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Preface

"*Better a well-made rather than a well-filled head*"
Michel de Montaigne

How do you measure the effectiveness of a lesson? But before that, what is meant by effectiveness when it comes to teaching? This apparently trivial question is the starting point for this volume.
Traditionally, the idea of school is associated with the idea of learning, initially just notions. The first, obvious answer to our question then is this: teaching effectiveness is measured in terms of the results achieved by the students. The interest shifts to the expected results. We take a step forward and we realise that in order to measure effectiveness, we must first ask ourselves what are the results that we expect to achieve through teaching. It soon becomes clear that the transmission of teaching based on the mere acquisition of knowledge is now wholly inadequate. The real mission of the modern school is to train young people for life, make them able to deal with situations, endow them with the necessary tools to face the future.
Considering a complete study cycle, from the primary school to university, students who graduate today began studying about twenty years ago, in an environment totally different from today. How could school prepare him to face an unknown reality? In a society of the digital revolution, characterised by continuous and fast changing environment, the school must understand the necessity to train students in the use of technologies and for new professions in order to solve the problems yet to be known. Faced with these new requirements, the school and the teachers are required first to have the ability to help young people develop the skills and expertise necessary to address the challenges of society in which they live as protagonists.
Such knowledge, accumulated for some time internationally, has resulted in the investment of substantial resources in finding new and more effective training and learning methods, with the aim of achiev-

ing a profound revision of knowledge and of the models of education and training leading to the development of a complex thought process, the only one able to deal with issues that require multidisciplinary approaches. This is what the French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin explains in the book entitled, precisely and simply, *The head well made* (whose subtitle, *Education reform and thought reform*, is emblematic and more relevant than ever in this respect). The "well-filled head" is one in which "*knowledge is accumulated and does not have a principle of selection and organization to make sense*", while in the "well-made" head there is "*a general attitude to ask and deal with the problems, organizing principles that allow to connect the pieces of knowledge and give them sense*". Therefore, the "well-made" head is capable of overcoming the separation between cultures and meet the challenges of the complexity of life in every aspect.

It had become obvious for some time that pupils are not containers to be filled with many notions disconnected between themselves: the *National Indications* of 2007 took a road that, in our country, represents the first attempt to establish a training program based on a final competence profile, featured, i.e., by the goals to be achieved. The school is understood, therefore, as the context in which the foundations for a training course are laid, able to provide the necessary tools for a lifelong learning.

The *National Guidelines* 2012 continue in this direction and consolidate the choice of an education aimed at the acquisition of skills and abilities. With this objective, the continuity and unitary feature of the curriculum are reinforced between nursery school, primary school and lower secondary school, in relation to the unity of the person and the process of learning, recognising that skills and competences are not like notions, whose acquisition can be expressed in terms of defined times, but "qualities" that mature, become finer, and are perfected if properly stimulated over time. The vision of the education commissioned by the new *National Guidelines*, under which teachers must henceforth model their activity, is centred on the skills, or rather on the skill-oriented goals. Compared to this and taking into account the results offered by the research on learning models, the pedagogical and educational action is conceived in a new way, respectful of the knowledge related to the learning environment, understood as a context of activities and situations that respects and promotes the centrality of the pupil, which processes the right learn-

ing for multiple pathways, characterised by features of inflexible and precious uniqueness. In this context, interactive forms and collaborative learning emerge, as well as laboratory methods and situations contributing to enhance the expression of their potential on the part of the pupil and to connote learning as a constructive activity. Thus, the opposite of a transmissive setting - expressly stigmatised by the *Guidelines* - to which we can no longer recognize any plausibility, although it can be challenging, for further awareness and the project work that it requires.

Based on these premises, the volume is subdivided in two parts. The **first part** presents and compares the main learning models and their use in teaching projects: learning the knowledge is, in fact, the basis on which the teacher builds and plans the classroom activities, representing an essential prerequisite for anyone who aspires to lead an effective lesson. This is an interesting and thorough *excursus*, from Piaget to Baron, from Sternberg to Gardner and his theory of "multiple intelligences", to the useful contributions of the social-cultural constructivism, to the latest contributions offered by neuroscience. Learning, as mentioned, is no longer considered a mere transmission of notions from the teacher to the learner, but it is essentially "social", taking place in a context-class in permanent contact and mediation with others. A type of learning that wants and needs to be cooperative and collaborative, as we shall see. Then there is the section dedicated to programming and evaluation (who evaluates? what is evaluated? how do you evaluate?), in which the functions of evaluation are assessed and the most effective means to put it into practice are examined.
The **second part** deals with the topic – important now, more than ever – of multidisciplinarity, crucial to understand reality in its entirety, abandoning the now dated separation between disciplines: the different ways of "teaching lessons" will be evaluated – from the frontal lesson to the participative one – and the different methods, in particular those that use new technologies. The lecture, with a long tradition, offers certain advantages when it comes, for example, to communicate a large amount of information to a large number of participants. However, when the aim is to establish an exchange, comparison, discussion, learning from each other, the lecture should be rethought, along with its limits. If the teacher can no longer be

