

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROFESSIONAL FIGURE OF THE EDUCATOR. ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE ITALY CASE

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Abstract

This contribution aims to investigate the possible scenarios of the professional figure of the educator in Italy, in the aftermath of the promulgation of the 205/2017 law which establishes duties and safeguards from a jurisprudential point of view. The educational practice, therefore, is a fact that is increasingly an educational problem that becomes increasingly responsible in a liquid society, governed by nebulous interests and passions, and devastated by the pandemic caused by Covid-19. The contribution of pedagogical research, in this sense, starting from the premises of a good educator, tries to lay the foundations for a new educational challenge.

Keywords: educator, relationship, practice, work, institution

1. The educator: a professional figure

The acquisition of the qualification of professional educator has been one of the issues that for years has affected pedagogical research, with particular reference to the recognition of another figure, but at the same time complementary, to those institutionally recognized within the main educational contexts, such as the family and the school, and that in 2018 experienced a somewhat epochal turning point. Educators and pedagogists by law, this is the meaning of a regulation that sets the stakes of a professionalism to be built and recognized, in an often hazy and cumbersome legislative framework, starting from the idea of a socio-pedagogical and pedagogical professional educator who, as indicated in paragraph 594 of Law 205/2017, operates in the educational, educational and pedagogical field, in relation to any activity carried out in a formal, non-formal and informal way, in the various phases of life, in a perspective of personal and social growth¹.

The relational question, for some time, has been at the center of research and analysis, and finds its priority conditions in an affectionate interpersonal communication that, as such, is nourished by lovingness, benevolence, tenderness. As Bruno Rossi writes, "in addition to cognitive acts, every educational practice is always pervasive by feeling, mobilizes desires and expectations, tensions and fears, involves mutual influences. Educational action, rather than fulfilling techniques and gestures, the implementation of standardized rules and procedures,

¹ Law 205 of the 27-12-2017, available at <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/12/29/17G00222/sg>.

feeds on attitudes and conduct, feelings and atmospheres, relational quality and affectively substantial behaviors"². It is clear that there has been, over time, a progressive reassessment of emotional competence in the educational professions after a long period in which the interweaving of affectivity and scientificity has been rejected or at least strongly suspected and, therefore, emotions and feelings have been silenced by repressing or hiding or ousting them or denying them in the name of an aseptic professionalism. The main requirements of professionalism have been identified above all-in emotional anesthesia and in the almost total detachment from the situation, objectivity and impersonality, pragmatism and operation, specialism and the technologization of educational intervention.

In pedagogical and didactic literature, as well as in educational practice, the conviction is widely shared that the construction and conduct of a *positive relationality* depends somewhat, as well as on a solid cultural and didactic competence as well as on a refined pedagogical intelligence and awareness and on a strong professional motivation, on the personality of the educator, on his commitment to reason with the heart and to work with the soul, on his ability to give voice to the feeling of one's own and others and to witness in a continuous way a positive sentimentality, an awareness and an emotional control. The daily educational action, due to its complexity, uniqueness and unpredictability that characterize it, is not reducible to a purely procedural activity. It therefore cannot be aseptically regulated, presided over by strict technical requirements and extraneous detailed instructions, nor it can be governed by systemised knowledge, by an applicable and controllable specialist know-how without considering the subject, the context, the situation, the concrete social, cultural and material conditions in which it takes place. The educational event, therefore, cannot be thought of and managed according to the model of technical rationality, as there is no possibility to interpret it in a linear way and, consequently, it will be impossible to predict or accurately foreshadow the results. Like other professional practices, educational work requires an artistic exercise of the profession and, therefore, in addition to skills requires intuition, inventiveness and improvisation.

The sense of a solitary action isolated from the rest of the context represents another criticality that pedagogy, in particular in recent years, has strongly undermined, bringing back to the foreground the theme that also sees other skills and knowledge, and therefore other professionals, as protagonists. Consequently, it should be remembered that it is essential to consider that, as far as possible, it is possible to create a multidisciplinary interview in order to build cooperatively valid cognitive and practical synergies. The empathic question, therefore, which returns significantly in the relationship between educator and educating and outlines an exclusive professional ability for the professional figure of the educator. In this regard, Guardini writes: "when I speak to a human person, I look with my own eyes for his, I make contact with the expression of his face, so as to warn that my word reaches the face before me. And through the face to what is expressed in it: to the spirit that thinks; to the heart he feels; to the person who exists there. Reading on his face, I grasp the repercussions that are expressed in it: I grab

² B. Rossi, *Il lavoro educativo. Dieci virtù professionali*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2014, p. 7.

himself³. The quality of education, therefore, is largely guaranteed by a relationship rich in credibility and authority, participation and care, affective responsibility and affective intelligence. When the educational profession deteriorates into misconduct, the encounter between consciences does not occur, the relationship between humanity weakens, motivational dynamics become impoverished, interpersonal distances increase, affective involvement dilutes, mutual esteem and appreciation as well as trust and hope fail. The educator, from the tendency and prerogatives indicated above, is increasingly in difficulty, enclosed in that dimension that makes him imperfect in the practice of sense and complexity of educational work.

