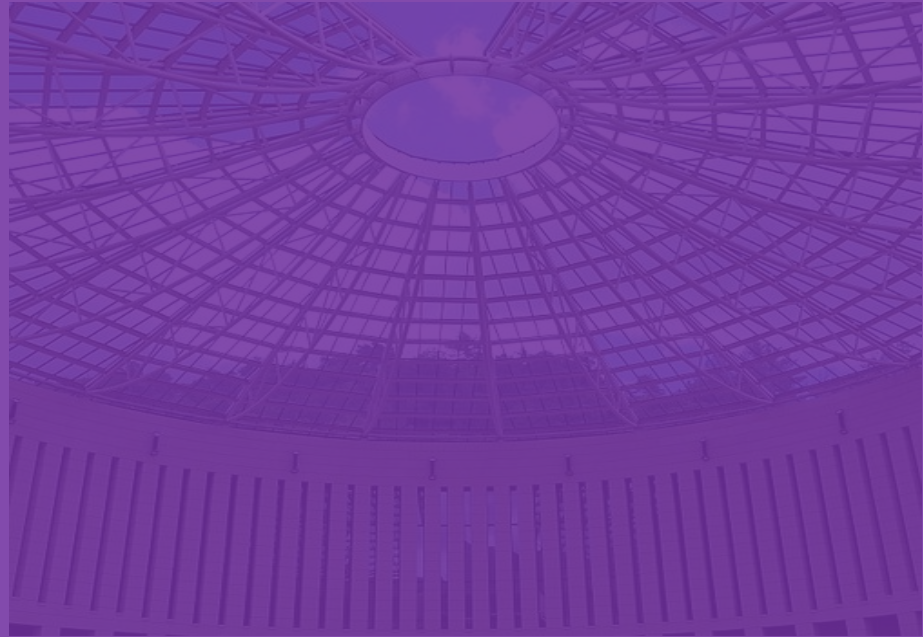


Scuola
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EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY

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VOLUME III

Governance, Values, Work and Future

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***Title* Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" - Education and Post-Democracy VOLUME III Governance, Values, Work and Future**

This volume contains papers presented in the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place at the University of Cagliari on 5-8 June 2019. The aim of the Conference was to bring together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate the concepts of "education" in a "post-democracy" era, the latter being a set of conditions under which scholars are called to face and counteract new forms of authoritarian democracy.

Populisms, racisms, discriminations and nationalisms have burst and spread on the international scene, translated and mobilized by sovereigntist political movements. Nourished by neo-liberalism and inflated by technocratic systems of governance these regressive forms of post-democracy are shaping historical challenges to the realms of education and culture: it is on this ground, and not only on the political and economic spheres, that decisive issues are at stake. These challenges are both tangible and intangible, and call into question the modern ideas of justice, equality and democracy, throughout four key dimensions of the educational function, all of which intersected by antinomies and uncertainties: ethical-political socialization, differences, inclusion, innovation.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and interdisciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners' mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 600 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on researches, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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A University Traineeship Experience for Educators. The case of the Bachelor Degree in Educational Sciences, University of Milano-Bicocca

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Introduction

The dynamic transformations underway in contemporaneity impact on educational work: new needs emerge, modifying the boundaries of educational intervention and educators' professional skills (Fook, Gardner, 2013; Tramma, 2017). Given the complex, unpredictable, and precarious situations facing them, educators are required to become «reflective professionals» (Schön, 1993) with the ability to identify the multiple factors influencing their work settings and develop an in-depth understanding of them. Their professionalism is rooted in balancing skills learned through experience with theoretical knowledge (Oggioni, 2016). This in turn will help them to design the most suitable intervention possible for each case they are involved in.

Against this backdrop, current bachelor's degree courses in Educational Sciences are designed to provide students with both interdisciplinary knowledge (pedagogical, psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical disciplines) and practical experience, including laboratories and a traineeship. This paper presents an analysis of the structure, features, future prospects and critical aspects of the traineeship of the Bachelor's degree in Educational sciences offered by the University of Milano-Bicocca.

1. The structure of the traineeship programme

The traineeship of the Bachelor's degree in Educational sciences at the University of Milano-Bicocca (Palmieri et al., 2009) runs over two academic years and is divided into two phases: it begins in Year 2 with the so-called 'preparatory activities', and is completed in Year 3 with the 'Internship at a host socio-educational organization'.

Throughout the entire traineeship program students work in small groups that are conceived as situated learning contexts. Each group comprises about twenty students, led by a pedagogical supervisor, who encounters the generative potential of dialogue and exchange among peers, by sharing their ideas, doubts, questions and experiences; over the two years group composition remains unvaried.

