

## Educational Professions and Pedagogical Culture

### *Professioni educative e ruolo culturale della Pedagogia*

**Elsa Maria Bruni**

Associata di Pedagogia Generale e Sociale / Università "Gabriele D'Annunzio" di Chieti-Pescara

abstract

*This article explores the question of educational professions, their formation, and the role of pedagogy as a field of knowledge focusing on educational processes regarding today's subjects, seen as they are, rather than according to idealized standards.*

*Informal agencies play a significant role in the education of today's generations, hence what has come to the fore in current educational research and political debate is the will to reread education in its most authentic dimensions, considering above all the professional figures supporting education's most urgent needs. This paper encompasses the issue of defining the identity and profile of professional educators and pedagogues as well as the urgency of promoting a pedagogical culture capable of working out models while actively supporting the human formation of every citizen.*

**Keywords:** *educational professions, pedagogical culture, educational path*

Il contributo indaga il tema delle professioni educative, della loro formazione e del ruolo della pedagogia come sapere che riflette sui processi formativi degli attuali soggetti, fotografati nei loro reali tratti e non secondo parametri idealizzati. Le agenzie informali ricoprono un evidente peso nella formazione delle attuali generazioni e ciò ha messo al centro della ricerca educativa e del dibattito politico la volontà di rileggere l'educativo nelle sue dimensioni più autentiche, in modo particolare partendo dalle figure professionali di sostegno ai bisogni e alle emergenze educative. Con un'attenzione circolare, la riflessione tiene insieme sia la questione dell'identità e del profilo degli educatori professionali e dei pedagogisti sia la necessità del rilancio di una cultura pedagogica capace di decifrare e promuovere modelli e azioni di reale aiuto alla formazione umana di tutti i cittadini.

**Parole chiave:** professioni educative, cultura pedagogica, formazione

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## 1. Educational professions

Over the last decade, Italy has witnessed an increasing awareness of the problems concerning education and extra-school activities, along with those connected with the reorganization of the process of formation of educational professions. In fact, what has emerged is a distinct responsiveness towards the whole world of educational professions, whose process of institutional recognition has been, from an historical point of view, neither smooth nor easy. In this respect, it is important to consider a certain propensity to define educators and pedagogues within the sphere of personal vocation rather than as profiles to be envisaged and shaped in connection with university courses and *curricula* aimed at acquiring manifold skills that could be deployed in the growing number of educational fields. Pedagogical professions have been increasingly defined in terms of what is done *within* informal contexts of education, namely beyond the school, albeit in close interrelation with it. In particular, the ideas of lifelong learning and lifewide learning have triggered the redefinition of the roles and functions of educators while at the same time redrawing the boundaries and the standards of educational spaces, increasingly seen within the frame of a learning society (See Baldacci, Frabboni, Margiotta, 2012).

From the point of view of scientific literature in the pedagogical field, it is worth mentioning the co-authored volume eloquently entitled *Le professionalità educative. Tipologia, interpretazione e modello*, published in 2003 (Cambi, Catarsi, Colicchi, Fratini, Muzi, 2003). A decade before, in 1990, Duccio Demetrio wrote *Educatori di professione. Pedagogia e didattiche del cambiamento nei servizi extra-scolastici*. Throughout the 1990s, Paolo Orefice's research anticipated the key question of extra-school educators (1982, 1991, 1993); later, Silvana Calaprice's studies (2000, 2004, 2007) explored the meaning of social pedagogy and the question of educating educators, while Franco Frabboni (2002, 2008) and Luigi Guerra (1999, 2002) focused on the pressing issue of school teachers. In the

meantime, Piero Crispiani engaged in research projects as well as in the professional field presiding over the Federazione Italiana Pedagogisti from 2000 to 2010 and coordinating the Professions' Group in the Italian Society of Pedagogy (SiPed), along with Silvana Calaprice. In 2001, among other books, he published *Pedagogia clinica. La pedagogia sul campo, tra scienza e professioni* which testifies to his engagement in support of educators, currently more than 150.000, who have rejected their “clandestine” condition, while claiming a specific professional recognition. However, it is during the last ten years that increasing specialization and new contributions, from an international perspective as well, have enhanced research, while, most crucially, the scientific and political condition of educational professions has improved.

