Questo scritto intende sviluppare alcune riflessioni sui processi di orientamento, sullo sviluppo delle competenze e sui processi formativi di orientamento in ambito scolastico.

In primo luogo si tenta di approfondire, nelle sue linee principali, il concetto di orientamento interpretato come un elemento costitutivo e strategico della formazione, caratterizzato da continuità e sistematicità di intervento e inserito in un ampio periodo di formazione.

In secondo luogo viene esplorato il concetto di competenza e ne vengono indagate le caratteristiche fondamentali, utili a dotare i futuri cittadini delle necessarie basi conoscitive e abitudini cognitive per esercitare in modo pieno e attivo tutte le potenzialità, sia personali sia collettive.

Infine, viene ipotizzata la stretta connessione fra lo sviluppo delle competenze e il processo di orientamento, strutturato in attività ed esperienze formative diverse e efficaci in una prospettiva di formazione continua.

Il processo di orientamento prevede interventi progressivi, finalizzati a sostenere lo sviluppo di interessi e attitudini personali, a facilitare la formulazione di riflessioni consapevoli e l’assunzione di decisioni in contesti reali.

Parole chiave: Orientamento, competenze, modelli formativi

Keywords: Orientation, Competences, Educational Formative Models


Orientamento è uno dei problemi chiave delle politiche di formazione europee e di tutti i paesi avanzati tecnologicamente, in Italia si è notato un cambiamento di orientamento per problemi relativi all’orientamento scolastico in elementare e secondaria come ad alti livelli. Pur non sempre legati alla pratica e alla legislazione in materia, l’orientamento non è sempre coerente e unito.

Orientamento activities are established as final operations, too often limited to orientation procedures in the bridge years between the various school levels, to
the offer of packages for training programmes and the detection of interests with the use of aptitude tests and questionnaires. Orientation activities relating to the bridge years between the various school levels and the use of aptitude questionnaires are important but do not appear to be effective in getting to know, orient and possibly modify the individual characteristics of a cognitive or affective/motivational nature of subjects. Orientation activities are envisaged at the end of a cycle when these aptitudes have already been set.

It is advisable that formative actions be inserted within an orientation process that extends over a long period, connected to the entire school career and is constructive for each subject, in order to encourage the best conditions to allow students, right from the start of their school career, to be able to move autonomously and continuously for the entire period, as a process of re-orientation. In other words, it means helping and supporting the students in achieving all the aims of education, and become producers and citizens of their own time independently and in a responsible manner, to build on knowledge and promote the development of interests and aptitudes, to develop the ability to research and understand messages and critically examine information in order to take decisions based on the greatest amount of information available\textsuperscript{211}. To achieve this it is necessary to promote a formative period of orientation in the long term, realised by putting into place flexible didactic routes that are also strict at the same time\textsuperscript{212}. It is also necessary to update the professional curricula of teachers and offer resources and support, also technical/scientific support in order to encourage independence and effective didactic initiatives.

The orientation process is certainly a constructive and strategic dimension in education. The debate on orientation has seen the juxtapositioning of supporters of an analysis of subjective and aptitude elements of the subjects and the supporters of an approach based on the knowledge of the socio-economic and entrepreneurial world as a structure at the basis of scholastic and professional choices. The process of orientation is such a complex one that it needs an in-depth and appropriate knowledge of education opportunities and the awareness of the various dimensions and potentials that make up the individual. In this context, the knowledge, competence and aptitudes of a person interact constructively in long-term educational processes, such as elementary and high school and are characterised by various didactic and educational experiences that also rely on the involvement of the family rather than the stronger orienting forces of the choices made by young people. The skills acquired by the subjects should include the important ability to take decisions in conditions of uncertainty\textsuperscript{213}, in-

\textsuperscript{211} Baldacci M., Trattato di pedagogia generale, Carocci, Roma, 2012.

\textsuperscript{212} Domenici G., Manuale dell’orientamento e della didattica modulare, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2009.

