

# Transition in Education. Internship and Vocational Guidance Counselling for Educators

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## Abstract

This paper presents a model of internship and vocational guidance counselling in the field of educational practices. The contribution intends to suggest the organization of an experience performed by the students as educators in their experience of internship, according to a framework that focuses on the educational professions and is based on reflectivity and transformative learning. The Introduction presents the theoretical and methodological framework of 'reflective and transformative epistemology of professional practices in education'. Chapter 2 focuses on the role of educators training for supporting professional epistemologies, considering workshops and internships as meaningful and transformative education experiences. Chapter 3 focuses on vocational guidance for educators, considering the practice of guidance for internship in the field of educational practice. Internship as transformative reflective experience is an experience of vocational guidance to support transition in education for educators because it contributes to support the development of attitudes and tensions of self-education.

## Keywords:

Educational professionalism

Reflective practices

Transformative learning

## 1 Introduction

Inspired by the principles of complexity, incompleteness, interpretation and emancipation, educational professions cannot just be limited in their being applicable and dogmatic. Nowadays, educators have to be able to integrate several rational forms, in order to, on one hand, achieve training activities, acquire, create and use in-situation skills, and, on the other hand, to identify, to observe and to apply action guidelines and educational intentions that have to be constantly and critically reviewed and whose assumptions and perspectives have to be endlessly shared and negotiated (see Cambi, 2003).

Considering reflection as a professional *habitus*, according to a perspective of "reflective education" (Perillo, 2010), in this paper we refer to a theoretical and methodological framework on the basis of different points of references: Dewey's "theory of inquiry" (Dewey, 1933, 1938); Schön's "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1992); Mezirow's "transformative learning" theory (Mezirow, 1991, 1997; Mezirow *et al.*, 1990; Mezirow, Taylor & Associates, 2009; Mezirow, Taylor, Eds., 2011); Wenger's "Community of Practice" (Wenger, 1998). These perspectives represent an epistemological background that can be defined as "reflective and transformative epistemology of professional practices in education." (Perillo, 2012a)

If every educational action is also a social action that is involved in a system of standards, meanings and cultural traditions where formation and transformation educational action give a contribution, then the educational professional – meaning a "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983) – is able to practice forms of emancipating rationality that gives the professional the opportunity to act as a transformation and changing producer. On the basis of this rationality, there is the request, by the critique, to give the chance to create strong educational actions as they are based on the awareness of theoretical and cultural assumptions of those actions, of the involving implications and consequences.

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The analysis of the reflectivity as a *topos* of critical education begins from Dewey's philosophy. This is so because the "reflective thought" (Dewey, 1933) is considered as enabling to rule and control the use of thought. The ability to manage in a reflective way this process, in its constant and complex development all along, is innate in that particular form of knowledge based on meta-cognition ability (see Ausubel, 1968; Cornoldi, 1995; De Bono, 1992; Flavell, 1976, 1979; Ianes, 1996). According to our hypothesis, meta-cognitive competence is a fundamental element to reach the higher level of reflectivity (or reflective mode of thinking) to support "professional effectiveness" (Argyris, Schön, 1974) of educators, considering education as reflective practice. The intent is to provide high valorization to critical-reflective thought as a mechanism that allows the subject to value, in educational experience and in the contexts of "transformative learning" (Cranton, 1994, 1996, 1997; Mezirow, 1991) symbolizing and interpretation modes for his own educational experience which is biologically-socially-and-culturally constructed and deconstructed (see Frauenfelder, 1983). Accordingly, transformative learning is the basic presupposition in order to provide emancipative learning processes that enable doubting and questioning of the theories upon which the knowledge structures itself, experiencing the value of interpretative processes managed through reflectivity. From this point, the need, for educators, to use reflectivity as an essential and always constitutive element of their professional practice (see Striano, 2001).