What stands out in the background is a changing society, undergoing a process of rapid if not violent transformation that began in the 2000s, from the point of view of education's most urgent needs in terms of support at different levels; from the point of view of the composition of populations primarily in consideration of the extraordinary migration flows; further still, from the point of view of the working world, with the reformulation of the institutional structure of both professional typologies and educational paths, as well as of the introduction of new instruments requiring innovative skills. Old and new weaknesses closely associated with a changed developmental psychology in the different moments of everybody's life, new forms of social, familial and intergenerational fragility, the urgency to building up solid social interconnections on a large scale are, broadly speaking, the revolutionary aspects of the organic structure of contemporary societies. In this respect, it is worth considering how human existence is more than ever in need of something else, how the social economy is creating new jobs, how indexes of absolute poverty are on the increase even within advanced societies such as our sand how a growing number of people are increasingly demanding social protection while family care and assistance are required (See Bertagna, 2016).

Furthermore, traditional forms are now fading away, from society and families, from time and place for formalized education to the configuration of spaces and relationships – both informal and non-formal – from a school-centred pedagogical-didactic model to the affirmation of more consistent worldviews as far as self-building processes, lifelong education and self-education are concerned. Eventually, it is worth taking into account the peculiar role of the university in instructing education professionals, a role which proves to be a crucial opportunity for promoting skilful responses to the demands of a society “of education”, that is «a society wherein educational processes have become increasingly promi-

ment, increasingly varied, increasingly determinant for inhabiting the contemporary space where innovation increasingly functions as a universal and “fundamental” rule» (Cambi, Catarsi, Colicchi, Fratini, Muzi, 2003, p. 7).

On the one hand, the teacher’s profession, whose profile and role are the most clearly defined from a traditional as well as historical perspective, has undergone a thorough revision concerning its professional status and identity, so that, above all, teachers have become aware of the role they play: they see themselves as builders of processes and paths in line with today’s real men and women. On the other hand, educators and pedagogues are still undergoing a process of specification and formal recognition of identity, which requires a delimitation of professional boundaries, along with a classification of their profession’s range of action (DDL S. n. 2443, arts. 3 and 4) and eventually, a delineation of *curricula* aimed at regulating the work that educators and pedagogues do in non-formal contexts. In other words, what is necessary is a legitimization of their work in terms of policies and practices, so as to counteract the invasion of professionals from contiguous scientific fields, who deprive educators and pedagogues of their specific range of action.

As regards teachers, an *iter* was developed: starting in 1990 (law n. 341), it set up university courses for everybody, whatever their position. Consequently, specializing schools were established (SSIS, i. e. Scuole di Specializzazione all’Insegnamento Secondario) for the years 1999-2000 together with Education Studies at university (Scienze della Formazione Primaria) aimed at teachers in nurseries and primary schools (“infanzia” and “scuola di primo grado”: see Bonetta, Luzzatto, Michelini, Pieri, 2002).

As to educators and pedagogues, despite the manifold hindrances they encountered, including long legislative and political standstills, they were accompanied by relentless research studies conducted by academic research teams focusing on theory and project-building along with actual reflection and practical work led by educators and pedagogues who in time joined professional Associations (such as ANEP, ANPE, APEI, PEDIAS, UNIPED, ANPEF, ANIPED, AIF, ANFIS, AIEJI, APP, AECO and COLAP).

In the last decade, the National research group – formerly led by Paolo Orefice and currently by Silvana Calaprice – has played a key role on multiple levels, from territorial analysis to the delineation of the entire process of formation regarding non-formal educational professions; from the critical views evidenced to the analysis of university programmes – both first (BA degree) and second level (MA degree) – across the country; and, eventually, the formulation of hypotheses of shared

programmes for the foundation phase of these figures (Orefice, Carullo, Calaprice, 2011).