\textsuperscript{213} Pellerey M., Le competenze individuali e il portfolio, La Nuova Italia, Scandicci, 2004.
creasingly characterising the labour market and the professional fields. Orientation is becoming a fundamental and strategic element in school education as it leads to the development of a personal project that is essential for the valid and productive entry into society, the labour market and the taking on of responsibility, this is also true for the area of relationships, culture and democratic life. In this regard developments and improvements are necessary in various fields: initially concerning oneself, the ego system; and then the ability to read and interpret life around oneself; and then to be able to decide in a competent manner and establish strategies for the realization of one’s choices followed lastly by the ability to control and self-control one’s actions in the realization of one’s plans. In practice it means allowing each one to develop a system of wishes and desires, concepts and beliefs appropriate for oneself, society and the education one has received, of the knowledge and skills needed to solve real problems. This, in order to support and steer young people in their ability to comprehend and interpret, following their own motivation, knowledge and competence and their own aspirations in real life situations, in order to generate their own intentions for action, distinct choices, expressing their plans in the short or long term. Indeed this aspect is often neglected, i.e. the ability to persevere in one’s objectives despite difficulties, distractions and possible frustrations. It is necessary to be able to favour the development of valid skills in order to know oneself and the surrounding environment so as to work in an appropriate manner and reach the objectives one has set.

Therefore, the elements comprising orientation can be summed up as being: the acceptance of one’s aptitude, aspiration, desires (the dimension of self), one’s skills and the value thereof; acquisition of an appropriate knowledge of actual educational and working possibilities in the territory and also future prospects; the development of knowledge, competence and attitudes relating to the ability to take decisions in conditions of uncertainty; an increase in the will to plan and modify future prospects, both in the basic preparation and in an initial and ongoing professional qualification, connected to the ability to remain faithful to the decisions taken and prospects envisaged.

Long term educational programmes are required in order to achieve all this, characterized by didactic activity and multiple and diversified educational experiences that also involve the families.

Therefore orientation can be seen as a series of operations aimed at allowing oneself or others to make choices or take decisions, and activities that are coherent and congruous with the surrounding environment and in keeping with one’s own interests, aptitudes and objectives. These operations, i.e. orienting oneself and orienting others, are extremely complex operations within a post-industrial "society of knowledge" such as ours and are increasingly present both during school education and during one’s working career, in terms of re-orientation. Various legislation passed in recent years, such as regulations contained in the
Linee guida sul sistema nazionale sull’orientamento permanente\textsuperscript{214} (Guidelines on the national system on permanent orientation), make provision for orientation and tutoring activities during training and education processes and activities for the requalification and re-orientation of works and are increasingly necessary. We therefore speak of on-going education (lifelong learning) in the view of a widespread increase in the cultural level of the active population with an appreciation of \textit{intra} and \textit{inter} differences of the individual. There are many problems leading to an increase in the difficulties and complexities of the orientation processes. Let us mention: the increase in knowledge and the use thereof in the organised forms of social, cultural and productive life; the decrease in opportunity of using acquired skills in a stable manner during school and university; the request for greater flexibility in working skills; an increase in interdependent relationships linked to globalization; and above all the need to guarantee the conscious participation in democratic life and the exercise of citizenship. Schooling plays an extremely important role this socio-historical picture, characterised as it is by complexities, transformation and uncertainty on the possibility of development. Information and knowledge are atomised, de-structured and often contradictory, knowledge is often used to solve occasional problems and cannot guarantee the construction of that basis of structured knowledge and skills that allow, both in a cognitive and in a motivational sense, the continuous development and updating of cognitive abilities. Only learning processes offer the cognitive, relational and motivational instruments that are essential in guaranteeing on-going self-learning and self-orientation processes, so too does an effective use of learning in the service of updating and the development of skills that have already been acquired. It is also necessary to mention the type of learning to be obtained, the teaching methods, attitudes and regulations to achieve and to favour.