considered as a mere transmitter of information but, instead, a "researcher" reflecting continuously on his own way of teaching, and learning to improve his profession, then he becomes the "director" of the learning process. Only in this way, the teaching-learning paradigm, from being individual, will be transformed into collaborative, where even the student will play an active and participatory role. Knowledge is a shared job: a more engaging learning is longer lasting. On this premise, we will examine the conditions of the collaborative and cooperative learning, its theories of reference, the formation of study groups and we will see how to establish that "positive interdependence", which constitutes an essential element of cooperative learning, whereby each Member of the Group perceives to be indispensable for the group itself, having a common goal to achieve with consequent positive results both in terms of motivation and commitment and in the quality of interpersonal relations.

A final **Appendix** to the text gives a short summary of the Italian institutional and educational system

General table of contents

Part One
Learning, planning and evaluation

Chapter One – Learning: Comparative theoretical models

Appendix – Basic knowledge of the Italian education system

13 - The employment relationship in Public Administration

Part One

Learning, planning and evaluation

SUMMARY

Chapter One
Learning: Comparative theoretical models

"The primary purpose of education is to enable the learner to take charge of his/her own personal construction of the meaning. Any educational event represents a shared action to seek an exchange of meanings and emotions between student and teacher. Whenever the student and the teacher are able to agree and share the meaning of a unit of knowledge, meaningful learning occurs. (…) Meaningful learning underlies the constructive integration of thoughts, feelings and actions and it leads to empowerment aimed at engendering commitment and responsibility" (J.D. Novak).

What is the learning process and how does it occur? How does the student behave when he/she learns? Learning, as we were taught by the constructivist proposal, and as we will soon examine, is not in the first instance, a solitary activity, but a social fact, as it happens in a relational context of sharing with others and their culture. It is understood that "*the teacher does not determine the learning process. Learning is an on-going process, which may use teaching as one of the many structural resources. (…) The teacher and the teaching materials become learning resources in many complex ways*" (B.M. Varisco), the teacher appears therefore as the "co-manufacturer of learning environments": he is not the one who transmits or reproduces accurate information, but he who knows how to set the basis for an interaction with the environment, the context, so that learning becomes a constructive process, contextualised and collaborative. Learning is the result of a reciprocal exchange, it does not end with the acquisition of concepts and notions that, maybe, one day may or may not be useful, but it must provide the student with the skills to "learn continuously"; constantly "learning to learn". A student who is able to organise his/her own learning, using knowledge and ability to achieve new knowledge, will also be able to connect new ideas and materials to the existing knowledge, even and especially after the school process.

That said, the school of the 21st century requires an innovative change of perspective, primarily by those who are "responsible" for the school process: namely the teachers. In order to be educators, Plato said, "*you have to love what you teach and the people whom you teach*": the educational work required now by the teacher is to train students capable of learning to operate, making them flexible and willing to accept new and stimulating *input* and information, preparing them to raise issues and problems as well as solving them. The school today has changed extensively, hand in hand with the society we live in: it is multicultural and often multilingual. Moreover, the continuous and unstoppable development of the information technologies and their increasingly easy accessibility and use helps the education itself in forming citizens able to live and work in a globalised world, which constantly changes our ways of thinking and perception.
Today, everyone has a guaranteed access to culture and learning. The "circularity" of knowledge can now be implemented and it is highly desirable. It is no longer a science or sciences reserved for experts, but one that everyone can make their own using various channels and social or aggregated contexts. Edgar Morin talks about "cognitive democracy", which according to him implies a necessary reform of thought, that is well suited to teaching, requiring necessarily the "training of the trainers" and the "self-re-education of the educators," educating the "educators to a complexity of thought", even where they find obstacles relating to preformed mental and institutional structures. The "cultural reform" advocated by Morin, wants to open the way for a knowledge which is no longer fragmented into individual disciplines, but capable of framing the knowledge and information in a common collection: "*reconcile the knowledge and discard the bridges, establish correspondences between disciplines which so far have not been communicating between them.*" In one word: multidisciplinarity. The issue of central learning has certainly influenced and still influences the design of the teaching activities: thorough and lasting learning should be the primary objective for each student, followed by the formation of intelligences able to accompany and support them in the resolution of the complex problems. Therefore, it is essential to invest in "competences": the student, through these, will be able to learn continuously throughout his/her life, acquiring responsibility and autonomy, being aware of "know-how", and organising the construction of their personal profile related to