The model of "reflective rationality" (Schön, 1983) is based on Dewey's theory of inquiry. When Schön expresses the concept of reflective rationality he wants to underline the necessity, for the professional, to practice the acquired technical competence as a reflective meta-competence. While, according to the Technical Rationality, theory and praxis can be divided, these, on the contrary and according to Reflective Rationality theory, are related so that knowledge and action are linked in a "transactional" (Dewey, Bentley, 1949) way. Consequently, knowledge is always constructed while action is in progress, and it is possible to find "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 1967) that determines and guides the professional practices while action is taking place: "implicit" and "silent" dimension inherited practices, implied values, and prejudgments, is a crucial part of scientific knowledge.

Adopting a reflective epistemology of the practice the professional reflects not only upon the acquired elements of knowledge and on how that it was possible to build them, but also upon the knowledge structure developed during the practical moment. While acting in their professional practice, educators are involved in never-ending learning processes. This is the point where it is possible to find how Merizow's perspective of the transformative learning becomes important.

In developing a theory of adult learning which starts from constructivist principles Merizow recalls Habermas (1968) who distinguishes the instructive learning from the communicative one putting the emancipatory learning in such a wider area that involves practical learning. The transformative theory attempts to explain adult learning and to establish the processes by which the "meaning schemes" (attitudes or specific convictions) and "meaning perspectives" (the various sets of the meaning schemes) we employ to observe and to interpret our experience are modified or transformed. Mezirow tries to explain the concept of reflection according to its own ability to change or transform both the meaning schemes and the meaning perspectives, pointing to processes of transformation of the meaning perspectives through forms of critical-reflective thought.

Referring to adult learning, always as interpretation of the experience, the transformative learning theory, from Dewey's transactional and experiential theory, is fit to a valid integration with Schön's model of the epistemology of professional practice. According to Mezirow, learning is a chance to find new meanings produced by the changing of perspectives. He identifies three different kinds of meaning perspectives: 1) epistemic perspectives (knowledge); 2) psychological perspectives (specific emotional states); 3) sociolinguistic perspectives (linguistic and interpretative schemes).

Epistemic perspectives relate to the single subject's images, theories and representations concerning the knowledge and the process through which knowledge is generated. Psychological perspectives arise from the meaning schemes inducing to the perception of oneself in a specific context or in relation to a task: psychological perspective can produce specific emotional states when the subject experiences the inability to overcome specific meaning patterns, developed with the passing of time, and facing a situation that is incongruous with those schemes. Sociolinguistic perspectives arise from sociolinguistic premises, related to the processes of socialization.

The application of a reflective rationality allows to take part to the reinforcement of awareness levels coming out from action. Most of the professionals in education, in fact, are led to reflect upon their actions, to question their standards of judgment and of their procedures, to plan the problems to be solved, to value the achieved results. It implies also a reflection upon the implicit knowledge related to action and somehow producing and influencing action effectiveness. Reflection upon the sense of an action emphasizes how mostly

the expert's practice spontaneous behavior is not connected to previous cognitive operations, but directly develops itself throughout action. Here because the educational professional as adult learner (see Billet, 2001; Knowles, Holton III, Swanson, 1973) should be able to play the researcher's role and should learn to be *inside* the experience (see Mortari, 2003) while he is criticizing it: education routines represent the permanent field of reference where rational reflectivity may be practiced.

## 2 To develop educational professionalism

### 2.1 Reflective practices in education

Reflection upon professional epistemologies (see de Mennato, 2003, 2006) assumes an education value as it makes educational professionals be aware of the epistemic conditions of the achieved practices. We consider 'epistemology' as the way the single subject or a collective one (for example a team teaching) constructs, negotiates and uses knowledge and 'epistemic position' is the whole set of perspectives assumed either by the single or by the collective subjects in cognitive processes, and the way knowledge is represented by them, built and rebuilt and, consequently negotiated and transferred into the real situations as a practical utilization. So, it is inevitable that epistemic positions will change, according to the construction and deconstruction that either the single or the collective subjects are achieving for the first time.