\textit{Competence}

Today there is the repeated request, in cognitive terms, of being able to solve problems, to reveal a cultural and personal flexibility that allows transforming one’s own knowledge, abilities and capabilities into real skills that can be used in different situations. In this view, learning, together with the acquisition of knowledge must favour the development of skills, seen as the result of knowledge and abilities that work in situations. Indeed the concept of competence has an important role in the education system and the skills approach offers a concrete solution to some problems within the education system, allowing the pursuit, for example, of interesting and important learning which lead to genuine knowledge, an increase in knowledge through situations of contextual

\textsuperscript{214} MIUR, \textit{Linee guida nazionali per l’orientamento permanente} of 19 February 2014.
learning and not only the simple transmission of skills. Competence is presented as the expression of a cultural and scientific baggage, it revolves around the ability of problemising real life, theorising the solution to problems. The development of knowledge requires cognitive "mobilisation", i.e. a process that aims at actively involving the subject, that represents the result of a learning process undertaken within a real situation and aimed at the production of new knowledge. To develop a competent attitude that aims at learning, a comparison with a problematic experience is indispensible, as is an internalisation of the characteristics of the situation, resorting to the mastered and available resources that are automated, the putting into effect of behaviour suitable for the solution and the attainment of purpose accompanied by a thoughtful attitude. In practice the memorised knowledge, reproduced, rendered automatic and increased by a repeated learning experience are used by the subject to act in real situations of daily occurrence, to solve problem situations, to achieve the performance required in a conscious, original and creative way. In this sense competence requires learning, declared knowledge and know-how (procedural knowledge). Solving specific tasks and being able to develop integrative and global situations. Resources, understood as learning, know-how and skill, acquired by concrete experience, are explained, modelled and then transferred or moved to new contexts with original and personal combinations\textsuperscript{215}.

The concept of competence is generally connected to the ability to use the available resources in a conscious and effective way, in terms of knowledge and skills, in relation to the resolution of difficult situations, also in terms of unknown or important situations\textsuperscript{216}. In particular, reference to the 'ability to use' resources requires knowledge and skills to be tested, the possibility of applying them within a context of active and operational learning which involves the learner. Concerning the 'solution of problem situations' it is the competent student who can solve a specific problem in an intelligent and effective way within a specific area of activity.

In a cognitive society like ours, where learning changes rapidly, it is important to master a developmental style of learning and to be able to transform one's knowledge. Therefore it is necessary to overcome the emphasis placed on contents of learning and focus on the development of skills which are, in fact, able to allow the person to move flexibly within a field of knowledge that is continuously increasing, both in quantity and in quality.


Today it is necessary to be able to adapt to transitions and continuous changes and the interaction between competence and orientation can contribute to train subjects who are able to learn, and learn in an adaptive way, and do this in such a way as to be able to respond effectively in problematic and unexpected situations which require change and complex restructuring. Subjects developing their skills in specific areas are asked to act as experts, i.e. as individuals acting without problems within a professional situation, having extensive knowledge of their routine and are able to use it.

Skill seems to be indissoluble from the subject having it while it is defined as a social activity that appears through verifiable actions, at the same time it does not aim at a stereotyped behaviour but is able to offer an adaptation in the light of an unknown and particular situation. The acquisition of skill is therefore characterized by the intentional purpose of learning, for an active comparison with the problem situation in view of reaching the truth, in the attempt to increase one's knowledge.

Specifically, Dewey characterises education as the acquisition of mental habits and emphasises some issues that have been neglected by the education system. The first concerns the acknowledgement of the fundamental significance and unity in knowledge; the second issue which Dewey brings to light is related to the attention to be paid to learning results which are obtained following a long period of education.

The first fundamental question, concerning the significance of learning, was pointed out by Dewey in *Democracy and Education*\(^{217}\). In education, Dewey says that knowing, being able to do and thinking are pursued in separate ways. The resulting knowledge is often separate and distinct, acquired mechanically, characterized by sterile verbalism, not ready to be applied in other contexts. Indeed, knowledge, understood as the knowledge of concepts, risks falling into simple verbalism, in being able to speak about matters in a precarious manner. Knowing how, interpreted as procedural-type knowledge, like, for example, basic cultural instruments such as reading and writing, are sometimes seen as abilities to be done mechanically and not to be developed in a critical and intelligent manner. Knowing how to think, when it is separated from knowing and doing, risks becoming an intellectual activity devoid of practical connection. The Dewey proposal aims at connecting these separate aspects, to promote and develop an intelligent knowing, able to consciously control the activities of the subject, it aims at acquiring organic and concrete knowledge. It hopes to encourage passing from knowledge based on mechanical and reproductory learning to an education proposal built on active, intelligent and transferable learning.

