopting this attitude is that of demagoguery (operating in suggestion) and paternalism (operating in concession).

In the *contractual posture* instead, the educator lies behind. The action is of transaction⁵ and the actor is a mediator, an intermediary, an interpreter. The relationship is governed by a contractual mode⁶. The risks identified here are those of loss or distrust.

In the *posture of animation* the educator is in the middle. He works for participation, entertains and promotes. The idea of reference is that of union, the risk is of manipulation and dispersion.

The *accompanying posture*, finally, is characterized by being at the side, trying to involve the other, assuming the role of counselor and companion, avoiding excessive kindness or fusion.

In the *Accompanying Relationship* the institutional and asymmetrical connotations are attenuated in favor of the aspects of partnership and cooperative collaboration.

In adult and continuing education the *accompanying* binds to a logic of facilitating learning and appears the most suitable strategy “in case of work insertion and conversion, but also in case of personal changes, as in transitions and life crises” (Biasin, 2010). Thus, *accompanying* becomes also “a specific form of education and training, aimed at educational figures, that with various methods and tools, operate in the field of educational guidance, apprenticeship, supervision, individual counseling and tutoring” (Biasin, 2010).

At the same time, however, Chiara Biasin wisely warns that, even if today we register “an obvious bias toward the relational posture of *accompanying*”, as just pointed out, “the structural features that characterize the education and training action [...] cannot require anything else but [...] the adoption of a flexible and open posture, ranging from direction to transaction, from participation to involvement” (Biasin, 2010).

6. Accompanying, Self-Formation and Active Citizenship

If the relational and the deontological competences of the teacher may refer to the *accompanying relationship* in the teaching-learning process, the mastery of knowledge and

techniques, key factor in the exercise of teacher’s professionalism, can be tracked also in a growing practice in today’s continuing education, that of *self-formation*.

In the 2000 *Memorandum on lifelong learning*, the European Commission adopts, as a foundational structure, the concept of *active citizenship*. Being an *active citizen* means to fully participate in the social and economic life, being aware of the opportunities and risks that this entails. It marks the degree of belonging to the society in which we live in and the will to have our say in it (Commissione Europea, 2000). This is to avoid, what Aureliana Alberici calls “the risk of social exclusion, produced by the division among those who know how to make sense of themselves and the world, those who only know how to use information, and those who do not even know they do not know”, who remain on the margins of a society that, “in the most advanced cases, assists them” (Alberici, 2010).

Learning throughout the course of life is the basis of this right to citizenship, the exercise of which is necessary for the purposes of economic productivity, individual growth and social cohesion.

The confirmation of the European Commission in these words: “the acquisition and updating of competences [...] is the unconditional premise of an active citizenship and of employability in the twenty-first century’s Europe”.

And more: “economic and social changes involve an evolution and an elevation of the level of basic competences that everyone should have as a minimum to participate actively in working, family or community life, at all levels, from the local one to the European one” (Commissione Europea, 2000). “The position of each one in the space of knowledge and competency will be crucial” (Commissione delle comunità europee, 1995).

Recent years, in fact, are characterized by the subtle but significant passage, from *information society* to *knowledge society*, in which learning plays a crucial role. The attention initially targeted to accessing and processing the huge amount of information available, is gradually replaced by the attention to the human ability to create and use knowledge effectively and flexibly.

In this context, strong emphasis is given to the culture of project: managing our own life project and dynamically responding to the continuous challenges of social life, implies the need to acquire, maintain and develop knowledge, skills, competences.

The continuous setting of objectives and their evaluation in terms of results requires an adult to “be able to learn by himself, to self-regulate, to self-control, to re-design himself” in a “constant job of re-forming” (Biasin, 2010). Part of this work is the ability to integrate and recompose pushes for adaptation (with respect to social, institutional, organizational and economic demands) and pushes for individualizing emancipation (Tho, 2006).

⁵ Beatrice Ligorio refers to the metaphor of *transaction* to define a learning-teaching process conceived as an exchange between the learner and the context, which includes the one who teaches. *Transaction* is intended to reconcile individual and culture, learning as acquisition of knowledge and learning as participation (Ligorio, 2004).