Professional epistemologies focus on the processes of construction, transfer and the use of the knowledge which is typical of the professionals in the field of their working practices, considering, in particular, the rule and the function that cognitive processes have in the professional action: inquiries about professional epistemologies concentrate, therefore, on individual and collective learning processes realized in job and daily-life contexts, and on the silent, implicit and practical kinds of knowledge that characterize *routine* and professional practices which professionals are not always aware of (see Striano, Melacarne, 2005).

The educator who assumes a kind of reflective educational intention as a result of a reflective *forma mentis*, makes reflectivity as a real pattern for educational action and a professional skill that could be functional to educational planning: he uses reflectivity as a device useful for the investigation of the difficulties of the education action, underlining epistemic structure and developing its possible implications according to a logic of rational oriented continuity.

Current curriculums organization adopted for the different and articulated degree courses of Education in Italy, provide the right balance of: a) general kinds of knowledge, mainly of theoretical nature (philosophy, art, history, human sciences), requiring a high level of reflection; b) technical kinds of knowledge (as psycho-pedagogical, socio-pedagogical, relational, organizational, computer and communication knowledge, etc.), requiring an intense level of reflectivity, in sense of critical back-action, aiming to re-planning the general kinds of knowledge (thanks to metacognitive kinds of knowledge that constantly have to be stimulated); c) workshops and internships, experiences of sharing simulated and real education activities.

The general kinds of knowledge are functional to the organization of a reflective and interpretative *forma mentis*, able to organize and evaluate the education processes in action, and also to culturally back-acting on them, during and after the action, so that they could constantly be re-orientated, refined, and corrected. The technical kinds of knowledge, referable to the several specializations of the kinds of knowledge about education, allow realizing reflective practices that give the opportunity to express the reflective and interpretative point of view. Workshops and internships are a sort of reflective link between theory and practice: workshops, besides being set as an *atelier* whose aim is the simple acquisition of techniques and practices, stand out also as settings in which to practice the critical hermeneutic inquiry of the kinds of knowledge and techniques. Internships, more than being an opportunity to apply the theories and the techniques learnt in the courses, may be considered as proper meaningful and transformative education experiences, introducing reflective practices aimed to constantly stimulate diagnostic, critic and interpretative skills that are fundamental for educational professionals.

In *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* Schön (1987) suggests a revision of the education patterns which the academic curricula refer to and does it in order to plan curricula that could allow to "teach and learn" the professional knowledge as empirically situated, pointing on the use of the kinds of knowledge arising from action and turning, functionally, into action. This model, giving value to not-systemic forms of knowledge, emerging from practical contexts, outlines the classical epistemology of professional education that points on forms of organized and systematic kinds of knowledge empirically transferable in practical contexts through simple application procedures, of an essentially technical nature.

The alternative is education to a reflective rationality through a professional education. Schön talks, intentionally, about professional education and not about professional training, giving prominence to how education for the professional practice should not be defined as a job training but as an heuristic process inspired by the Dewey's inquiry calibrated on two mechanisms, "reflection-on-action" and "reflection-in-action", controlled by a meta-reflective system: "reflection on reflection-in-action". It is a question of foreseeing experiences of reflection while action takes place that could consent the practitioner to learn and/or increase the skills of critical management of the contents of one's own learning, to acquire competences in facing difficult circumstances characterized by uniqueness, indeterminacy, confusion and contentiousness. The "artistry" matured through the action-thinking transaction into the communities of practitioners as a built-in-action learning will be the result of that "reflective conversation" with the situation: through specific "moves" – able to provoke the situation-problem – and "back talks" – that lead to recognize new data sprung from the action and the maturity of a system of judgments –, will allow the professional involved in this process to learn to manage his own process of construction of the knowledge and to interpret it in a critical way.