Concerning the second matter Dewey cautions educators who tend to limit their attention only to the immediate progress achieved by their pupils in the individual subjects. By doing so, they consequently lose sight of the more long term educational results, the implicit learning that is fundamental in the learning of attitudes, aptitudes, permanent interests and durable "habits". These aspects, achieved over a long period, parallel to the explicit learning of skills and subjects, are very important in education and the future of the pupils, in the development of an ability for orientation and self-orientation within the world.

This Deweyan indication is very important and it has been accepted by Baldacci who has integrated it into a new concept set on two levels of the curriculum. The first level concerns the assimilation of knowledge and the ability relating to the individual subject of study and the various learning. In this level there are direct acquisitions, attainable in the short term, characterising the customary didactic objectives. The second level of the curriculum aims at structuring the mental abilities and attitudes that could refer, for example to the training of a subject mentality (history, mathematics...) or have a transverse nature such as the propensity to enquire and research, to asking questions, to thought and meta-cognitive, auto-cognitive and auto orientating attitudes. Baldacci points out an analogy between the concept of competence and the Deweyan concept of 'habit' understood in the sense of mental habit on an educational level. Indeed, competence, like mental habits, has the characteristic of appearing as indirect learning achievable in the long term. In this way they can refer to the second level of the curriculum, defined by the acquisition of disciplinary and transverse aptitudes. Competences, like 'habits', can be connected to a process that, in the long term and with adequate conditions, leads to the achievement of goals of a higher order logic. Essentially, while pupils learn the abilities and skills connected to the individual subject matter, they, in the long term and collaterally, develop competences linked to both the structure of the subject and to its transverse nature, i.e. linked to the possibility of interpreting situations in such a way as to consciously use the resources they have. These competences are not pursued directly and represent the overall result of the learning processes used, at the end of a long period of training.

These conditions bring to mind another hypothesis, the one connecting training and the development of competences, in the long term, within learning processes that can develop a correct approach to orientation and self-orientation.

The development of competences to favour orientation processes

In the current view, the matter of the development of competences in order to encourage the orientation process, carries a multitude of elements, factors,
variables and processes that involve the school, the company at a personal, group or institutional level.

The debate on competences derives from the business world. Specifically, in the field of professional training, competence concerns an immediate and practical usability and spendability. Lévy-Leboyer closely connects the notion of competence to development and, in this sense, identifies the development of the concept in the passage from a balance of competence to the management thereof. Indeed, the balance of competence, in the professional person, is limited to outlining, in retrospect, the competences acquired, while it would be advisable to pass to the management thereof, i.e. to try to predict, beforehand, those which could be increased in the future, and investigate the individual characteristics and environmental conditions which could encourage these acquisitions. The purpose is the training of increasingly flexible professionals who are effective in responding to the unforeseeable requests and solving problem situations. Competence is therefore considered as being the ability to use, in an effective and conscious way, one's knowledge in situations of importance and problematic situations.

While in a school environment competence has a general and basic educational connotation, within the school system, the question remains what type of competence should be acquired by pupils in order for them to be able to orient themselves and be in a better position to face the multitude of problems posed by continuous change and the climate of uncertainty that characterizes our complex society. Clearly in order for the subject to be equipped with the useful competences allowing him to face the many different requirements of a work situation it is necessary to promote knowledge, abilities and skills that are meaningful, systematic, stable.

This means that in order to be meaningful, the new knowledge must be grafted onto knowledge already acquired, then the task of learning is successful, motives and purposes are understood and these, through the processes undertaken, lead to results. It is important that knowledge is systematic and stable, creating an organic and coherent whole, a network of knowledge that has sense and is long-lasting. This is the exact opposite of that fragmented, parcelised, casual and episodic knowledge that is easily forgotten.