⁶ As part of the *Andragogic Theory*, Malcolm Knowles defines the *learning contract* between teacher and learner, the negotiation of objectives, evidences, strategies, criteria and means to be used in the teaching-learning process. Today, such a contract is widely adopted in Adult Education. (Alberici, 2010).

7. *Accompanying* and Dispositions to Learn

In the belief that “self-formation does not mean no accompanying” Hélène Bezille states that every person has different and specific dispositions and attitudes towards environment, learning and projects to realize, that favor different modes or absence of *accompaniment* (Biasin, 2010).

In fact, the attitude that each of us develops in relation to knowledge and learning is derived from schemes, models of behavior, ways of being and feeling, acting and thinking that have been internalized. The *accompaniment* is processed within these and the form and the position assumed, vary from refusal, to direction, to implicit use.

According to the author, for example, the *willingness to work hard* and with passion in an activity or a project from its conception to its final recognition (commitment), leads a person to direct himself his learning.

Those who *authorize themselves to deviate* or circumvent the set of rules, forming themselves facing not established paths, reject institutionalized *accompaniment*.

Those who *explore*, capture here and there, ideas, knowledge, relationships, and take the time to ponder and wander, usually deems appropriate moments without *accompaniment*.

Others, sensitive to the environment around them and listening to *grasp its opportunities*, consider the *accompaniment* part of the resources that can be helpful to projects' activities.

The *pleasure of experiencing* is connected to the non-conformist thinking, to the willing to create innovative connections, to the use of all means available. The *accompaniment* in this case, is controlled, linked to the needs of the moment, discontinuous, uses different forms and may be scattered on several persons.

Then there is the *disposition to live uncertainty*, to experience doubt, to feel continuously challenged. Here the need for an institutionally imposed *accompaniment* is limited.

Finally, in the *willingness to improvise*, the *accompaniment* assumes a particular significance in the specific relationship that the person establishes with himself, the world, the others, the environment (Biasin, 2010).

Laura Biasin, going beyond, takes adult *accompaniment* as a “paradigmatic derivation of the contemporary complexity and globality”, and there distinguishes:

- a *productive function*, what allows to better address the ongoing destabilizations due to different transitions, to overcome the critical steps, manage the present and plan the future;
- a *revealing function*, what allows to increase the performance and develop potential and resources, and leads to a full responsible realization (Biasin, 2010).

8. Professional Competences: In-Depth Analysis

Whether is a research driven by our own disposition towards learning and the world, or by the need to deal with the small and big crises of contemporary life, what is the added value that the teaching profession brings to those who need to be formed to adequately address the present and the future?

Expanding and deepening the four dimensions identified by Franco Frabboni in 2003, Serafina Pastore and Laura Agrati translate disciplinary, didactic, relational and deontological competences in four conceptual areas:

- the fundamentals,
- the act of teaching and the socio-educational context,
- the transversal competences,
- the professional identity.

First and foremost, the teacher knows the basics: he is able to organize theoretical and practical knowledge.

Theoretical knowledge is referable to contents knowledge, to the discipline. But more closely, what does it mean to know the subject matter? In the words of Laneve: “making an articulated and consistent speech, establishing relationships among the parties [...] articulating segments of knowledge, increasing learner interests referring to [...] the content” (Cortini, 2008). Thus, knowing the discipline means to know:

- the alphabet
- the structure
- the epistemology
- the issues relating to research and method.

To this deep knowledge of the basic ideas and of the conceptual frameworks of the specific content being taught, is integrated *knowledge originating from Education Sciences*.

Pastore and Agrati consider fundamental factors of this theoretical knowledge: *hermeneuticity*, *potability* and *perspicuousness*.

The concept of *hermeneuticity* is what makes the teacher capable of observing, analyzing, understanding the context from a historical, sociological, cultural and economic point of view; understanding the class context; exercising order, discipline and social control.

The meaning of *potability* is related to the ability to select the essential concepts and explain them gradually in an appropriate manner; identify the essential and driving ideas and principles and recontextualize them; encourage and guide problematization, hypotheses formulation, realization of possible research routes.

Perspicuousness is understood as transmission of knowledge in the clearest way as possible and modification, change, simplification, reconstruction of knowledge for a better understanding on the part of the learner.