2. The imperfect educator: difficulties and prospects in educational practice

A full-bodied jurisprudential literature has, in recent decades, clearly defined the meaning and regulatory complexity of a professional figure, that of the educator, who, like a real specialist today more than in the past, sees the light of day also on a practical level. A fundamental aspect in the definition of the good educator is represented by the evaluation of the context of analysis, which cannot ignore the centrality of the person and the many facets that the pedagogical sciences have highlighted over the years. Relationship facilitator, the educator not only works on educating by accepting emotions and feelings, but proceeds according to a path that recalls a new welfare *system*, declined no longer in a *welfare-restorative key* of social-educational and social-welfare action, but rather according to the promotion of the *person*, support to the person, which guides the educational process of building *citizenship* of social inclusion, continuing on that long and laborious path inaugurated by Law 328 of 2000⁴.

The relational dimension, therefore, the real protagonist of the pedagogical path becomes central in the post-modern redefinition of the figure of the educator, also in the light of the bill – "Discipline of the professions of educator and pedagogist" - which since October 2014 has been completed in December 2017, and implementation since January 2018; identity and professionalism at the base of a path built and consisting of a plurality of contexts that interact with each other and create dynamics, and that characterizes the action of the educator that does not end in the relationship with the individual educating but above all on the contexts in which he experiences his life. "The goal of education attentive to the world, human events and social changes is to grasp and transform the meanings of human existence, within the multiple bonds that intertwine people's lives"⁵.

Understanding the complexity of *educational work*, trying to write the characteristic aspects of the professional figure, are the basis of the new text of the law and represent what in pedagogy is read as an exercise of *responsibility*; it is necessary, therefore, "to have the person as an

³ R. Guardini, *Virtù. Temi e prospettive della vita morale*, tr. it., Brescia, Morcelliana, 2001, p. 37.

⁴ Cfr. G. Elia, *Tra scuola ed extrascuola. La figura specialistica dell'educatore professionale*, in G. Cian, D. Orlando (Eds.), *Studium Educationis – Disabilità integrazione e pedagogia speciale*, Padova, CEDAM, 2004, vol. n. 3, pp. 568-569.

⁵ M. Santerini, *L'educatore tra professionalità pedagogica e responsabilità sociale*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1998, p. 36.

established and pursued value, according to the incontrovertible form of *the singularity* that emphasizes the identity of *the self* and warns that the same self lasts over time, shows its self in continuity"⁶. Rediscovering the pedagogical meaning of the person, as a representation of human reality in all its complexity, represents the first element that an educator must take charge of; "the person is *always identical* and lives this condition in the multiplicity of situations, without being able to speak of a *more or less personal*. This is rooted in the right of man to be recognized and validated in his identity before all *the statuses* and roles that can be accepted existentially. It's a right that precedes and feeds in continuity, towards the unique and unitary man, not fragmented and divided"⁷.

The educator, however, fits into a much broader framework, in a plurality of dimensions, acts, disorderly relationships, which need a hermeneutic and contextualized reading; "a figure – using a term dear to Zygmunt Bauman to define contemporary society – *despite* attempts to think of it and describe it as *solid*, but not for this reason an *ethereal figure*"⁸. A change of course that opposes the ancient figure of an educational operator who tends to normalize with authoritarian methods, an educator able to move on the same track but using non-authoritarian methods, to finally reach an operator who is able not only to question authoritarian methods but also the very concept of normalization.

Understanding the importance of the relationship becomes essential in the construction of the figure of the professional educator, that way through which educational intentions become work; in fact, where "there is no interpersonal relationship there is no possibility to follow up educational intentions and, consequently, aspire to achieve changes"⁹. It is, in essence, an *asymmetric relationship*, where the players at stake can never be equated in the dialectical and formative relationship; a picture that draws an educator committed to correcting a defect of those in front of him, sometimes even spontaneously, but that can be read according to that principle for which there will be – it's better to say there may be – a dependence of the smallest on the largest, or the weakest on the strongest. Going beyond this first conception, however, produces that awareness according to which both people involved are bearers of personal projects, specific needs and different capacities, and need there to be a need to identify aspects of similarity and sharing, the indispensable need to favor an empathic proximity and a relationship declined through a partial emotional rapprochement. "When it comes to the educational relationship, the usual, but not appropriate, reference is to some consolidated relational images, in particular, the relationship between parents and children and between teachers and students. The spontaneous and frequent reference is therefore to a relationship in which a person must transmit something to another person: models of life, thought,

⁶ G. Flores d'Arcais, *Le ragioni di una teoria personalistica dell'educazione*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1987, p. 112.

⁷ A. Chionna, *Pedagogia della dignità umana. Educazione e percorsi di rispetto*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2007, p. 42.

