

Chapter 11

Developing a Reflective Competence for a Master's Level Programme on E-Learning: The Leonardo Project REFLECT

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of an activity of reflection on a group of students enrolled in the Master for Intercultural Education and European dimension of distance education, who participated in the construction of the model for a “reflection participant” and a self-evaluation tool to be used for training teachers. The activity is part of the research carried out within the Leonardo da Vinci “REFLECT” - “reflective practice for training the trainers” - Reflective Practice and VET (Vocational Education and Training), aimed at the creation of a specific methodology for the implementation of reflective practices in VET contexts, so that new processes of updating and re-professionalization required by the challenges of today's society can be started. It envisaged the creation of a testing laboratory, organized within the Faculty of Education at the University of Valle d'Aosta, which brings together teaching and research functions, contemplating an experiment involving the direct training of educators and teachers and demonstrating how to make a significant change in the actors who take part in the process. The study results show that it is possible to develop, enhance and strengthen skills through reflective mode online. The study indicates in post-treatment that the impact of such differences is based on the contextual features of the training.

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1. REFLEXIVITY AND REFLECTION: SOME IMPLICATIONS

In recent years, terms like “reflection”, “reflexivity”, “critical reflection” and “critical incident” have appeared in much of the literature, to indicate above all a way of intervening in the training of teachers. The same terms have, over time taken on different meanings, migrating from one area to another, thus requiring different types of action, to such a point that it is not always possible to specify either the nature of these processes or to understand exactly what these words mean to those who use them. In addition, a substantial part of the vocabulary that revolves around reflexivity has become part of the teaching, and via translations from international literature, has found new concepts in terms which in Italian already had a precise meaning. And we know that the use of linguistic terms makes no sense unless it is placed in a rigorous context of analysis. Hence the need to bring some of these words to their respective interpretative models and forms of reflexivity employed in education, avoiding reductionism and attempting to assert their specific meanings.

The study aims at presenting a research activity adopting a precise model of reflection, developed with the help of ICT and on the possibility of its extension in the domain of management of educational processes, keeping in mind a literature aimed at developing reflective approaches both participant and on-line (Valli, 1992). This starting from the re-centering of the concepts of “experience” and “practice” as well as the re-conceptualization of the notion of “routine” (Nuzzaci, 2011a).

It is useful here to recall how reflexivity is placed in between theories of action, on the one hand, and devices from distance teacher training, on the other, proposing a different approach to professional education as a whole, at a time when the path of professionalism, while providing “structural conditions”, and presenting itself as a socially defined construct, is undergoing a

serious “stagnation” which makes the country’s increasingly mobile professional education in need of new skills. Within this framework, the reflective paradigm and the new ICT can both be considered emblems of this professionalization, conceived as the power of teachers to intervene on their work from the analysis of practices openly and consciously assumed. They should therefore be correlated with the teacher training (at all stages), without being thought of as the only carrier capable of professionalization but certainly raising the level of competence, autonomy and responsibilities. It follows that there cannot be professionalism without the ability to reflect on the action or without the introduction of technological devices which facilitate the task.

The combination of technologies-reflexivity becomes an opportunity to question the nature of professionalism, the way to exercise it and learn the skills; aimed at reaching a deeper dimensions of professional culture (structure, values, thoughts, beliefs), it expresses a certain way of being “professional educators” and promotes an equal relationship between humans, a relationship which, rejecting the economic imbalances, political, social, re-defines the problem of attitudes (related to the self, the evaluation of others, etc.), knowledge (of self and other, individual and social interaction) and skills (interpret, discover, interact) and requires a mutual recognition of cultural and professional teachers, an assumption of the perspective of others, and a knowledge of how to look at their professional tradition through the eyes of a stranger, the ability to act on their routines and learn from each other elements of the new professionalism.

The experience is translated, through online discussion, into a “changed conceptual perspective” (Mezirow, 2003), which sees the process of acquiring knowledge capable of promoting the change and growth of the educator (and his community), causing him continuous “identity crises” and the loss of dogmatic temptations.

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