

## Philosophy and experience in training

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**Resumo:** Este artigo pretende inicialmente interpretar o treinamento do ponto de vista epistemológico, mostrando as razões que legitimam essa atividade e implementar cursos de educação nos quais teoria e prática se articulam para reafirmar a unidade do processo educacional. Treinamento e laboratório parecem revolucionar o ensino, a partir da perspectiva de um sistema educacional que realize uma síntese constante entre teoria e prática.

**Palavras chave:** Pessoa - Cultura – Aprendizado – Treinamento - Laboratório.

**Abstract:** This article intends firstly to interpret training from the epistemological point of view by showing the reasons to legitimate that activity and, secondly, to provide educational courses in which theory and practice coincide to reaffirm the unity of the educational process. Training and laboratory seem to revolutionize teaching from the perspective of an education system that makes a constant synthesis between the two phases of teaching, that is theory and practice. Apprenticeship can be considered as the practice phase, where the subject is free to intervene and positively impact the real world. This is the result emerged from a study carried out at the University of Perugia on the future teachers, who need to enrich their literacy with training. A curriculum where theory and practice merge is not the only method to get a suitable professionalism, but can contribute in realizing the “ten competencies necessary to teach” on the Perrenoud’s opinion.

**Keywords:** Person - Culture - Apprenticeship - Training - Laboratory.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article intends firstly to interpret training from the epistemological point of view by showing the reasons to legitimate that activity and, secondly, to provide educational courses in which theory and practice coincide to reaffirm the unity of the educational process. Training and laboratory seem to revolutionize teaching from the perspective of an education system that makes a constant synthesis between the two phases of teaching, that is theory and practice. Apprenticeship can be considered as the practice phase, where the subject is free to intervene and positively impact the real world. This is the result emerged from a study carried out at the University of Perugia on the future teachers, who need to enrich their literacy with training. A curriculum where theory and practice merge is not the only method to get a suitable professionalism, but can contribute in realizing the “ten competencies necessary to teach” on the Perrenoud’s opinion.

The supremacy of the West on an intellectual level is evident, even if the East cannot be neglected if, as the philosopher Derrida says, Europe is the head of Asia, so its natural extension.

But the West, under the influence of the theoretical research of the nineteenth century, especially in Germany, has always enhanced the activity of abstract thought on practical emergencies in the subject’s relation with the world.

In its natural perfection, reality has always been seen as an object to be contemplated, to be protected from all material contaminations and any outside influence. Reflection and ideation therefore strengthened so that reality was considered as derived from the idea, an abstract concept. Hence the attention to philosophical speculation aiming at explaining the three great ideas of man, soul or reason and the world, as Kant remarked.

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Within this perspective some theories aiming at explaining facts without affect them or analyzing each of their expressions without distorting the essence, but rather making them derive from the materialization of them, which was increased by over the time, developed.

The superiority of thinking on reality, the logos on the contingent reality, has led to a depletion of material resources in favor of ideas that, from Comenius through the German idealism, come up to the Vienna School. Therefore the Poppers' distinction among the three worlds, one of which is certainly the material, and therefore objective, reality developed.

The intellectual corpus represented by the Plato's and Augustine's, Rousseau's, Kant's, Hessen's and Croce's and Gentile's theories, is the texture and substance of a high culture that is to be given to the future generations through education and training.

Today there is an urgent need to give students competences to be immediately used, especially in the world of work. Therefore, the Ministry of Education is implementing education curricula suitable for all stages of life, from childhood to adulthood.

This way, reclaiming a concept of culture not only intellectual by relating to reality, a project concerning a new training, appropriate to the present time, made of ideas rooted in a practical, objective and real basis, can be organized. This project is independent from nature of culture as they have developed in Western Europe, also thanks to globalization.

The scientific research defines the dimensions of this complex idea where language permits the communication between people, story defines ideas as they developed over the centuries in different geographical areas, science has been able to witness the "perfect honesty" with which reality has to be interpreted, religion has allowed to go beyond contingency and art has collected art objects, enterprises, products and creative experiences celebrating the richness of the man's intuitions and inventions.

These areas represent the symbols that have to be recovered and mastered to give today's man an effective, practical and usable culture, in order to realize the so-called "knowledge society".

Therefore the educational horizon, where the high culture allows things, events, objects and instruments that make the training content and purpose combine, is now changing. The learning activity allowed by education and making people able to think but overall to do, both in school and in life, at any age and at any place will focus on the above mentioned objects.

This new concept of cultural education, allowed by an innovative methodologies, will show the relationship between thinking and doing.