⁸ S. Tramma, *L'educatore imperfetto. Senso e complessità del lavoro educativo*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, p. 11.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 89.

behavior"¹⁰.

Emotional involvement and prejudice are two of the most significant aspects in the evaluation of complex educational work, where terms become constraints of action that move from accusations and characteristics that should never inhabit the figure of the professional educator. Prejudice, in fact, accuses the person or group that owns and exercises it, undermining the linguistic vocabulary of the educational operator who feeds, otherwise, on neutrality, non-judgmental position and acceptance, inducing the educator to path of stigmatization and labeling that have nothing to do with the complex and tortuous work of the good educator. Useful, in this regard, is the contribution of the psychotherapeutic field, where psychological science states that the two opposing poles of the different ways of approaching the patient are placed on the one hand "the psychiatrist detached and confident, who does not let himself be involved, who is never openly rude, but not even kind or welcoming, if not by mistake, on the other the psychoanalyst, who immerses himself to the end in the relationship with the other and explores his feelings and his own experience in the belief that all this is an integral part of his clinical activity"¹¹.

The certain fact, from which the study of *pedagogy* moves, is characterized by an educational relationship that is able to include within it also an affective dimension, which involves thought and feelings, trying to overcome and integrate the mental-affected dualism; but this dimension must not and cannot be considered an obstacle to be eliminated, a compromising element of reflection and educational action. However, frequent reminders of the need for a distance from a person to be educated, the meticulous prescription of the rules of negotiation, show the caution and difference with which one often looks at the educational relationship. Why there is so much mistrust of the emotional dimension is one of the themes that holds the present contribution and can be explained according to a dense scientific production that sees both pedagogy and psychology and sociology engaged in an interdisciplinary path.

"The reasons are only partially attributable to the appropriate need to avoid an excessive, dysfunctional, unproductive and unbearable involvement of the operator in the educational process, in favor of a dosed, functional, productive and bearable involvement"¹². Imagine the lack of emotional involvement, for example, of the doctor towards a patient, rather than a social worker engaged in a one-off social secretariat with a user, it can also be theorized and practiced as functional to the relationship. Moreover, the lack of involvement could be traced back to the reduced frequency of meetings between operator and user, the limited time for each meeting, the *configuration of the relational setting*, the need to be not involved to be objective, effective, democratic. Recover the values of one's own, and those of others, in order to recover the social perspective, what Gallino defines "such as the conception of a state, a condition, a way of being oneself or others, or of oneself in relation to other subjects or objects.

¹⁰ G. Macario, *L'arte di educarsi*, Roma, Meltemi, 1999, p. 74.

¹¹ A. Civita, *Introduzione alla storia e all'epistemologia della psichiatria*, Milano, Guerini, 1996, p. 21

¹² S. Bolognini, *L'empatia psicoanalitica*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2002, p. 46.

In this second area, values represent the criteria on the basis of which the correctness, adequacy, effectiveness, dignity of own or other actions are assessed"¹³.

3. Towards a new challenge

The complexity of today's world, together with today's global society, defined by *liquid companies*¹⁴, it presents professional educators with new challenges for which pedagogical reflection aims to seek new interpretative keys and problematizing approaches: " in the face of the complexity of social problems, complexity that can induce hyperactivity but also strong risks of paralysis by entropy, new and stimulating approach strategies are opening up. These prospects are of particular interest to professional social workers: they feel more closely the anguish of such viscosity that grips acting, of that being within a hyper-complexity where every problem is interdependent, where every action, before reaching a purpose, branches and disperses, loses the sense of its effects, often comes out of control. Lack of a flywheel capable of *multiplying* the effects of their work (a hard, nagging, often frustrating job by its nature, as long as the solution is not found), their efforts are in danger of being empty or chronically superior to their results"¹⁵.

The challenge, therefore, for professional educators, is to act within a society hit by a crisis of the political dimension and educational work ethic, in an era, the post-contemporary one, characterized by the symbolic poverty of social ties. It is *necessary to think* politically and to act politically as Bertolini recalls, that is, to rediscover the meaning of politics, the responsibility of education, the need for these two experiences of man to be able to relate to each other; and it means the possibility of discovering or rediscovering the joyful effort of thinking and acting sensibly.

The educational services within which professional educators also operate need a profound pedagogical reflection, because " this is a historical moment in which the political and ethical dimension of educational work, risk remaining in the background like unexpected, burdened by a productive dimension that is increasingly orienting the implicit pedagogies of educational services"¹⁶.

A rethink, in essence, of services as an integral part of a community project in which educators are called to contribute to taking care of the health of members of the community; that same community that "urgently needs operators capable of reading signals from the *polis* in order to

¹³ L. Gallino, *Dizionario di sociologia*, Torino, UTET, 1978, p. 712.

¹⁴ Si veda Z. Bauman, *Modernità liquida*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2000.

