Pedagogical knowledge and labour processes: alternation between school and work in Simulated Work Training (SWT)

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Contemporary pedagogical reflection can make assist in interpreting the connection between scholastic and working contexts. Its principal contribution is to underline reasons for the primacy of the person over the logic of profit, and also to promote the rediscovery of work as a typically human activity with value, functional to the achievement of a person’s life goals. Hence the idea of a curriculum based on the alternation between school and the world of work in Simulated Work Training, with reference to the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship, and contributing to the integral formation of the person.

Keywords: school, work, alternating education, simulated work training, projectuality.

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Foreword

The constant change of scenery that can nowadays be found in social, institutional, economic and cultural contexts, has had and continues to have an inevitable impact on the educational system and the structural variables that comprise it.

In the contemporary globalized scenario, which is liquid and flexible¹, and where the field of education can increasingly be reduced to the need for integration between different systems, in particular between the educational system and the world of work, the transformation of school systems has already been, for several years, a central focus for the political and social worlds of the most advanced nations, so that the effectiveness and quality of a country’s educational system have long been considered essential parameters to measure the skills of the national system as a whole.

Based on these premises, the aims of pedagogy must be connected with everyday working reality and take into account the complexity of educational variables, in order to build an educational project that fully values the experience of the subject-person.

Against this background, alternating education appears as one of the educational opportunities offered by the Italian educational and training institutions to successfully address the challenges of a continuously changing labour market.

1. **Learning by experience: what work represents for the person in Simulated Work Training**

Contemporary national and international pedagogical debate, over the last decade, has concerned the specific problem of the relationship between education and work, between knowledge and practical activity, or theory and technique. Recent strategies promoted by the European Union in the educational and training sphere commit member countries to sustain and spread research and experimentation in the methodologies of more active, engaging learning, in order to attract the young towards higher levels of instruction, and to reinforce the links between school and the world of work.

Learning by experience, which is well-established in many European countries, finds in Law n.53/2003 new pathways for interaction between school and the world of work: the possibility, that is, for students to follow the courses of the cycle, if they wish, alternating periods of study and work, both within school channels and in systems of apprenticeship and professional training.

The new frontier of alternation between school/work is found in this context. It is a didactic/training modality, which spans all learning disciplines, and consists in the realisation of pathways that are planned, activated, verified and evaluated, under the responsibility of the scholastic or training institution, on the basis of conventions stipulated with the firms [...], able to welcome the students for periods of training in working situations».

Students of fifteen years old, «unless they wish to fulfil their rights/duties with a contract for apprenticeship», may present a request to carry out the entire period of education in alternating periods of study and work, under the responsibility of the scholastic or training institution».

An innovative method is thus available now: educational alternation (sous contrat de formation, as the French say with reference to the dual system), synthetically definable as «a methodological strategy that allows the realisation of a coherent, substantial formative pathway, where formative activities in the class are integrated with those of the laboratory and of work experience carried out in the concrete reality of the firm».

This is a didactic-educational resource that accompanies the young student along a path of professional research. In its role as companion, it represents a singular form of educational opportunity, because it is based on the synergic collaboration of all the educational and social actors involved in the transitional pathway from school to work. It includes the expectations of the young,

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2 Cfr. Law 28 March 2003, n. 53 It delegates to the Government the definition of general standards of education and levels of performances in education and vocational training.
3 School-work alternation is a «training program that: strengthens school autonomy, qualifies the scholastic programme, enhances flexibility, meets the differing needs of pupils, acts, because of the strong component of orientation, as a means to combat early school leaving» (cfr. A new method of connecting school with work, online at: http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/dg-ifis/area-alternanza-scuola-lavoro, last consulted on 20/11 / 2015).
involved in their own personalised study pathways, as well as the needs of the scholastic institutions, which are defined by the Profilo Educativo Culturale e Professionale (educational and cultural profile), the Indicazioni Nazionali (national guidelines), and the Piano dell’Offerta Formativa d’Istituto (scholastic programme) and, finally, the expectations of the firms in terms of their professional needs and competencies.