The perspective to plan some "Reflective Practicum" presumes the overcoming of the traditional conception that privileges information and expertise, intending professional knowledge as an application of science to practical problems, teaching as transmission of information and learning as a process of receiving and saving information, so that there is no place for research during practice, which means reflection on reflection-in-action. Moving towards the perspective of a reflective epistemology of the professionals impose the consideration of the expertise as the whole set of competences that needs to master complex thought, to develop and to practice in training and learning contexts as "communities of practice." (Wenger, 1998; see also Fabbri 2007; Lave, Wenger, 1991)

## 2.2 Internship as transformative experience

Internship in education may be considered as proper meaningful and transformative education experience (Perillo, 2012b). The experience I am presenting in this report is promoted by the degree course in Education at Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples, suggesting a view of internship experience in educational field as a reflective experience for students in education. The model of internship as transformative reflective experience is realized according to a specific perspective of Action-Research (A-R) in education (see Argyris, Schön, 1978, 1989; Coenen, 2002; Colucci, Colombo, Montali, 2008; Heron, 1996; Kaneklin, Piccardo, Scaratti, 2010; Lewin, 2005; Orefice, 2006; Reason; Bradbury, 2008; Torbert, 1976; White, 1991).

As a knowledge deepened in the action, A-R is a transformative intervention in organizational contexts with building intents of the knowledge. A-R is a research methodology, developing as a changing process and, for this reason, is a reflective practice of transformation where and through which participants reflect together upon knowledge, patterns and adopted meaning perspectives related to interpretation of reality; participants together change their *forma mentis*.

People attending the internship project were: students attending the third year of the degree course in Education; academic tutors for internship activities (corresponding to the researcher); tutors of the structures where training activities are practiced (contexts of educational work).

The project wants to stimulate transformative learning experiences for the improvement of the processes of reflective education and self-education in communities of educational practice represented by the contexts in which the students developed their internship activities. In particular, the research-intervention aim is to: explore the representations of the educational profession elaborated by the students who were coming to experiment in situation all the knowledge acquired through the first step of the educational training (in the two year time of the degree course in Education); develop a knowledge of the reflective and transformative epistemology of the professional practices in education and the reflective mechanisms to be employed in internship activities, both as instruments of organization and management of the experience and as a possible working procedure for the future performing role as a professional educator; stimulate and encourage reflective experiences of professional apprenticeship using the reflective and transformative methods; promote the identification of the interpretative categories of the professional practice of educators supported by the reflective experience on the internship; activate processes of negotiation of meaning for each category; stimulate the de-construction and the re-construction of meaning perspectives and meaning schemes employed for the meaning of each categories; check the possible change in meaning schemes and meaning perspectives and in the nature of the eventual transformative learning.

Proclaiming the situational educational-action theoretical model, the research intends, on one hand, to verify the efficacy of the reflective method as educational device for the production of transformative learning in professional practice communities and, on the other hand, to develop possible critical points, inherent in the adopted model and possibly opening to new fields of investigation.

The training-professional approach is different from the traditional technical training, according to the following characteristics: education is organized around learning through experience: in this way the student begins to do what he wants to learn before knowing what it deals with; the activity must be learnt by the student in a collective surrounding that could represent the world of practice: in this virtual context of practice the student experiences at low risk and can check the progress of his work; practice has to develop in the presence of a trainer who is not meant as a teacher: the tutorial function avails itself mostly of the dialogue, that allow to move from a state of mystery to a state of approximate meaning and becomes concrete in practices of learning training.

The project involves the use of narrative and dialogue tools (see Bruner, 1986, 1990; Demetrio, 1995, 2007; Fabbri, 2011; Formenti, 1998; Freire, 1970; Smorti, 1994; Striano, 2006; Striano, Melacarne, 2005) in order to promote the practice of reflectivity and the construction of transformative kinds of learning: a questionnaire; a notebook for reflections; a card for reflections; a card for personal impressions; focus group; a card for transformative reflections.

The researcher elaborated all these tools in order to investigate the dimensions and the dynamics of the process for the construction of the educator professional identity, starting from the internship experience. The tools are heuristic devices and, through the mechanism of a narrated and co-constructed reflection, they make the researcher be able to detect information and to interpret the investigation object, and, therefore, to re-construct and to understand knowledge learning and constructing processes involved in the students' thinking and action, in order to promote transformative learning processes.