¹⁵ F. Folgheraiter, D. Ianes, *Prefazione all'edizione italiana. La famiglia "al centro" del lavoro sociale* in L. A. Goldfarb, *La sfida dell'handicap e della malattia cronica: guida all'aiuto per la famiglia e gli operatori professionali*, Trento, Erickson, 1990, p. 7.

¹⁶ S. Ulivieri Stiozzi, *La continuità tra le funzioni di coordinamento e supervisione* in L. Perla, M. G. Riva, *L'agire educativo. Manuale per educatori socio-assistenziali*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2016, p. 309.

make sense of political thinking"¹⁷; a job, that of professional educators, which urgently needs legislative and social recognition that cannot be separated from the definition of professional ethics. Today we are faced with a new and interesting phase where the heritage of professional experience obtained can finally allow us to recognize the fundamental lines that characterize our profession by linking different activities in it as they are aimed at various types of users, in various areas of work. The recognition and legislative framework of the profession that are taking place at the same time is confirmation of the beginning of this new phase. In this profession, which is now mature, the ethical and ideal impetus that characterizes work in aid relationships can and must also be translated into the elaboration of professional ethics. It is necessary *as a support and protection* for each educator thanks to the development of a precise professional identity, as a common ground for comparison and elaboration for all educators as a category, for the identification and recognition of this professional category among others.

It is also essential that *the actions* of professionals are legitimized by the recognition of a profile of specific *educational skills* that qualifies the profession that guides training, allows the evaluation of their actions and ensures a socially recognizable identity capable of supporting the daily work of educators. Making *responsible choices*- as Jonas points out - means being able to predict the consequences of one's own actions, having the ability to modify one's projects, in the face of negative consequences, towards other equally appreciable objectives; it is to have the will to give a true account of one's actions¹⁸.

An unfair contractual condition can generate situations of dependence, the need for gratification and miseducation, if not pathological, relationships that can establish alliance, coalition, triangulation or collusion relationships. The professionalism of the educator must be properly recognized by the educator himself, by users and their families, by the employer and the other professionals who interface with him; compared to work organizations, Gardella points out that the organic metaphor, in vogue in the 1950s and 1960s, considered organizations as biological organisms¹⁹. In the case of companies producing social services, especially in the case of associations and cooperatives, this understanding of the company seemed particularly appropriate to the humanitarian purposes it pursues. The merit of this approach has been to identify not only the *material* needs of the worker, but also the psychological and social needs. On the other hand, the risk is that this vision will result in a real ideology and that it will turn into a way to avoid properly remunerating workers in the name of common values, group union, customer needs and company health. The employer can, in fact, exploit the relational involvement of the worker to bind him to his *task*, *triggering* a mechanism of emotional blackmail in the name of the relationship with the user and a normality always

¹⁷ P. Sculari, *Il mio debito verso Josè Bleger, Introduzione a J. Bleger, Psicoigiene e psicologia istituzionale*, Molfetta, La Meridiana, 2011, p. 20.

¹⁸ Cfr. H. Jonas, *Il principio di responsabilità. Un'etica per la civiltà tecnologica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1990, p. 135.

¹⁹ Cfr. O. Gardella, *L'educatore professionale. Finalità, metodologia, deontologia*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2016, pp. 144-149.

lived under the sign of emergency and exceptionality. It is not infrequently in these circumstances that the educator is called upon to carry out tasks that go beyond professional and contractual boundaries. The disempowerment of the professional figure therefore affects the well-being of the professional, the users and the quality of work in general.

It is clear that, in these circumstances, there is an urgent need to build a professional ethics which must be designed on the basis of appropriate training options and which must take into account how the current context contributes to delimiting the fields of intervention, priorities for action and in general the working identity of those who carry out an educational task professionally, recognizing that the educator is a proactive subject of his or her professional *identity*²⁰. It is not easy, however, to talk about building the personal identity of the educator and decline it according to exclusively professional canons; each, in fact, turns out to be, even before educator, *person*, with all the elements that characterize the term in a pedagogical key. Empathy, experience, sense of responsibility intersects in an in-depth study, aimed at the search for the personal identity of the educator, which aims at the training of the professional of tomorrow, able to be an all-round educator, able to recognize and respect the identity of the educating as pedagogical studies have long called. Education, designed or implemented, is an action that, like any other practice, tends towards an objective. It has a technological character which does not exclude the axiological aspect, because it is not a question of considering an end (*telos*), but of the purpose which makes it possible to qualify pedagogically, by virtue of it²¹.

In this direction, pedagogical *research aims*, so that the professional educator can work with competence and professionalism, recognizing the need to raise educational reflection in order to offer tools, models, elements, interpretations that guide *theory and practice* of those working in the educational field. Developing "the complex *decision-choice-responsibility*, deepened both in relation to that historical condition and from the most recent ethical and social analyses has been defined the new age of responsibility and both in relation to the particular significance with which one looks at the hermeneutic approach to the idea of responsibility and more precisely to the dynamic that the concept of responsibility is taking shape within the effort to remanentize the ability to act beyond the limited scope of the subject towards himself"²².