In this way, the students experience the 'pedagogical supervision', an effective training method that creates learning situations based on exchange and debate, with the aims of: stimulating a collective reading of educational contexts, cultures, values, prejudices, in relation to both informal and formal experience; enhancing the group learning, and of sharing strategies of intervention.

During preparatory activities, students are offered 36 hours of group pedagogical supervision, as well as encounters with experienced practitioners in the course of two symposiums and two field trips to educational services; in addition, each student has the opportunity to make an individual field trip.

The aim of this structure is to stimulate the students' ability to observe and ask questions about educational work, the role of materiality, how to organize an educational setting, and the transformation of ideas into actions in keeping with recipients' specific needs. The general objectives of this phase of the traineeship program are: to develop students' critical thinking abilities, grounded in the continuous practice of self-reflexivity; to facilitate them in moving towards taking up a professional role.

Therefore, in this transition, it is crucial to help students develop their self-knowledge and, at the same time, to familiarize with the territory and its services. This implies, on the one hand, guiding students to explore their own motivation and expectations, needs, desires and professional representations: uncovering their own personal ideas of education starting by identifying the 'traces of education' in their own life contexts (family, relationships, work), comparing and deconstructing these ideas, acquiring tools for recognizing the implicit models, cultures, values and rules at work in professional contexts, and constructing their own way of being educators. On the other hand, it means helping students to map out the territorial educational services and resources, recognizing the local effects of education and social policies.

These aspects are key to facilitating individual students in choosing the service where they will carry out their internship.

Indeed, the second year of their traineeship (Year 3 of the degree course), entitled *Internship at a host socio-educational organization*, is focused on entering in a specific educational service as an 'intern': students spend almost 200 hours in the field and in parallel have 30 hours of pedagogical supervision at university. This requires close cooperation between the academic staff and the host educational and social organizations.

The main aim of this phase of the program is to allow the students to put themselves individually to the test, experience a specific 'quasi-professional' role in an educational context, and improve their ability to critically reflect on their practice, while linking it with the theories learned at university. Students can detach themselves from their involvement with the host organization, and think about what they are observing and experience, with the contribution of the group and the supervisor. Thus, pedagogical reflection on action supports the development of both specific and transversal professional skills, tools and methodologies.

2. The features of the traineeship: groups and pedagogical supervision

The distinctive features of the traineeship of the Bachelor's degree in Educational sciences offered by the University of Milano-Bicocca are: the small group learning setting and pedagogical supervision as a reflection-on-action practice.

2.1. The group: a reflective work team

Involving students in a group experience is a pedagogical choice: it implies offering a different learning setting in comparison with the other courses that students attend at university. This didactic and reflective context allows them to share their thoughts, construct new meanings and design interventions in an

intersubjective way, considering their reciprocal differences and the possibility of conflict. Therefore, for multiple reasons, groups are potentially an effective means of enhancing both individual and shared learning, and of fostering outlooks and attitudes that are key to educational work.

First, the group pedagogical supervision process promotes the integration of partial, specific and transversal knowledge, acquired via internship experience at different host services. Adopting an inquiry stance leads students to observe educational phenomena and question practices; the group discussions stimulate them to go beyond the technicalities and to acquire deeper and more critical levels of understanding.

Indeed, the group offers the opportunity to experience a sort of 'work team'. It may initially be seen as a useful container for doubts and concerns, that may be resized in the light of others' narratives; progressively it is recognized as a formal space of discussion in which it is possible to define shared criteria for interpreting social problems and educational issues. A process of observation, reflection, documentation and discussion enables critical analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the different educational design and operational methods. Multiple approaches, in their similarities or differences, are compared within the group, whose heterogeneity reflects the variety of the education settings hosting the interns. This stimulates the adoption of a multidimensional approach to educational phenomena, and the quest to integrate the knowledge and skills, methodologies and tools that are used within different educational services. Thus, the group addresses multiple topics: analysis of educational events, experiences and services; analysis of educational settings themselves (from their organizational to their cultural features); professional tools and methods, including educational and professional relationships, teamwork, project design, professional writing and documentation, evaluation etc.; the concrete aspects of social work, taking into account the educational value of the organization of spaces and materials; the specific dimensions of educators' professional role and identity. In conclusion, the didactic and reflective experience in these training groups allows students to develop collaborative attitudes, narrative skills, and a professional language, enhancing their ability to analyse and critically understand educational events, by adopting an inquiry stance from which they can think about new hypotheses and in-depth questions. In addition, being involved in a group offers the possibility to observe and experience group dynamics, which are complex, and challenging to recognize and manage in the role of educator.