The C. 2656 bill concerning the professions of educator and pedagogue (“Disciplina delle professioni di educatore e di pedagogo”) first signed by on. Vanna Iori, further filed on 7, October 2014 was a long-expected one: it regulates educational professions and aims at granting recognition to socio-educational educators and pedagogues, defining the education they require. This proposal, unified with the n. 3247 (Binetti) bill and approved by the Senate as DDL S. 2443 on 6 July 2016 recognises three professional figures: socio-pedagogical educators, socio-sanitary educators, and pedagogues.

The qualification of socio-pedagogical educator is awarded after completing a three-year programme in Education Studies (“Scienze dell’Educazione e della Formazione”, L-19), while the title of pedagogue is provided by a further two-year programme in Education Studies in LM-50 (“Programmazione e gestione dei servizi educativi”), or LM-57 (“Scienze dell’educazione degli adulti e della formazione continua”), LM-85 (“Scienze Pedagogiche”) or, finally, LM-93 (“Teorie e metodologie dell’e-learning e della media-education”).

The bill can be seen as the outcome of a joint engagement on educational professions that began a long time ago, though has only in the last few years seen interest converging in scientific and scholarly and political and parliamentary contexts, as well as in associations and the working world. Hence the awareness of the urgency to face complex issues concerning theory and practice in education, original environments of human formation and, broadly speaking, new forms and current modes of providing education. Above all, what has emerged is the pressing need to regulate, namely to “legalize” – that is, validate by law – the world of educational and pedagogical professions. Academic research, Parliamentary attention, as well as Professional Associations have brought to the fore criticisms and weaknesses due to the unclear definitions of educational professions, while dealing with the weaknesses emerging from different experiences across the country. Attention has primarily focused on university programmes (first and second level) and in particular on three-year curricula and two-year curricula in Education Studies, (L-19 and LM-50, LM-57, LM-85, LM-93 respectively).

In 2007 Franco Blezza already underlined the risk of ambiguity for pedagogical professions in the aftermath of the reform concerning university qualifications, noting that «allowing no further mediation, this reform [3 years +2 years] irrevocably aligns the *Pedagogue* with other “cousin” professions, in terms of cultural background as well: the pedagogical pro-

fession will start with a five-year programme (“Laurea Specialistica”, 3+2), like other highly-qualified ones, such as the aforesaid Doctors, Surgeons, Dental Practitioners, Veterinarians, Pharmacists, Lawyers, Accountants, Engineers and many more; whereas the *Educator* – with some specification – will start with a first level programme (namely a three-year curriculum, “Laurea Triennale”). It is no longer possible to use the term *Professional Educator*, seeing that the education and training for this profession is now chiefly provided by the Faculty of Medicine; a more appropriate name should replace it, Social Educator for instance» (Blezza, 2007, p. 41). In addition, the problem of revising former four-year programmes in *Education* and *Pedagogy* was to be dealt with; whereas, more recently, the effects of the Gelmini reform of Universities have come to the fore, together with local misinterpretations of the 2010 Bill whose important novelties have been circumvented through the disguised reinstatement of former structures of power by micro-sectors. Therefore, the possibility of offering didactical curricula aimed at meeting actual educational needs and demands of the working world has been prevented.

Unfortunately, this affects the Humanities and impinges upon the pedagogical programmes mainly included in multidisciplinary departments wherein the balance of scientific fields is fragile. Sometimes former faculties have not been directly replaced by departments whose numerical organization has rather resulted in alliances which have not proved favourable to the quality of teaching within the areas of education and pedagogy. Therefore, it is paramount to focus on the underlining question of the institutional structure of university programmes, before considering the scientific skills frame, professional identity and the specific professional skills of educators and pedagogues. In other words, an engagement within the academic world has proved capital, albeit difficult, for it is there that rooted academic framework affecting behaviour and ways of thinking resist change.