## **2. Discussion**

### **2.1 "To get one's hands dirty"**

Knowledge is represented by individual knowledge when combined with the experience that enlivens and enlightens it, revealing its complexity. Thought and action, knowledge and practical life, make pedagogy a "practical science" analyzing reflection on reality, theory and practice; in doing it, they negate the Cartesian dichotomy, criticized by A. Damasio, between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* and give strength to the idea that knowledge includes.

In order to obtain knowledge, and therefore pure knowledge, the personal reality is to be continuously and daily checked. Nevertheless the person does not take refuge in the empyrean abstract ideal, as if reality were negative (even Hegelian idealism has contributed to the consolidation of this concept); on the contrary, he/she has to get and keep in contact with reality (to say with a common expression, “get his/her hands dirty”) in order to merge theory and action.

Therefore, in training education professionals, teachers as well as school social and cultural operators is essential to merge the disciplinary skills (the true knowledge) with those ones concerning teaching, knows as “expertise masterful”, where the Cousinet’s forms of *savoir*, *savoir-faire* and *savoir être* make the authentic professional knowledge.

Finally, this critical action, strengthened and fed by theoretical knowledge, is able to merge theory and practice in the knowledge unit, regardless of the starting point that some call *action-recherche*.

It is therefore time to recover this principle and act in social contexts, especially those ones concerning education, by transforming ideas into experience.

Also a good idea needs to be tested so that it can show its strength against the temptation of laziness and *laissez-faire*.

## **2.2 The education training**

Giuseppe Bertagna is the promoter of the decree no. 276/2003 concerning the importance of work in school and in society. The decree in hand recalls the articles 33 and 34 of the Italian Constitution governing the right-duty to instruction and education and stresses the necessity of enabling students to work after having finished their school.

There is also a higher level of training that would allow special training. However, especially in Italy, only five per cent of young people over the age of fifteen take into consideration a manual work, since “to learn to work through the work” (as Bertagna says) is considered as reductive.

In the Bertagna’s opinion, training is a sort of “medicine” to treat five diseases (Bertagna, 2011. p. 72).

The first one is intellectualism, that is to be convinced that abstract knowledge is in all fields more prestigious and powerful than the practical one. To know and to understand do not mean to know and to understand something and not even to know and to understand why and how to do something, but they always mean to do a thing properly and satisfactorily, so as the subject merits respect and admiration.

The second illness is considering school/training, school/work, general culture/professionalism, theory/action as dichotomies, that is distinct and even opposed.

The third disease is the lack of belief in the persistence of the opposition, considering the practical knowledge as “knowledge of the person acting in his/her entirety in the world and life.” Skill comes from this configuration: to know and to do.

The fourth disease is the devaluation of manual labor in terms of culture.

The fifth disease is the “professional fixity”, which consists in carrying out repetitively the same job for years, without any kind of creativity.

As a consequence, training allows an anti-intellectual, anti-separatist, anti-reductionist, anti-hierarchical and unfixed education method.

To work is also to study and know and is always to live the person's unit as protagonist, carrying out different kinds of work and making changes in it depending on the different life situations.

### **2.3 The influence on the environment**

The constant reference to the person's unity where the body plays an important role (as thought do) confirms once again that learning can be considered as a human behavior, although the reasons for the behavior, as Rosati says (Rosati, 2006), can be referred mainly to the brain activity, i.e. the relationship among those billions of neurons that regulate everything we do. When we think, we pay attention to the mental activity and are led to recognize the role played by our "magic box", that is the brain. But brain is to be considered not only as a biological, even if fundamental, datum, since it needs to work within the environment where it is. Therefore, as Bertagna says, for tens of thousands of millennia the *homo sapiens* have been learning and feeding his knowledge and expertise, improving his living conditions and radically transforming the surrounding environment thanks and through apprenticeship, not through formal and institutional education.

Learning, then, is to be considered as a personal matter, derived from the action of billions of neurons that cause mental states (i.e. thoughts states) relating to social and cultural contexts. Thanks to our mirror neurons, we can in fact immediately understand the meaning of the behavior of others as if they were our own (Rosati, 2011, p. 23).

There are two ways of learning; in the school the repetition of facts, data and other elements is the preferred method. Therefore apprenticeship is the phase where practice and techniques are learned; the subject trains in full freedom and feels the desire to positively impact the real world. Hands work for the benefit of the mind and the subject becomes a philosopher and believes to be nothing more than a worker. At this subject Rousseau asserts that when Emilio learns his work, he should learn with him, because he is convinced that his pupil will learn correctly only they will learn together (Rousseau, 1995, p. 232).

Bertagna also says that the tutor, helping the apprentice record the seen and imitated actions and understand the reasons of social, scientific and cultural matter, as well as supporting him/her in the actions work, intervening to correct any deficiencies in the process and explaining the reasons for the corrections, overseeing finally the apprentice products, after having considered him/her suitable to endorse the responsibility connected with the independent work, with all the consequences that this autonomy involves, not only teaches, but learns (Bertagna, 2011, p. 74).