The Legislative Decree of 15th April 2015, n.77 is even clearer. It was issued precisely as the enactment of the General norms on school/work alternation, under art. 4 of the law of 28th March 2003, n. 53.

The decree governs the alternation between school and work, as a means of carrying out the courses of the second cycle, both in the secondary school system and in that of instruction and professional training, to guarantee the young not only basic knowledge, but also the acquisition of knowledge that can be used in the labour market, following these premises6:

- activate flexible learning modalities that are equivalent from a cultural and educational point of view, with respect to the outcomes of the second cycle, which systematically connect classroom learning with practical experience;
- enrich the education acquired in scholastic and educational contexts with the acquisition of competencies that can be exploited in the labour market;
- favour the guidance of the young in order to empower their personal vocations, their interests and individual learning styles;
- create an organic connection between training and educational institutions and the world of work and civil society, which will allow for the active participation of subjects;
- correlate the educational programme with the cultural, social and economic development of the area.

In this sense, the alternation between school/work is based on the connection between the educational choices of the school, the professional needs of local firms, and the personal educational needs of the students.

Against this background, the new model of simulated work training, realised in the course of the experience involving numerous schools and thousands of students7, represents an opportunity to learn in a practical organisational context identical to that of a firm, thus reducing the time spent by the young person in the firm, without sacrificing the quality that the practical experience adds to the learning pathway.

Simulated Work Training is the simulated, but realistic reconstruction of a firm in its diverse departments, in its processes and activities; it takes place in a laboratory that “reproduces” a model firm that is able to supply experts/employees, also those serving management roles in the simulated firm, in order to transfer procedures and technologies; it regards a class or group of students and requires the presence of a tutor and the commitment of various teachers8.

In this regard, the project of Simulated Work Training has the aim of making the students protagonists of their own learning processes, developing an involvement and motivation on their part,  

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6 Legislative Decree. Definition of general rules on school-work, in accordance with Article 4 of Law March 2003, n. 53, April 15, 2005, n. 77, art. 2.
8 See: Project alternating training 2014/2015, the Institute of Education E. De Nicola S.G La Punta (Ct).
enabling them to freely express their own vocations, aptitudes and potentials so that they will make more conscious decisions over their future employment.

At a pedagogical level, the project aims to develop, in an innovative way, a close collaboration between the scholastic institution and one or more realities of the territory in which it operates, with the aim of activating processes of firm simulation, and facilitating the use of methodologies that belong to educational alternation.

The model on which Simulated Work Training is based permits the students to operate in the school as if they were in a firm. This occurs through the creation, within the school, of a firm-laboratory in which it is possible to represent and experience the functions of a real working context.

This laboratory is planned and realised:

• According to a rational, horizontal logic, which brings the young people into relation with other public and private subjects;

• With relation to the local reference context and that of the global market;

Naturally, to operate in a simulated context helps the young people to understand and analyse the management processes, dynamics and techniques involved in the direction of a firm. The laboratory activity favours quality of learning and the acquisition of the firm’s culture and, even if they cannot be substitutive of a period spent in a real working environment, give the participants the chance to use the competencies acquired and to verify the correspondence between the simulated model and reality.

To this end, there is a clear pedagogical necessity to open the school to real life, to make manual work an instrument for the integral and integrated development of the person; «it is understood that it is necessary to do a certain amount of work. Human beings have to live, and it is impossible to procure the resources of life without working. Even if we insist that the interests that regard earning one’s living are only material, and thus intrinsically inferior to those connected to the enjoyment of time outside work, [...] it does not follow that the kind of education which trains men for useful occupations should be neglected» 10.