4. Risks and criticism in educational work

Feeding *reflexivity and curiosity* about how educational action is influenced by implicit models, is functional to maintaining the balance between two inclinations that characterize educational contexts: the trend towards *self-referentiality*, a risk that mainly affects formal educational contexts such as school, criminal institutions for minors, social and health structures; the disempowerment of the value of educational work, understood as a risk of relegating educational

²⁰ Cfr. P. Triani, *Educatori e nuove sfide del "lavoro" socio-educativo*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2016, p. 46.

²¹ Cfr. G. Flores d'Arcais, *Orizzonti della pedagogia*, Pisa, Giardini Editori e Stampatori, 1989, pp. 53-54.

²² A. Chionna, *Scelta e responsabilità: le sfide educative del ventunesimo secolo*, in G. Elia (a cura di), *Le sfide sociali dell'educazione*, op. cit., p. 47.

actions to mere welfare, therapeutic and always emergency tasks. Today, therefore, we are opening a new phase in the field of research, able to recognize and evaluate new fundamental lines that characterize the profession, thanks to a good heritage of experience and competence; in addition, the profession by linking different activities in it as it is aimed at different types of users, in various areas of work, is able to recognize and frame in legislation the legislative dictates of the profession that are becoming a result in this new phase. A mature profession, which enhances the ethical and ideal momentum of the person, which characterizes work in aid relationships, and cannot ignore a professional ethics that must be elaborated by the professionals, so that it becomes an indispensable guide capable of supporting and protecting every educator in his professional activity, creating a fertile ground for comparison and elaboration for educators and, again, individuals and recognizes the professional category to which they belong. "The person is provided with an inner strength that allows him to place himself significantly over time, to live it *as kairòs* to make life an existence, to maintain a significant relationship with the past and to look wisely to the future"²³.

A fundamental element in the construction of the professional figure of the educator and in the openness towards a new research, another path, in step with modernity and recent pedagogical studies, cannot be separated from the evaluation of vocational skills, understood as a "learning goal that is achieved after acquiring knowledge, transformed, by the learner, in knowledge, applied in operational schemes, matured in general skills and then applied in problematic situations such as skills. The subject acquires knowledge, internalizes it, applies it in different situations and transforms them into operational schemes: when he is in certain situations, he "knows how to do", so he is capable. Competence is therefore not so much a general skill, but as an ability to cope with a specific situation, it is therefore a "know-how". The active competence knowledge, schemes, skills related to the intellectual, relational and technical-gesture sphere that are mobilized also in an integrated form to cope with a specific situation and challenges not only the internal resources of the subject but also the external ones"²⁴.

A careful reading of the educational skills proper to the profile of the professional educator does not allow us to detect a unique and universally adopted classification. Scholars, depending on the perspective with which they approach the theme, propose classes of skills with different denominations according to different perspectives of analysis. Often, in fact, educators do their work in deeply complex contexts. The critical issues come from coming into daily contact with the discomfort, disability, poverty, the specific needs of the different ages of life of users, conflicts, anxieties and fears of subjects and their families. Exposure to these issues calls into

²³ V. Balzano, *Educazione, persona e welfare. Il contributo della pedagogia nello sviluppo delle politiche sociali*, Bari, Progedit, 2017, p. 89.

²⁴ A. Lotti, *Introduzione. Fondamenti teorici per la formazione dell'operatore professionale* in F. Crisafulli, L. Molteni, L. Paoletti, P.N. Scarpa, L. Sambugaro, S. Giuliodoro, *Il "core competence" dell'educatore professionale. Linee di indirizzo per la formazione*, Milano, Unicopli, 2010, pp. 21-22.

question deep parts of the operator's personal history²⁵.

Educational work exposes the operator to the reactivation of his personal suffering and can lead him to re-propose with dynamic users experienced in his personal experience or professional past. Relational and affective dynamics are complicated in the group dimension in which the educator normally operates. These, in fact, work in *equipe* groups within multidisciplinary teams, and work with groups, being frequently called to manage different users. To cope with the delicate educational task, the need arises that future educators are put in a position to acquire *fundamental clinical-relational and affective* skills in order to face complicated emotional dynamics during the exercise of the profession. In addition, the educator is professionally called to take emotional *responsibility* for the educational action by exerting a deep look for a complex intervention. This means that, within the educational relationship, the complexity of work requires the assumption of a conscious posture that in turn implies the need to know oneself in depth, recrossing one's personal history to reveal the automatisms, the deep experiences, the identity nuclei of each individual. Getting to know your life story in depth is important to be able to compare yourself with the life stories of others: the professional educator, to use an expression of Massa, must have the ability to "know how to investigate chiasm"²⁶, that is, knowing how to identify by chance in case the intertwining of the world of life and the world of training and the profession.

The educator is called to build positive and future-oriented relationships, and to read and emotionally manage educational relationships. To do this he must demonstrate that he has a good *ability to read transference and countertransference*, which implies the ability to use a *binocular gaze* or live and at the same time read the relationship to interpret the manifest and latent levels. The operator must also have the ability to maintain the right distance, a concept on which many authors focus²⁷ within the studies of the *educator-user* relationship.