Stressing the tutor's work, a difference between learning in the school (mental training) and in the laboratory (working with the hands) is to be avoided and a fruitful relationship between mind and hand, brain and body is to be realized, that is a shift that removes every contradiction and provides some perspectives of an authentic knowledge, too often ignored by the traditional school.

### **2.4 A new system of education and training**

Without recalling the political and pedagogical principles that govern the "work pedagogy" experts in the laws governing the school suggest to reflect on the system of education and training which would replace the current one, so that it provides a fruitful relationship between thought and action, between school and work, through the introduction of laboratory work to complement the theoretical learning.

For decades, when designing a new degree course for teacher training, Lanfranco Rosati advocated a work environment in which a pedagogy addressed to students that would be the future teachers could take place. Experience, including that part which has not been possible to realize and that is likely to be unfinished, suggests that we can no longer continue teaching pedagogy, or rather we cannot teach the teaching profession, from a theoretical point of view nor on the basis of some investigations where the students' participation is foreseen (Rosati, 1983, p. 8).

As far as laboratory is concerned, we do not mean an environment where pedagogy is taught. We are thinking about a technologically equipped environment, where competent support staff work; it would represent for students the ideal condition to answer the tutor's proposals. We must also add that we think about an environment that can translate into practice the meaning of the researches carried out in the university departments (not only those ones connected with education science) and in those interdepartmental centers for the qualitative development of the school, teaching, curriculum and learning methods. In a such a laboratory (already foreseen by scholars as Mencarelli, Laporta, Frabboni, Agazzi and others are) new skills could be planned and forms of cooperation among different kinds of professionals (linguists, historians, psychologists, pedagogues, etc.) working to the same aim could take place.

Some different aspects of culture, suggested by Cassirer and already described in this article, could surely represent the favorite fields of application, where mind and brain, intellectualistic elements and practical and experimental activities, can work synergistically.

### **3. Conclusion**

This part of the article concerns an example of university laboratory.

The main innovations introduced in the education of future teachers in special degree programs are definitely the training and the laboratory, that seem destined to radically change teaching in the perspective of a training system that assures a constant relationship between the two phases of teaching, i.e. theory and practice.

On one hand, the internship itself can be considered as a set of activities through which the student experiences the translation of theoretical knowledge into practice, checks directly his/her skills and realizes their limitations, on the basis of the opportunities offered to him/her. He/she also directs his/her professional capacity. Still inside the school, the laboratory can be understood as a place where knowledge is transmitted before being tasted, independently from the specific disciplines which belongs to (Scaglioso, 2009, p. 625).

On the other hand, the interpretation of pedagogy as a practical science is therefore legitimated, although some researchers, as Delevey is, defines pedagogy and psychology as key moments of education (Delevey, 1992).

In other terms, the laboratory can be considered as an environment where teaching is simulated, projects are prepared, work tools are set up. Here some reflection on training, as well as on the different disciplines, are carried out. The latter, anyway, have to be investigated not only from a theoretical point of view, but also in their relationship with educational action, that is a set of methods and models aiming at an interactive education (Scaglioso, 2009, pp. [.627..]).

The training project allows to compare and produce working hypotheses to realize tools for suitable for analysis and observation.

Laboratory is also a place mandated to give cultural dignity and to carry out practical activities, as well as to check theoretical knowledge, both used by the people

working in the school, connected in a special relationship, taking into consideration the problems arising from each practical activity and the way knowledge is used, handled and processed.

Basically, the laboratory allows an experience of reflection on educational practice, not only able to give birth in the student an awareness of the relationships that exist between practical experience and theoretical education, but also to test the same knowledge theoretically presented.

With the organization of the laboratory activities and training in the Italian school, we have seen a deep and global “change of second type” (the definition is by Watzlawick et coll.), allowing Italy to accept the European directives on the matter as far as teacher training is concerned (Watzlawick et coll., 1994, p. 17).