In this way work is no longer considered an activity in itself, that aims to satisfy an immediate need or to acquire a social position, but assumes «an educative role insofar as it permits the harmonic and complete development of the person involved in it» 11.

In this regard, work becomes a field of education, a sphere of learning, an activity that involves not just the body but the intellect, reason and emotion: «a sphere of education and training, an opportunity for professional growth; [...] a place for significant and shared relationality» 12.

It is therefore necessary to recover the constructive dimension of work, the latter term referring to «a fundamental participatory mechanism in a society», as an activity that is born of the «pleasure to do, to learn by doing, to build as a relation between people, solidarity seen as a connective that is not just moral but also economically productive» 13.

2. Didactic planning in the activity of Simulated Work Training

11 Ivi, p. 66.
Today work assumes different qualities and meanings when compared with those of the past, it «ceases to have servile characteristics and becomes capacity for knowledge and socialization»14. From being a purely mechanical service it has been transformed into a tool of self realisation, an activity of personal and social significance.

It therefore follows that work not only permits the satisfaction of primary needs by guaranteeing an income, but it also favours the satisfaction of needs that, in Maslow's hierarchy are found on a higher level: «need for belonging, respect and realisation»15.

In this pedagogical perspective, the social and human value of work is rediscovered, in the awareness that it does not lead only to earnings, but is also a factor in the development of the personality and of social integration. It is recognised that the «preeminent characteristic of work is that it is the immediate expression of the person. The worker appeared a man to the extent that he was a worker [...] the worker expresses himself as a person through his work»16.

Thus, Simulated Work Training is one of the ways of realising alternation between school/work (and hence, of the processes of empowerment of the educative functions of work), activated through the constitution of a virtual firm animated by the students, which carries out marketing activity online (e-commerce) and depends on a real firm (tutor or model firm) which constitutes a reference point to emulate in every phase or cycle of the firm's life.

A didactic methodology is used that employs problem solving, learning by doing, cooperative learning and role playing in a natural way, constituting a valid tool for the acquisition of competencies that can be used in the labour market17. The tendency is to reproduce a simulated environment that allows the student to learn new competencies under an operative profile, reinforcing those abilities learnt during the course of studies.

The collection of simulated educational firms, connected with each other through an informatic platform, constitutes the telematic network of simulated educational firms18, supported through a national or local Centre of Simulation (SimaCenter), formed by a system that allows the virtual agency on the web to simulate all events connected to the specific areas of any entrepreneurial activity. The Simucenter permits, also, the simulated online educational firms to be connected with a virtual world, represented by the Chamber of Commerce, those who hold the Register of Businesses, the Inland Revenue, the banks and all the other simulated educational firms that interact with each other in competition, according to the degree of maturity and innovation of the product19.

In this pedagogical sense, the simulated educational firm presents itself as the most effective form of learning for those youngsters who intend to undertake an autonomous entrepreneurial path on completing their studies, creating a new commercial reality (start-up) operating through the

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channel of electronic commerce, entrusting the firm’s principal activities to subjects who specialise in web services using remote servers (cloud computing)\textsuperscript{20}.

To this end, the pathway of simulated educational firm follows six distinct phases, which are\textsuperscript{21}:

1) raise awareness and direct the student, giving him tools to explore the territory, analyse resources and relate to them in the way that most suits his own objectives and aptitudes, developing abilities in moments of enquiry, listening, analysis and comparison;

2) make the student aware of a systemic vision of civil society through the culture of the firm, so that his ethical sense of interaction with the surrounding economic context is developed, with respect for the fundamental knowledge of the concepts of the firm, of training in the firm and of the ethics of labour;

3) put the student “in a situation”, allowing him to use the theoretical knowledge learnt in formal contexts, to give space to his own creativity in choosing a model for reference in the territory and defining his own entrepreneurial idea (Business Idea), supported by a necessary feasibility analysis;