The annual experience articulates into three phases. At the beginning, the researcher's rule is to guide and make the reflective process be easier. Then, the researcher places inside a reflective dialogue, in order to construct a transformative knowledge that could allow to find and to redefine meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. During the reflective-explorative workshop, using of the questionnaire, the researcher proceeds to explore the representations of the educational profession, before the introduction of the adopted epistemological perspective and of the reflective devices employed in internship activities.

The second stage corresponds to the development of the apprenticeship experience inside the structure. Every student can observe and take part to the activities achieved here, with the support of the tutor and of the reflective instruments offered by the researcher-tutor. During and after internship activities the participant students and the tutor-researcher meet and reflect on the possible meanings of the experienced activity through the reflective dialogue in focus groups.

During the reflective-transformative workshop it is possible to: find the personal interpretative categories of the professional practice of an educator; negotiate the meanings for each of the identified categories; de-construct and re-construct the meaning perspectives and the meaning schemes used in order to give meaning to each of the categories; verify the possible transformation of meaning perspectives and meaning schemes.

The units of analysis of the meaning cores used in order to direct the reflection can be the following: desires, motivations and expectations ("Why did I prefer this profession?"); emotions ("Which emotions did I live more intensely?" "Why do I consider them so important?"); epistemic mastery ("How much did I know before this experience?" "Was the experience useful for me in order to face the different situations?"); performed actions ("Which epistemic position did I assume in order to decide how to act?" "What kind of action did I perform?"); contextual obligations ("Which obstacles and facilities depending on the specific nature of the structure did I meet?" "How did I use facilities? How did I face obstacles?"); role played by the tutor ("Which role did the tutor play during the internship experience?" "How meaningful was his presence?" "Why?"); image of the profession ("Which categories do I employ in order to represent the image of the profession of an educator to myself?"); other (aspects regarded as important but not taken into consideration in the previous reflection units).

Education locates itself in a place of construction, negotiation, deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge, deriving from an interactive relationship between thinking and action. After the study of the nature of the transformations and of how the participant students change their meaning perspectives in relation to the construction of a professional identity and in the light of the actions performed in the experience, we proceed to the analysis of the three dimensions of the meaning perspectives. Thus, our analysis of the change and the transformations relating to the single images of the educator rising from each one of the three meaning perspectives suggested by Mezirow: epistemic, psychological and socio-linguistic.

Assuming that the processes of meaning construction may be forced and conditioned by the individual meanings perspectives and that narrations of specific live experiences may reveal changes in the participant in terms of transformation of each of the three perspectives, emerging from valuation tables, recording changes forms, it is possible to evaluate the nature and the intensity of the performed participants transformative learning processes. As it is reasonable to imagine, only 19% of students claim to have changed the meaning perspective. The purpose of the research and training was not, in fact, to change the meaning perspectives, but to stimulate the disposition to use reflection on reflection in action. In this sense, the internship experience is an experience of vocational guidance for educators (see Perillo, 2015).

### 3 Vocational guidance for educators

Guidance is linked to the process of the education of mankind, in that it represents a form of 're-segmentation' aimed at redesigning the trans-formative processes of human growth (see Corbi, 2002; Cunti, 2008; Frauenfelder, Sarracino, 2002; Loiodice, 1998, 2004). We consider vocational guidance for educators in the perspective of specific human development, to be understood in terms of the 'duration' of a lifetime that is developed in the dialectic between continuity and discontinuity (see Morin, 1977).

The student in education, as an individual in evolution, in "transaction", in growth, is an individual in education and as such, he needs to direct and re-direct himself in the complexities of the world of work and the general conditions of life (see Schettini, 2005).

The adult is an individual living in transition, and transition represents the spaces through which evolution and transformation are achieved. These are the spaces of action for adult educational vocational guidance which is developed in the process of adulthood (see Alberici, 2006, 2008).