This change involves those who have in their hands, from now on, the future of Italy, that is teachers, because it is agreed that teaching is not merely a theoretical, so abstract, but also practical matter. Training and laboratory allow practical training ensuring the transition from knowledge to the ability to teach, stressing action rather theory. Also the university teaching change and gets free from self-reference, routine and disciplines to be organized as coordinated and innovative activities, better from the quality point of view (Laneve, 1996, p. 9)

The Degree Course in Primary School Education at the University of Perugia, following the old regulation, provides for students (future teachers) a set of laboratory activities during the third and fourth year of course. During this period, the student can choose three laboratories, one each course year, among the following ones: integration of the student disabled, languages, mathematics, education concerning ludic approaches to learning, body and non-verbal languages education, methodology for the development of critical, creative and complex thinking, education concerning autobiography, media education, methodology and technique of observation, art and drawing, history and geography, environmental education, science education, diversity and cultural integration; about languages, second languages and non-verbal communication. The laboratories are conceived as environments where learning is deepened, researches are carried out, creativity is developed; in particular, a cross-disciplinary educational curriculum is realized in conformity with the training general and specific purposes of the course of studies. This curriculum is designed taking into consideration the education principle, that is to allow the student to acquire or improve specific skills of problematization and other general skills. This problematization aims at a cross-disciplinary mental action, focusing on specific issues that seeks to bring the student to a given position. The student indeed asks him/herself: “How do I think? How do I process information? How do I interpret? How do I gather all my knowledge and my experiences to solve a given problem?” (Massaro, 2005, p. 51).

Starting from a research carried out by Dr. Michela Briganti on the laboratory teaching at the Course of Primary School Education (University of Perugia), it was found that over the years these activities have not been easy to be managed. The high number of students, unsuitable and non-functional spaces, lack of equipment and materials and limited funds to pay experts made this course difficult to be carried out. The research was made possible thanks to the collaboration of teachers responsible for laboratories and tutors who have allowed the administration of a questionnaire for students at the end of thirty hours of planned activities, although often this initiative was interpreted by the teacher as an act of intrusiveness and interference aiming at determining a qualitative assessment of their teaching.

The intent of the research was not to express an opinion on methodologies and approaches, much less to have a protocol to be compulsorily adopted in the organization and planning of these activities. The objective of this research was to

investigate and collect data, reported by the student in an anonymous form with respect to the laboratory result, related to the context and the organization of the same laboratory, to interpret a training course in a graduate program to certify teaching professionalism and to assess the level of quality offered, in order to improve it and therefore to ensure an optimal training.

Taking into consideration the number of students and the use of it in investigating the field of human sciences, the questionnaire was chosen as the best research tool. It was made up of fourteen questions based on the following indicators: student's characteristics, context and organization of the laboratory. More precisely, a questionnaire made up closed format questions that include multiple choice answers and some open format questions was adopted. The multiple choice questions foresee the following items: "Strongly disagree", "Disagree somewhat", "Uncertain", "Agree somewhat", "Strongly agree", derived from the Likert-type scale, the most widely used approach to scaling responses in survey research. Answers are situated on a rating scale, that is a range which captures the intensity of the participants' feelings for a given item, while the results of analysis of multiple items reveals a pattern that has scaled identified properties.

The open format questions represented the first three parts of the questionnaire, while the open format ones constituted the last part of it. The open format questions asked students to express their opinion or suggestions and comments on how the laboratory activities were carried out. The decision of putting open format questions in the last part of the questionnaire was motivated by the need to find information suitable to understand not only the students' proposals, but also their needs related to training.

Great attention has been given to the formulation of questions as well as to the placement of the question within the questionnaire. Each aspect to be investigated included more than one question in order to check the consistency and stability of the answers. We started from general questions to arrive to more specific ones, so as to create conditions favorable for the student's answers, avoiding as possible the lack of answer by the respondent because of his/her discomfort. A pre-test of the questionnaire was firstly administrated to a restricted sample of one hundred students with the same requirements as previously described. This has served to understand the functionality of the questionnaire, calibrate the language of the questions and check understanding. This phase allowed to adjust the questionnaire, avoiding dispersions, and obtain suitable data to be analyzed and processed with respect to the research purpose. After a careful data processing significant results were achieved. As far as what is relevant to this paper, the following considerations emerged: the need to make changes to the organizational structure and design of the laboratory in order to organize courses that stress action instead theory.

Since the degree course in hand qualifies students to teach at school, the exigency of training relates to the necessity of working in a classroom and to avoid the teacher burnout despite a good theoretical preparation. In the laboratory, the student will be able to practice teaching in a simulated and partially protected environment, under the guidance of an experienced professional, through an articulated curriculum specially designed for the teacher professionalism. Here knowledge is constructed by observation and participation in the teaching activities as they are shared with the other future teachers (Nigris, 2007, p. 34).

This privileged space for cooperative learning can be considered as a form of collaborative work and mutual aid aiming at realizing a cognitive and affective scaffolding, while more experienced students coach the less experienced ones. The laboratory therefore becomes the place where theory and practice interact in a

dialectical relationship allowing students to get the right skills for a teacher professional (Dalle Fratte, 2005, p. 95). A curriculum where theory and practice merge is not the only method to get a suitable professionalism, but can contribute in realizing the “ten competencies necessary to teach” on the Perrenoud’s opinion.

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