Compared to the subjects with whom the professional educator works, in the structuring of an educational path, intentional and interactive, he must also put in place psychological skills, since the life of an individual includes individual, relational and social elements. The professional educator must be able to understand the psychological components present in the person *in* the different stages of evolution: the development and needs of the subject in developmental age differ greatly from the needs characterizing the age to adult or the *age of the old age*²⁸. The

²⁵ Cfr. V. Iori, A. Augelli, D. Buzzone, E. Musi, *Ripartire dall'esperienza. Direzioni di senso per il lavoro sociale*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2010, pp. 5-9.

²⁶ Cfr. R. Massa, *La clinica della formazione. Un'esperienza di ricerca*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1992, p. 5.

²⁷ See, among others: cfr. P. Bertolini, L. Caronia, *Ragazzi difficili. Pedagogia interpretativa e linee di intervento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2015, pp. 156-161; cfr. F. De Girolami, S. Faggian, *La relazione nelle strutture residenziali. L'operatore, i familiari, l'utente*, Roma, Carocci Faber, 2006, pp.101-103; cfr. B. Pozzoli, *Caratteristiche e competenze di una professione in continua evoluzione* in S. Kanizsa, T. Tramma (a cura di), *Introduzione alla pedagogia e al lavoro educativo*, Roma, Carocci, 2011, p. 153; cfr. S. Miodini, M.T. Zini, *L'educatore professionale: formazione, ruolo, competenze*, Roma, Carocci Faber, 2001, pp.65-67.

²⁸ See A. M. Volpicella (a cura di), *Ri-pensare le vecchie*, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2015.

educator must recognize the existence of relational dynamics in the *contexts* in which he operates and propose new ways of relationship more adapted to reality and to the subjects who inhabit it. The first of the realities experienced by the educator and the subjects to be educated or re-educated is the family. It not only identifies the group of people who make it up, but goes beyond its physical existence, since the emotional values and relationships that develop at the family level are the basis of a person's education system.

A *relevant relational* space in which the educator operates is the dimension of the group, within which different and important dynamics manifest themselves. The group represents a highly significant reference system and the educator, in designing and implementing the intervention, must know the *affective-relational dynamics* that exist in it, manage the distribution of power, identify implicit rules, manage conflict, be guarantor of internal balance. The educator will also have to consider the psychological dynamics produced by social interactions, that is, being able to connect the behavior of the subject and the external pressures that condition him²⁹.

The professional educator acts in a constantly changing work environment that requires, because of its instability, a remarkable ability to adapt to the real situation. Assuming reflexivity as a skill means thinking of the professional as a *reflexive researcher*³⁰ that must be aware of its tacit structures by analyzing problems and roles that emerge in the educational act. He is a researcher who builds the repertoire of *working practices*, investigates pedagogical methods and theories, verifies his theories on the action by implementing a path of reflection in the course of the action. A reflexive professional is such if he recognizes that his action is immersed in a universe of meanings, if he grants the subject the skills to understand, learn and plan, if he admits that his actions can take on a different meaning for the subject in difficulty than he intends. Reflexive competence guides the professional in understanding the meanings that his actions have for the subject by educating and stimulates the educator to put in place dialogical devices that facilitate comparison and mediation. Reflexivity means paying attention to one's tacit understandings and the effects that the educational relationship has on themselves; but it also means seeking the plurality of points of view and the comparison of approaches and models.

Reflexive *skills* "they are the starting point for digging below the surface of values, in beliefs and assumptions that articulate the internal evaluation of a situation and subsequent action. This is a necessary capacity to discriminate against divergent conceptions and remain open to different perspectives. In a similar way, one must be able to tolerate and work in the midst of differences, conceptions and conflicts, when looking for solutions to complex problems that do

²⁹ Cfr. S. Miodini, M.T. Zini, *L'educatore professionale: formazione, ruolo, competenze*, Roma, Carocci Faber, 1992, pp. 29-30.

³⁰ Cfr. D.A. Schön, *Il professionista riflessivo. Per una nuova epistemologia della pratica professionale*, Bari, Dedalo, 1993, pp. 311-316.

not have the right answer, technical"³¹. The basis of *reflexive practice* is the processes of differentiation and decentralization. The process of differentiation consists in distancing one's own subjectivity through experience to identify the differences between one's own and others' point of view, while the process of decentralization allows you to critically validate your intentions, reviewing one's beliefs in the light of a perceptual reformulation of one's cognitive perception. Looking back, thinking deeply, learning about oneself, organizing one's subsequent strategies are the stages of a thoughtful path that allows the professional to examine their beliefs to implement a perceptual reformulation useful to calibrate their choices and actions in problematic situations.