To these aspects, others may be added, such as: portability, learning to learn, emotional closeness, the principle of interest, timeliness and waiting, authorship,

commonality, monitoring, evaluation ability (Cortini, 2008).

Theoretical knowledge, which has just been treated above, is inextricably tied to *practice*, to knowledge generated within the action. Teaching competence, in this perspective, is not limited to a technical-operative dimension, but it means the ability to adapt, to move with expertise and commitment in solving problems. Even in this case, Laneve recalls how, above all, the teacher deals with, “setting up all those favorable conditions, situations and opportunities that can facilitate learning by the learner [...] and providing method indications (routes, times, modes) and organizational suggestions, redefining and delimiting tasks and doing everything possible to make the learning experience rewarding” (Cortini, 2008).

Planning, evaluation, research and communication are considered the main competences related to the act of teaching.

The *planning ability* is understood in the sense of overcoming the routine on the one hand and overcoming improvisation on the other, “without falling into the danger of instrumental reductionism” (Cortini, 2008). The teacher, as evidenced by Laneve, has a constant inclination to ask himself questions, to design, to verify; an uncommon subtlety in choosing, scanning, sizing, anticipating, postponing, until reaching the target; the ability to express a serious and serene evaluation of the results achieved, with a consequent availability in any possible re-calibration, revisions of forms, corrections of procedures.

The *evaluation process* is an essential part of the teaching architecture and is closely related to the development of planning. So, Gaetano Domenici, stresses the value and importance of that: “information and knowledge derived from a congruent evaluation process can be extremely valuable, especially in the promotion of intentional and finalized behaviors, of relevant, effective and efficient actions [...] appropriate to the context, consistent with the pursued objectives [...]” (Cortini, 2008).

In these terms, *Evaluation* can be considered a means of regulation of the system and of its interrelationships with the social supra-system. It entails the improvement of:

- the overall development of planning;
- decision-making processes that can be activated within it, with a consequent increase in the quality of instruction;
- decision-making processes that can be activated outside it, with a consequent optimization of the functionality of the whole system.

Furthermore, the teacher, is led to assume a correct *research attitude*, aimed at defining learning objectives, activating rigorous paths and emphasizing the role of checks, addressed to the entire learning process. Of this, is a part, the ability to innovate, to be open to the new and to the innovative; to plan, organize, manage, supervise the didactic action, multiplying and differentiating proposals, in order to offer a teaching appropriate to the needs and the characteristics of the learner.

Teaching is also the ability to *communicate* in a consistent and systematic mode, at the same time problematic and dynamic, therefore open to new points of view, reviews, reinterpretations. In this case, the teacher is able to read, interpret and understand the reality of the classroom context and to listen and prepare himself to comprehend reasons, interests and expectations of learners. He fully masters the modulation of the transition from scientific knowledge to learning knowledge and demonstrates a mature rhetoric competence, understood as the ability to express himself in a clear and comprehensible mode and to gain the adhesion of the learner on the basis of arguments, recognizing his evaluative and decisional autonomy.

Didactic competences are not limited, however, to the act of teaching, but take into account the socio-educational context. The competences related to the *context* in which teaching takes place include the ability to read, interpret, understand the reality of the classroom, in order to better modulate the educational offer and calibrate the action on the basis of learning needs, backgrounds, expectations and motivations of learners. All this, taking into account the role that assume, in the exercise of the teaching profession:

- *memory*, that allows us to refer to what has already been experimented, experienced, is known;
- *tacit knowledge*, the repertoire of cognitive schemes and knowledge models, developed personally through continuous interaction with theories and experiences, through which we interpret and understand new situations and of which we do not have full awareness;
- *personal beliefs* and spontaneous conceptions.

Moreover, the teacher knows how to *improvise*. In this sense, he is able to operate successfully in specific situations using only what is available and of responding in an inventive, intuitive, creative mode, at the same time, appropriate to circumstances. In addition, he knows how to relate and collaborate constructively with colleagues, which has a positive impact not only on the teaching group, but gives to the learners the opportunity to live and experience different ways of interaction and educational relationships and to benefit from valuable opportunities for socialization.