4) diversify and deepen knowledge of the territorial economic system through interaction with the subjects, by elaboration of the Business Plan, seen as a document constructed according to a precise model that synthesises contents and characteristics of the entrepreneurial project (Business Idea). It is used both for the planning and the running of the firm, and for external communication towards potential financiers and investors. In this phase the young pupil studies concepts of entrepreneurial formulae, management and financial-economic budgeting and exercises first of all in planning a single activity and, later, in programming the phases of development involved, together with the group/class, learning the techniques of team-working;

5) formation and start-up of the simulated business with respect of the existing legislation and with the support of digital infrastructure of simulation available in the territory;

6) management of the simulated educational firm, with particular attention to productive and commercial management. The significant aspects of this phase are the production and commerce of the simulated products, the creation of a “virtual shop”, seen as a shop window for display and sale of the products.

The proposed learning pathway involves the collaboration of the whole Class Committee and helps the students to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge which can be spent in various contexts of life, in education and work, as well as cognitive skills that are appropriate for solving problems, for example, knowing how to handle oneself in areas characterized by continuous innovation.

In a strictly pedagogical perspective, the path of alternating training in a simulated educational firm does not require, even though it does not exclude, practical training in companies located in the territory. Experience in firms, in fact, is practiced in the laboratory and reproduces all the aspects of a real company, with the tutoring of the model company.

At the operational level, the Headmaster identifies, for each class involved, a referent (internal tutor) who is trained to operate and interact with the Simulation Centre.

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\textsuperscript{20} Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca, Dipartimento per il sistema educativo di istruzione e formazione, Direzione generale per gli ordinamenti scolastici e la valutazione del sistema nazionale di istruzione, \textit{Attività di alternanza scuola-lavoro. Guida operativa per la scuola}, Roma 2015. p. 35-36.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ivi}, p. 37.
In this regard the tutor\textsuperscript{22}, in the planning stage of the project, presents the general guidelines for the various phases of the project to the teachers of the Class Committee. The Class Committee, finally, defines the timing and stages of realization of the pathways in alternation, according to the format proposed and described in the various Learning Units (UdA).

**Conclusions**

For some time there has been a wide-ranging and specific debate, at national and international level, concerning the qualitative features which should characterize the training of the young and the not so young.

The debate focuses on the goal of promoting \textit{education} as a fundamental category of the pedagogical tradition, because it is linked to the subject-person, and to the principle that «the West has redefined and rearticulated throughout its history, but also strengthened and enhanced as its foundation»\textsuperscript{23}.

For these reasons, a school is required that will give «greater dignity to work, making it the object of sustained thought», and workplaces where it would never be necessary to «turn the worker into an object divided into compartments, one that now works and now thinks»\textsuperscript{24}.

Work, therefore, far from being a "punishment" that one is condemned to simply by existence and one's humanity, is linked, in this view, to the development of the personality; in the sense that «the work that is required to define the concept of the new school, in the noblest sense of the word, for that very reason is distinguished from work as fatigue since it develops the personality of those who work and at the same time connects them with others; that is, it is a socializing force»\textsuperscript{25}.

It is therefore possible to qualify the manipulative processes of man through a perspective of pedagogy as a \textit{practical prescriptive-science}\textsuperscript{26}, able to requalify the value of technology and of professional action.

The school of work can, therefore, also become a school not of occupations or trades but of \textit{vocations}, a school that educates by leveraging potentials and therefore opening opportunities for development in alternation.

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Образовательная система и трудовая деятельность: альтернатива между школой и работой в процессе моделирования профессионально-ориентированных учебных центров

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Современная педагогическая рефлексия может принимать участие в интерпретации связи между схоластическими и рабочими контекстами. Идея учебного плана, основанного на чередовании между школой и миром труда, где происходит имитация инициативы и предпринимательства, вносит свой вклад в формирование целостного человека.

Ключевые слова: школа, работа, альтернативное обучение, моделируемое рабочее обучение.

Литература

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