5. Concluding remarks on educational practice today in Italy

Practice is often a swampy condition, where situations are misleading tangles that do not lend themselves to technical solutions; this means that it is difficult in educational action *to simply apply theories and techniques tout court, but the relationship between theory and practice* must be recomposed in the light of the problematization of any educational intervention through reflexive action. In the course of his work, the professional educator must put in place a series of evaluation skills both before the action, during and after the "evaluation is pervasive"³². Evaluation skills are identified in everything that the professional educator should be able to plan, organize and reflect on his actions and future interventions.

It is essential that the educator is competent to observe reality intentionally in order to assess what he considers to be relevant to educational intervention. There are several observational methodologies which differ depending on the environment in which the observation is conducted and the role that the researcher has in it, the level of participation of the observer, the degree of structuring of the detection instruments and the type of data collection. The educator must have skills in appreciating the processes or be in an active and effective listening mode to understand what the starting situation is, in which direction the intervention must be oriented and what objectives are desirable and achievable. To do this, it must be able to evaluate the elements, conditions, constraints and possibilities offered by the context by balancing both qualitative and evaluation variables.

Another competence related to the evaluation area is that related to the ability to draw up an evaluation plan, always in consultation with the other educators and professionals who make up the work team. This competence is based on the ability to share knowledge of the aims of educational intervention and the methodologies adopted, on the self-evaluation capacity of the service and on the need to provide for external evaluation. The team is called upon to produce a service evaluation report and then a final functional balance sheet to calibrate future interventions. Finally, evaluation skills include the *self-assessment* necessary to look at the

³¹ V. J. Marsik, J. Davis Manigaulte, *Supporting of the Development of Youth Development Workers through Action-Based, Critically Reflective Learning in Educational Reflective Practice, II*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2011, p. 22.

³² L. Galliani, *L'agire valutativo, Manuale per docenti e formatori*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2015, p. 67.

situation, since detaching one another from practice allows you to return to it with a more aware posture of your latent pedagogies.

The educator can make use of different tools useful for the observation of subjects, such as, checklists, evaluation scales and observation guides that allow to accurately detect the behavior of evaluands. On-board diaries and anecdotal annotations, on the other hand, have a more narrative cut. For the evaluation of the skills of the professional educator it is possible to use *the skills budget*, an instrument defined by precise rules in some European countries, but not regulated in Italy. Also interesting is the *Portfolio*, a tool that effectively presents the skills and abilities possessed by a subject and at the same time highlights the relationship between the experiences of the subject and the elaboration of the experience in order to an ever greater professional and work awareness. It is, therefore, a tool capable of documenting the growth of the subject who compiles it, since it documents the evolution of the professionalization of the subject and contributes to the growth of professional awareness and knowledge; the same structure of the portfolio facilitates the reconstruction of the identity of the educator by guiding a narrative with meaning, a bridge between the training paths that marked the subject's past, the action in the present and the projection towards the future that guides personal and professional development.

Professional design requires skills related to the drafting and implementation of the life project. In the first instance, it should *be remembered that* educational planning is an intentional and professional practice aimed at change: in educational intervention "the educational intentionality that turns into a project is explicit. The position of the educator towards the recipient of his action is recognizable precisely in the greater ability to anticipate, impose, propose (and therefore design) the future of the subject"³³. In drawing up an educational project, the educator will first have to take responsibility for the intervention in which the knowledge and skills of the educator, his educational and professional history, his experience and his worldview come into play, but also the constraints and possibilities offered by the context, social expectations towards or against him, as well as the desires, abilities, perspectives and autonomy of the recipient of the intervention. The *responsibility*, on the other hand, is expressed in the choices of the educator who foreshadows the future of the recipient of the intervention through the preparation of objectives to be achieved, times and operational tools. "Design implies essential value choices, whose responsibility is always in the hands of those who think and then carry out the intervention. Thinking about what he wants to do is therefore at least as important as thinking about how to achieve it"³⁴.

The educator must also be able to handle different investigation tools and demonstrate alignment skills to develop a training path and be able to favor an integrated system; he is a professional, and always works within a context and with other professionals. With respect to

³³ S. A. Rosetti, *La logica invariante dell'azione: la logica progettuale*, in S. Kanizsa, T. Tramma (a cura di), *Introduzione alla pedagogia e al lavoro educativo*, Roma, Carocci, 2011, p. 125.

³⁴ Cfr. *Ibidem*, pp. 126-131.

the context, the educator is called upon to analyze the resources available in terms of human resources, financial resources and material resources, and formal constraints such as laws, regulations, previous agreements, and informal such as expectations, desires, beliefs of the subjects involved. In defining the aims, purposes and objectives of the training project, these must be able to negotiate the project with other agencies, taking into account the needs and domains of quality of life, knowing how to mediate between subject and contexts, knowing how to choose inclusive devices and for autonomy, knowing how to favor processes of self-evaluation and reflection, knowing how to activate documentation and evaluation paths for the implementation with the network of agencies.