2.2. Pedagogical supervision: a meta-reflective tool

The training groups are first and foremost 'pedagogical supervision groups'. In social and educational work, supervision consists of a process of reflection, learning, evaluation and scrutiny, that is built up via the relationship between an expert practitioner and a worker or group of workers seeking professional support (Oggioni, 2013). Therefore, supervision is a reflective setting that offers the possibility to revisit knowledge acquired on the job, by focusing on the effectiveness of professional behaviours, methods and instruments, so as to constantly review and guarantee the quality of interventions and identify new ways of conceptualizing and planning them. The supervision setting enables the temporary suspension of action, seeking to integrate different theories and praxes, motivations and choices, doubts and feelings, objectives and methodologies, in light of multiple perspectives. Thus, a 'partial, local, shared and temporary knowledge' emerges, reducing the distance between representations, planned objectives (sometimes not achievable), and the scope for active engagement in re-designing sustainable alternatives.

In the academic traineeship groups, the supervision conserves these same characteristics. First, it allows students to analyse educational models and practices from different points of view, and to highlight explicit and latent aspects of educational professionalism and work. Second, supervision supports the development of a knowledge that intertwines different and ambivalent aspects of the educational role: personal and professional, emotional and rational, theoretical and practical, specific and transversal, cognitive and operative ones (Sorzio, 2016). Third, supervision requires and reinforces an inquiry-driven perspective and practice: students take notes on their experience in order to narrate and discuss it with the group, thereby discovering the representations, meanings, and pedagogical, anthropological and epistemological models implicit in what they observe and do. Hence, pedagogical supervision is essential to promoting reflexivity as a complex professional skill: via reflection, educators can «gain a deep understanding of the underlying intentionalities in their educational agency, [...] identify the generative elements of their practices and therefore modify and revise them» (Striano, 2017, p.181). Supervision makes students aware of ethical, contextual, cultural and social implications in educational agency: it can therefore play a strategic role in constructing professional identity and educational competences, which become visible and communicable during the process. Within this framework, the figure of the supervisor is crucial: his/her assumptions influence the way in which the educational processes will be identified and understood, and his/her methods of constructing the setting and managing group dynamics determine the very effectiveness of the supervision itself. More specifically, supervisor is required to exercise a particular expertise, that begins with the analysis of a particular case, situation or contest, draws on multiple conceptual and experiential perspectives, and leads to a theorization about educational phenomena. The introduction of new models of observation and analysis can open up new possibilities for interpretation and operational strategies.

3. Future prospects and critical issues

This overview of the structure and features of the traineeship programme enables us to analyse both its potential and critical aspects, which may be read as two sides of the same coin. On one side, there are the didactic aims and the pedagogical choices. On the other side, there are organizational conditions that require a balance between the students' needs and the sustainability of the training programme, which requires a large number of professional staff (three coordinators and about forty-fifty pedagogical supervisors). The high cost of the training programme for the Department of Human Sciences and Education reflects its firm commitment to offering a didactic setting that supports reflective experience and contributes to the development of a solid professional identity and an in-depth understanding of educational phenomena. This goal is achievable thanks to planned, complex coordination within the degree course itself, between the subject modules and the traineeship, as well as between the university and the local host educational organizations. The university is strongly committed to maintaining high levels of coordination, but the intentions have to face with the complexity of both the academic system and the educational services.

The training programme is based on consolidated procedures, which do not always strike the optimum balance between the requirement to manage large numbers (of students, supervisors, services, documents...) and the opportunity of preserving pedagogical spaces of thought, planning and inquiry into the

educational and training process itself. The dialogue among supervisors, as well as between the university and the host socio-educational organizations, is mainly focused on the training process, but more time is required to build a collective project in which all subjects can actively contribute to the development of a professional culture, and adopt an inquiry and professional-development oriented stance towards both pre-service and in-service educators. This could be a possible further implementation of the training programme, from the pedagogical perspective of attributing value to long-term relationships, professional expertise, and innovation in didactics and practices.

Students recognize the training experience as fundamental and value the group pedagogical supervision. They often request an increase of the duration of the internship: 200 hours are enough to gain an overview and initial taste of their future professional role and job, but not enough to try out alternative settings or acquire solid professional competences. This brings to light a 'sore point': What professional competences should the traineeship aim to develop? How does the evaluation process work? Do the university and territorial organizations use common or different criteria?

During their internship, students personally experience a specific service with its own peculiar educational mission and set of theoretical approaches, methods and praxes; the heterogeneous composition of the traineeship groups enables them to indirectly learn from the experiences of their peers, allowing them to progress from knowledge of one specific local context to a more complex view of educational intervention, seeking out transversal competences and meanings. This transition is not automatic and must be stimulated and supported by the supervisor; frequently, the supervision activities are not sufficient to bring all the students to the same level of awareness and knowledge, especially when they display personal fragilities or difficulties that would require dedicated spaces and times to be processed. Indeed, students' own life stories often reflect the complexity of contemporary society: taking this into account may actually be the most important critical aspect of the relationship between the university and society.

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