In the systematization of teacher’s professional competences, Pastore and Agrati refer then, to some basic factors that constitute the *identity of professionals* and that are considered to be valid also in this case: the responsibility and ethical dimension and the continuous commitment in professional development. To these are added a series of competences of a transversal type, or *cross competences*, which refer to general skills of a broad-spectrum, related to the processes of thought and cognition, the modalities of behavior in social and working contexts, the modalities and abilities to reflect and use learning and self-correction strategies in conduct.

These competences are divided into three groups:

- psycho-social and personal resources
- social abilities

- organizational skills.

Psycho-social and personal resources include: self-awareness, motivation, creativity, responsibility, integration, adaptation, flexibility, emotional control. Among *social abilities* are placed: empathy, ability to communicate, cooperation, negotiation. They are part of *organizational capacity*: elasticity of thought, ability to solve problems, ability of self programming, project management skills.

Already identified as a key element of an effective and competent job performance and a strategic competence in learning to learn, in this case *reflexivity* assumes a particularly important role. As argued by Donald Shön, *reflective rationality* activates a dynamic exchange between person and situation and promotes the continuous creation and experimentation of new concepts and thoughts.

This kind of *rationality* is based on uniqueness, originality and creativity of professional's actions: in fact, professionals always operate in unique cases and at the same time, reflect and implement the solutions chosen.

Knowledge of the *reflective practitioner* is always progressive and its practice is similar to a research activity in which different information and observations are handled, hypotheses and deductions are developed, knowledge categories are continually restructured (Cortini, 2008).

In the face of the vast and composite panorama of competences required to the *teacher's figure*, the centrality of *formation* in the paths of personal and organizational development, the growth of opportunities and places of *formation*, it increases the number of those who, in various ways, are involved in this area.

9. Professional Figures

Finally, following the perspective of Chiara Biasin, which suggests a vision of continuing education and training as a strategic *accompaniment* of adults in a flexible and permanent adaptation work by "figures [...] and services/spaces to that assigned" (Biasin, 2010), we will make synthetic reference to the model outlined by Maela Paul. This can be considered a useful orientation tool in the current field of teaching practice. Paul's model is structured on two axes and four poles:

- the horizontal axis is constituted by the pole of technique and by the pole of sense;
- the vertical axis, by the pole of action and the pole of reflection.

Placement of practices on the horizontal axis veers toward the *technical* aspect when the methodological and management structure and the aspects of control, forecasting, efficiency and excellence prevail; it moves toward the pole of *sense* when interpretive, evolutionary and hermeneutic elements and aspects of maturation, growth, research and understanding of meanings prevail.

As regards the vertical axis, practices that approach the pole of *action* give particular importance to factors of

production, conformation, execution; practices that converge toward *reflection* pay more attention to activities of analysis, mediation, construction.

Thus, *social mediation* and *guidance* are placed in the quadrant of reflection and technique; *coaching* and *tutoring* in the quadrant of the technique and action; *mentoring* in the quadrant of action and sense; *counseling* and *educational mediation* in the quadrant of sense and reflection. The key concept common to all these practices is that, previously mentioned, of the tension between autonomy and socialization: on the one hand a person's ability to assume a point of view of his own and authentic, on the other, the ability to interface with others and the world.

10. Conclusions

Not pretending to be exhaustive, in this article we tried to draw a picture of the competences required of those who teach in today's society of *lifelong learning*.

We started from explaining the concepts of *education*, *instruction*, *formation* and *training* as they developed in the Italian social-historical landscape, then we highlighted how, in the recent past, the teacher dominated these fields of knowledge.

To meet the definition of teacher's professional competences today, inevitably, we examined different educational/training postures and different dispositions to learn. *Accompaniment* has been identified as the common thread between these complementary attitudes toward the teaching-learning process.

The analysis of the concept of *accompaniment* shows how today this posture is compatible and conciliated in various ways with the *cutting-edge* concepts of *self-formation* and *active citizenship*.

Deepening then, the variety of competences that the teacher's figure should capitalize in an education and training process that lasts for a lifetime, we outlined a model that illustrates how these characteristics currently tend to be distributed over a plurality of professional profiles.

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