Finally, among the design skills, also those related to the constructive activity of one's professional self, knowing how to build trajectories for their personal and professional development, knowing how to develop self-analysis processes, knowing how to document their professional path, knowing how to identify resources for their training. According to the classification proposed by the IAEJI³⁵, in fact, documentation is a functional tool for other skills. The theme of documentation is traced back to wider competences: from *organizational competence*, in the sense of reporting the work carried out, the documentation is functional to verifying the success of the training interventions; it is also identified within systemic *competences*, meaning here for documentation the administrative and management documents produced by educators; in addition, the same is one of *the competences for professional behavior*, in reference to documentation as a communicative vector between educational realities and with the territory.

The documentary competences, therefore, are placed in the different procedural points to give you meaning; the documentation requires to activate a pedagogical gaze attentive to the dynamics of educational practices and to himself in action, to know how to collect and sort the data of an event in a clear and coherent way, to know how to organize and store such data through appropriate models and tools, to be able to consult a repertoire of data and information making appropriate selections and finally, know how to communicate the contents to the working group or outside to produce new knowledge.

It is, therefore, necessary to activate a range of documentary skills that make the educator a flexible and qualified professional; a professional figure who masters skills, to realize a documentary project that wants to describe an educational situation, putting in place a moral skill, since recognizing the subjectivity of one's gaze on reality, assuming responsibility for field choices. In documenting the educator also makes use of *organizational skills*, organizing the project, selecting resources and sources, finding and ordering information, processing and using information, communicating and disseminating documentation. Of course, the documenter must be able to use tools, materials and devices to document by putting in place technical expertise. In essence, the educator must be able to document the quality of

³⁵ Cfr. AIEJI, *Le competenze professionali dell'educatore sociale. Piattaforma concettuale*, (tr. it. Eds.) P. Scarpa, M. Testi, ANEP, <http://aieji.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Professional-competences-IT.pdf>.

interventions and services.

Trying to overcome the regulatory rigidity that characterizes the relevant jurisprudence, it is evident that the attempt to systemize a cluster of educational skills responds to the need for operators in the sector to define in a timely definition of the areas of competence of educational work in order to identify more clearly the profile of the professional educator. Through the determination of specific educational skills, built on pedagogical guidelines and practical experience gained over the years, professionals in the sector indicate the guidelines of initial and in-service training, and claim a clearly recognizable identity both within the educational community and outside society as a whole.

In order to continue this positive evolution, in the regulatory field, the question concerning the professional recognition of graduates of class L-19, with the relative construction of professional associations, is interesting. In this vein, the law, approved and promulgated, proposed by Vanna lori and Milena Santerini,, who respectively signed and presented a draft on the "Educational Professions" that feeds the debate on identity and professional recognition both in the pedagogical community and among ministerial and government representatives, for the purpose of the full evaluation and professional redefinition of the figure of the educator, is the starting point for a new and profitable idea of institutionally recognized professionalism.

The reform, therefore, sees the educator as a subject able to deal with *pedagogical* actions aimed at individual subjects; he has *knowledge* and *skills* in the pedagogical, methodological, didactic, philosophical, sociological and psychological disciplines and carries out the following pedagogical activities: designs, implements and evaluates educational and training interventions and treatments directed to the person in the areas and services identified by this law; carries out the reconnaissance, detection, analysis, interpretation and functional evaluation of a pedagogical type and collaborates in the work of the multispecies teams; programmed, design, coordinate, manage and evaluate continuing training plans; designs, manages, coordinates and evaluates management vocational training services and systems; carries out pedagogical guidance and permanent guidance as well as advice, skills assessment and job placement; cooperates in the definition of training policies; offers advice for the planning and management of network services in the territory; provides advice for the implementation of integrated systems for the management and enhancement of human resources and for the development of skills; coordinates territorial education and training services.

The need, greater than in the past, to regulate and define the profession of educator is even more relevant today due to the condition of extreme economic and social difficulty in which the country is located, which penalizes minors in their cognitive and emotional development, but also adults and the elderly in social inclusion and in the processes of lifelong education. The horizon of action of the educator who finds difficult ground in the health sector is therefore broadened: "the presence of the educator in the health field is mainly recorded in addiction prevention activities, day services and residential communities for subjects with psychiatric pathologies, and in some health, services aimed at preventing the use of psychoactive

substances, reducing their damage, or implementing rehabilitation pathways"³⁶.

In conclusion, starting from the figure of an educator, yes professional, but who knows how to combine the aspects of the educational relationship with practical work, going beyond the welfare drift of the last decade, also in line with the new regulatory texts in the sector. The being of an educational action, in fact, cannot be exhausted in the welfare dimension that, Tramma recalls, is not attributable to professional profiles; it is good that there is, today more than in the past, a place in the care project, finally giving the right meaning to the committed operators, reconstructing this figure starting from the attitude, both of the educator and of the user. An evolutionary approach, in the new path of building the professional figure of the educator, which will be the basis of *taking care of pedagogy*.

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³⁶ S. Tramma, *L'educatore imperfetto*, op.cit., p. 127.

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