The Gelmini Reform is now seven years old and has found no real application, if we consider the dissimulations that, though consistent from the point of view of didactic programmes, they are nonetheless incoherent from the point of view of didactic regulations meeting the educational objectives only in part. More studies on academic programmes – first and second level – led by the SiPed Professions’ Group in collaboration with some professional Associations of educators and pedagogues have confirmed this situation, while foregrounding the gap between universities along with the efforts made by some of them to grant essential courses and strong curricular training as well; they have further brought to light an im-

balance that has proved disadvantageous to the pedagogical areas, in particular to the interclass courses<sup>1</sup>.

## **2. University education and pedagogical culture**

As has become evident in recent years, the educational professions have a large range of action, besides being involved in multiple informal areas (people and family, health, sport, education, social, environmental, judicial, cultural Welfare, local development and international cooperation, concerning work and culture); hence, two considerations have come to the fore, resulting, on the one hand, from the definition of university programmes for all educational figures and, on the other hand, from a wide-ranging reflection on pedagogical culture, that is on the impact of social and professional changes in pedagogy. From the point of view of an all-encompassing reasoning, anew reorganization of interpretive models is taking place, involving mankind, culture, social structures, educational dynamics in every place and time of human existence (See Ulivieri, Cambi, Orefice, 2010).

Since a university degree for educational professions is now compulsory, Universities have been at the core of an educational practice that refers to extremely complex professional skills and specializations.

The assigned task has been to regulate quality curricula aimed at the acquisition of wide-ranging and articulated skills, capable of going past the technical application of rules and knowledge, while being flexible and open to exploration in contiguous fields.

Shifting attention to the current configuration of university programmes in Pedagogical Studies, both first and second level, it becomes clear that the diversification of curricula across the country and the current restructuring of academic Departments function as a double-sided coin: while on one level they are an opportunity to provide suitable educational paths aimed at acquiring useful skills for educators and pedagogues in three-year and two-year courses respectively; on another level, they might deviate from the natural path of the objectives and aims of education, sometimes widening the gap between courses compared with the European strategic orientations, or the international guidelines of educa-

1 For a comprehensive picture of either first grade (L-19) or second grade courses (LM-50, LM-57, LM-85 and LM-93) see [www.universitaly.it](http://www.universitaly.it).

tional demand, owing to the differences in fund availability for each university.

Therefore, what emerges is a multi-layered issue, which could be analysed under multiple perspectives. As we have seen, social and cultural, as well as political and educational questions coalesce and involve a plurality of places and specific fields. In a sense, Universities are invited, and for several reasons, compelled to take charge of the imperatives proceeding from the national social system. Furthermore, it is important to note that Universities have a double responsibility, not only towards the national educational needs they are to meet, educating and training society's professionals for the manifold branches of the working world, but also because of their duty to provide education for the new "knowledge workers", that is emerging professionals in lifelong learning, now deemed a fundamental human right (See Orefice, Carullo, Calaprice, 2011)<sup>2</sup>. It is as if Universities whose aim is educating people were called on to revise their role, their architecture, their modes of providing qualified knowledge and skills. Across Europe, where different situations still persist and where, in recent years, university programmes have tended towards the unification of the programmes for professional educators, the regulation of social professions, including educators and pedagogues, has already started while university courses besides those provided by national officially accredited centres have been redefined, paying close attention to integrate theory and practice with the introduction of a training period (see Magni, 2016, pp. 12-13).

In Europe and sometimes Overseas, what underlies these reformulations of educational paths for educational professions is a shared pedagogical structure underpinning the transformation of fundamental relationships in educational processes and, broadly speaking, socio-cultural processes. For instance, the relationship between school and society has changed, the traditional parental roles as well as the idea of the teacher as conveyer of knowledge have been questioned; further, there is the traditionally lacking and problematic relationship between universities as institutions and the context surrounding them, i. e. local and socio-educational agencies, the working world, the students' real needs. As Franco Cambi pointed out, educational professions "are difficult professions nowadays" (2003, p. 43)!

2 It is important to consider the law n. 4, January, 4th 2003, which regulates the professions outside Orders or Collegia, thus establishing a connection with the European directions on education, professional work and services.