Some regulations, such as the new Indicazioni per il Curricolo, (Indications for the Curriculum - Ministry for Education, Universities and Research) offer a change from the cultural paradigm founded on content, to a curricular paradigm founded on

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221 Domenici G., Manuale dell’orientamento e della didattica modulare, Laterza, 2009.
222 MIUR, Indicazioni per il curriculo, della scuola dell’infanzia e del primo ciclo d’istruzione of 4 September 2012.
competence, with the relative investigation of matters with a high educational importance, and the proposed vertical curriculum useful for promoting the increase in knowledge, life-long learning, aiming at citizens undertaking a critical citizenship, overcoming encyclopaedism and the fragmentary nature of subject contents, by means of a consolidation of experience and the appreciation of professionalism. The new curricular indications allow us to pass from a didactic model aimed at content to a model aimed at competences that can be circumscribed, are describable and certifiable. Not only what to teach but how to teach in order to develop and reach the targets of competence.

Within the various teaching methods, the one that must be encouraged is the one able to promote epistemological and historical-critical thoughts about the objects of teaching, therefore that can develop a theory of knowledge that is aware of the underlying relations between the theories, principles, hypotheses and research procedures, of each discipline with the aim of facilitating the cognitive processes of analysis, synthesis, the formulation of theories, explanations,… This in order to promote the formation of stable and long-lasting knowledge that can build real networks of knowledge that can be transferred to other contexts and support autonomous learning, such as cognitive behaviours that are open and flexible.

Orientation assumes that the subject has mastered networks of knowledge and it requires the development of useful competences to solve concrete problems, having an indispensible baggage of instruments and techniques so as to be the producers and citizens of one’s own time\textsuperscript{223}. Undoubtedly in post industrial societies school education is multi-dimensional and there are many causes that determine the success or failure of a pupil, not only in terms of learning but also for all the attitudes in the sentimental-emotional sphere, motivation and socio-relational aspects, all interacting closely with the cognitive aspect. All these attitudes (confidence, inadequacy, lack of confidence, the strategic control of actions, self-regulation procedures, …) strongly influence the qualities and quantity of the subjective commitment and determine, encouraging or inhibiting, the start of an action, perseverance and the effort in the learning task. One of the most important tasks in the orientation activity is linked to the fact of promoting and developing positive attitudes and the ability of undertaking reflexive and meta-cognitive actions on cognitive and emotional processes activated during learning also for the purpose of developing regulatory strategies useful for a progressive control and for self-improvement.

The orientation that is formed only in the last year of school, whether in primary school or in high school, needs to be reconsidered. Orientation activities are structured essentially to offer students information on the labour market

(new professions, opportunities, ..), on after-school training opportunities and the assessment, following one's school career, of interests and aptitudes by means of aptitude or predictive tests. There are also other fields of action, visits to work environments, traineeships, internships at companies, open days, meetings with professionals from the labour market and procedures to analyse the aspirations of subjects. The educational component of orientation aims at developing fundamental elements in order to allow each pupil to progressively conquer his/her own identity, to choose and respect his/her own life project and to consider also environmental limits.

Clearly, both the offer of information and the assessment of aptitude are important methods, but it is necessary to integrate these with other elements useful for developing an orientation in the long term, which would allow every pupil to develop the elements that are needed in order to move independently.

In a historic moment such as the present one, where the processes are increasingly characterised by change, professional uncertainty and work mobility, it is necessary to increase knowledge, technology and the manifestation thereof, throughout one's life. Consequently, orientation becomes necessary, important and complex and the figures offering orientation services and tutoring are increasing in number.

The competences acquired by each one must be updated, revised and developed from time to time in order to reach the levels required for new opportunities in the labour market, seen not only within a national aspect but also in terms of the international market. Given this aspect, study experiences of average to long duration, such as a school year spent abroad in a foreign school, seem to be very interesting and promising, and a large number of high school students are accepting this proposal.