The transition education-employment, which specifically characterises the vocational guidance sphere, represents one of the most important spaces in educational action in the life of an individual, the dynamics which characterise this passage may not be interpreted following unique and exclusive approaches, in themselves functional, which are aimed at evaluating the rapport between costs and benefits, or determinable and structural, aimed at evaluating the process based on personal and contextual variables.

From the adult educative point of view (see Demetrio, 1997), attention should be given to the process itself, to the continual dynamics of discontinuity which characterise these phases of passage, to the dynamics of the breach between personal and professional identity and therefore the world of daily life, in which the individual experiments continuity and discontinuity, rational and emotional, between private life and working life, between personal aspirations and actual possibilities of professional development.

Guidance directly concerns the instance of autonomy, an instance which educational reflection sides with in a teleological sense, promoting same as an objective of educational action and contemporarily, deeming it a precondition for the realisation of individual and social emancipation.

Educational practice does not pursue autonomy as a function of an abstract principle of freedom, but fuels those dimensions of mankind to become those which create the precise figure of a responsibility which is expressed in the capability of choice. Autonomy as freedom of choice, which signifies preventive power of choice, acting therefore as a beginning and end of the educational process; it follows that guidance as an educational practice acts on those dimensions which allow for objective autonomy, the tenet of the guidance process *educate to choose* is firstly, *educate to plan*.

Autonomy requires the individual to have the capability of learning to learn which is the result of "deuterolearning" (Bateson, 1972) representing the generative sources of the perspectives and models of organization of experience. Autonomy, therefore, manifests as capability of guidance and choice in a field of determining possibilities and that it is connected to knowledge of the whole conditions in which each individual lives and acts.

An intervention, a project, a policy, in general the practice of vocational guidance, requires that the individual is able to exercise metacognition. In fact, when the adult is induced to seek the sense of what is and what will be in the rapport with others and in different contexts, it is not only the metacognitive logic which activates the interpretative procedure of self and the world, it is thanks to reflection that an adult may develop autonomy, as reflecting takes note of the limits of knowledge creating an educative space to construct and re-construct possibilities of opening to the new (see Brookfield, 1985, 1987, 1995; Quaglino, 2004).

The passage of metacognitive knowledge to reflective management of ones own constructive processes of knowledge may come about during the structuring of the processes of vocational guidance managed as experience of "meaningful learning." (Ausubel, 1968)

For this reason it is possible to define vocational guidance as a practice of education for education work, work as a project, a form of learning, as an identity dimension, representing an educative space which needs the rational action of guidance in view of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is an instrument and, at the same time, a path and the essential condition of activities and paths of guidance as educational practice aimed at supporting the development of capabilities of “educational self-challenge” (Perillo, 2013) of a young adult preparing for this important phase of transition between degree in education and work in education.

The practice of guidance for educator’s internship becomes an educative practice when it contributes to support the development of attitudes and tensions of self-education of educators as adult learner. Deweyan pragmatic teaching tells us that the departure point in the process of adult guidance is representative of experience. For this reason, the programmes of guidance in internship should take into account the dynamics of ways of transformation adopted by the apprentice in education to think of themselves and the educational work field.

Considering the project of the professional life of apprentice educators in terms of educational self-challenge, it is possible to propose, as we did, practices of guidance which focus on the processes of awareness of the learner. If the need to understand the experiences is the most peculiar characteristic of the human being, vocational guidance for educators in internship must answer to this need guiding adult learning towards the management of change, stimulating the availability of the individual to transformation and to the metabolism of change through reflection on experience.

Transformative learning is difficultly achievable and the objective which moves the proposition of reflective internship for vocational guidance is not that which guarantees the learner with the possibility of the transformation of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives, rather than supporting the processes of reflection on experiences aimed at experimenting the methods of transformation in the transition from education to work, redefining himself and his own projects in working life in terms of educational self-challenge. In this sense, internship as transformative reflective experience is an experience of vocational guidance to support transition in education for educators.

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