Ten years after this comment, we can confirm that if they are still problematic professions, they are more than ever indispensable for the whole social system. Likewise, it is essential to connect their education upon new skills stemming from original educational principles without relying upon artificial and merely imitative knowledge. It is imperative to build up new professional skills for «very old activities», as Luisa Santelli Beccegato would say, stressing as we do today the need of «a close and incessant dialogue between Universities and the institutions outside them» seeing that «in recent years both in school and extra-school several skills have been refined through difficult and uneven paths: projects, initiatives and innovative tensions have surfaced demanding recognition and appraisal both in terms of education in service and of basic educational paths. Universities should be able to employ in the most significant and suitable ways the available resources in a given context taking into account experiences, and organisational and teaching knowledge» (2001, pp. 1, 15). Nowadays, universities should more than ever challenge the self-referential thinking and be ready to engage for educators and pedagogues, offering suitable university programmes capable of providing the required pedagogical and cultural-didactic skills.

Moreover, it is crucial to reinterpret and re-envision the curricula structure of knowledge so as to integrate it with training and laboratory activities. The connection between the didactic-disciplinary path and practice figures as a focal point for university education, all the more for the professions under scrutiny here, with their multifaceted identity: acquiring the necessary habits and tools to cope with, interpret and respond to the educational needs of new and manifold existential conditions depends upon the balanced as well as dynamic conjunction between the two terms (i. e. theory and practice). Further still, upon the integration of the two terms depends how the professionals of education appropriate methods of study, research and analysis not only to lead change but also to produce it, thus benefiting the educating community and the subjects who belong to it (See Bruni, 2015).

In particular, training is a crucial educational process functioning as a connection between theory and practice since it allows theoretical, methodological and technical reappraisal, thus standing as an experimental space of integration between theoretical knowledge and practical methodological knowledge stemming from experience (See Laneve, 1999; Frabboni, Guerra, Lodini, 2002; Sirignano, 2003; Czerwinsky Domenis, Grassilli, 2005; Perucca, 2005, Bartolini, Riccardini, 2006, Salerni, 2007, Bastianoni, Spaggiari, 2015; Traverso, Modugno, 2015). It is no coincidence that the Italian term for training is “tirocinio”, whose etymology

refers to a soldier's first service, that is first hands-on experience, facing the reality of education while also reconstructing one's own experience. It is, to sum up, a moment of self-education.

In current configurations of academic courses, both first and second level, this activity is compulsory in the final year, that is when students are able to synthesise their itinerary and reassemble their background knowledge so as to put it to the test through their first direct experience, with the assistance of professional figures, wherever educational professions are required. In this perspective, training is a key experience for it serves as an orientation moment offering the students the opportunity to become aware of their future profession in real contexts, thanks to practical activities supervised by academic tutors in the receiving institution.

The idea of complex learning emerges as the result of a change of perspective regarding the present generations' need to know and know-how; for them, knowing how to think and especially, how to use what they have learnt according to time and context has become crucial, not only in the working field but also in the existential sphere. In this respect, the whole being is concerned, while supporting figures are involved in order to facilitate the learning experience together with its continuous revision (Striano, 2002; Bruni, 2016). From this angle, in its theoretical basis, training can be seen as mirroring the necessary dimensions of pedagogical thinking/doing; further, it mirrors the conditions characterizing pedagogical culture. The latter is inevitably rooted in a marked historical sense, as a critical reflection on education and human formation, deeply engrained in the present, albeit projected towards the future (See Genovesi, 1989). Further, as historical knowledge, conceived in and for the present, it is social knowledge that, moving from real subjects, is given back to other subjects and to their education, again in real contexts. That is why it is also a kind of knowledge that reflects along a phenomenological perspective, while shifting first and foremost towards a hermeneutical direction, ceaselessly interpreting models and contexts in order to re-envisage its practices. From a critical angle, pedagogy today is called upon to enhance human formation as a process with ever-expanding boundaries, in a period problematized by the post-modern enigma, between social control and the risk of the decline of the individual (See Luhmann, 1990; Elias, 1990; Mariani, 2003; Cambi, 2006).

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