The orientation process founded on a theoretical viewpoint is able to promote and encourage interests and aptitudes, and transform inter-individual and intra-individual interests into elements of value for the individual and for society. In order to reach this aim the orientation model must make provision for a series of progressive instruments, over a long period, able to integrate some crucial factors for the development of the subject's potential capabilities so that he/she is able to move autonomously. The orientation could therefore be a diachronic structure able to sustain the development of personal interests and aptitudes, aimed at certifying progressive and final results of learning and individual interests, suitable to encourage individual projects that are useful in the development of a critical approach to the main informative sources and leading to conscious thought, as well as being able to make choices and take decisions in real situations.

Research in the field of cognitive and motivational educational psychology has identified various didactic approaches to support the acquisition, by students, of control and self-regulatory procedures in their own cognitive, emotional and
motivational strategies, useful in learning in a significant, stable and effective way and to appreciate, promote and develop interests and aptitudes.

To overcome the iniquities due to the casual nature of individual talent it would be advisable for educational processes to be aimed at enhancing personal differences and inter-individual differences to promote the strengthening of interests and aptitudes in all the users. Each orientation activity should be aimed at enhancing personal differences and inter-individual differences as these are an essential means of achieving the cognitive and motivational involvement of the students, indispensible in facilitating the acquisition of a common cultural basis right from the early school years, in order to support the discovery and development of aptitudes and interests in subsequent educational programmes, proving that it is a decisive and irreplaceable instrument to determine the scholastic success of the individual, to equip the youth with those cultural and professional materials that are articulate and rich, suitable to the consolidated and emerging necessities of a civil and productive society.

The educational orientation model should encourage learning conditions allowing everyone to acquire basic curricular competences also through an individual strategy, i.e. through an educational model that adapts teaching to the individual characteristics of the student.

This strategy allows developing the acquisition of basic cognitive instruments, the development of the basic competences necessary to become critical producers and exercise a real active citizenship. It is the didactic strategies, being the individualisation of the educational proposal, that enable the appreciation of individual interests and aptitudes, to develop motivational and attributive aspects of students. The relationships that could be established between learning and motivation or between cognitive, emotive and affective development, are known and can strongly influence educational success or failure.

The connections are extremely complex and structured and are influenced by the various contexts and the age of the subjects. Lack of initial motivation does not always produce limited effects on the learning level. If learning conditions are identified, i.e. adapted to students' characteristics, the failures manifested can be overcome by increasing cognitive acquisitions.

In this way it is possible to install the virtuous circle from the increase in cognitive results obtained to the motivational and attributive aspects of the students. The identification of the formative proposal to achieve an orientation model that leads to an actual self-orientation process, so that all students have a full and effective involvement in learning skills, both at a cognitive and at an affective and motivational level, is highly advisable.

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The educational proposal founded on an individualized strategy allows students to anchor their new knowledge to the knowledge they already have and all this is achieved also thanks to orientation activities such as welcoming activities at the start of the year and the programmes that bridge the years separating the various school levels. Also of particular significance in this regard are didactic programmes that have a compensatory nature, aimed at filling the gaps and the attempt to unify the various types of experiences and materials proposed for study and the students’ learning styles.

To this end it is important that the orientation training programme makes provision for a systematic survey of the progress of the development of knowledge and the development of the affective and motivational involvement of each student. It is advisable to document the survey of cognitive and affective/motivational acquisitions also in order to achieve real continuity between the various school levels.

Also a consideration of the structural processes of decision-making and the development of the ability to consciously take decisions promotes conditions that favour the development of each student and allow him/her to start developing their own individual life project therefore making orientation something that is aimed at the appreciation of individual attitudes and interests of the students, in order for these to be fully manifested and offer real and concrete possibilities to all, to move successfully towards different subjects and to face everyday problems. The various types of learning contain formative and orientation aspects that can sustain students within their undertaking, making it effective and productive to the utmost degree.

The promotion of orientation considers the structuring of the best learning conditions in all subject matters. In other words achieving basic competences by all parties, and at the same time, in the long term, achieving the development of transverse competences understood as being the ability to call on information from various sources, the development of the ability to take conscious decisions connected to the appreciation of inclination, interests, personal aptitudes.

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