his/her academic career. But most of all being aware that learning does not fade away after the years spent in school since it continues at every stage of life. It follows that the skills should become a fundamental heritage for all the students, not just for an elite few, allowing the circulation of knowledge previously mentioned. Competence is not just knowledge or capacity, but it requires know how to respond to complex requests, which also involves psycho-social resources to deal with the complex challenges of today's world, for successful outcome in life and social functioning, beyond that of an individual. The so-called "core competences" should stimulate and act on the internal and external resources required to address the continuous challenges of life in a constructive way.

In his *Formae Mentis Essay on the plurality of intelligence*, Howard Gardner asserts that "*a competence must imply a set of skills for solving problems (…) to create valid products and to be able to discover or create problems, from which new knowledge is acquired*". Intelligence is not innate, but gradually built, through the formulation and investigation of various areas of life. Everyone can develop the various intelligence required, as identified by Gardner, and attain a good level of competence or ability; however, in order for this to occur, one must create situations and conditions of encouragement, insistence, curiosity and creativity. Therefore, learning in a profound way is identified as one of the most important objectives that each student must achieve during the academic process, together with the development of intelligence that will guide and support him/her in solving problems.

According to new stimuli and new changes required by modern society, the school and the concept of "learning" related to it have continued to evolve over time. It is therefore appropriate to examine how psycho-pedagogical thinking in terms of learning was formed.

First of all, this thought has been developing over the last twenty years, along two axes of thought: the cognitive one and the socio-cultural constructivist one. We will address both lines of thought in our study, but we will analyse in particular the contributions of the constructivist theories that have inspired the research and experimentation in the educational and teaching field.

1.1 Learning: definition and theoretical core references

Learning, according to the definition proposed by the psychologist Ernest Hilgard, *is an intellectual process through which the individual acquires knowledge about the world that he subsequently uses to structure and guide his behaviour in the long run.*

Learning may be the result of spontaneous processes, as occurs in children, such as with language, or it can be induced and guided through outside teaching. Psychology and pedagogy are often concerned with the learning processes, producing many and different interpretational theories on learning, classified according to the great schools of psychology of the 20th century. The main theoretical cores in the research on learning are the behaviourism, the cognitivism and the constructivism.

Behaviourism is based on an association-like concept, considering learning as a result of new combinations between stimuli and behaviour in response to stimuli. In this approach there is a learning concept of summative type, which considers the subject as essentially passive. What is being learned is a copy of the presented stimulus therefore learning can be measured, on the one hand, by comparing the behaviour acquired after the learning situation to the previously presented one, and on the other hand, it can be evaluated according to the criteria of quantity and accuracy of performance.

The authors of reference of the behaviourist approach are J.B. Watson, I. Pavlov, E. Thorndike, B. Skinner.

The **cognitivist approach** moves away from the behaviourist models shifting the focus away from the concept of association to that of an active subject in working out the surrounding reality, better revealing the internal processes of preparation and representation. If in the behaviourist perspective learning is studied through the manifested behaviour and treated as a "unitary" phenomenon, in the new cognitivist perspective we notice a fragmentation of the scope of inquiry and learning is redefined in relation to the different cognitive components involved. In particular, there is a strong association between the study of learning and the study of memory, because, in order to learn, you first need to know how to encode, store, integrate and remember a set of information. So, since the information are processed first by the senses and then by memory, the projection of the training

content must take into account the need to ensure that transfer in the most efficient way possible. When such a transfer does not take place immediately, the information is lost. The quantity of information that can be stored in the memory depends on two factors:

- The attention devoted to the information by the learner;
- The presence, in the learner, of cognitive structures suitable for receiving information.

The most important authors of the cognitivist approach are C. Hull, E. Tolman, W. Kohler, K.J.W. Craick, G.A. Miller, E. Galanter, K. Pribram, U. Neisser.
The constructivists believe that in the process of learning, the student plays a central role while the designer/teacher takes on a marginal role, aimed at facilitating the completion of that process. On the basis of this approach the teacher will have to produce a teaching programme based on the learner, where the latter is an active part of the knowledge process: thus it is essential to insert considerable practical activities, structured and de-structured simulations that stimulate creativity and the formation of one's own knowledge about the subject matter of the course. The learner will acquire the information even from sharing with his colleagues involved in the formative process, leveraging the observations and knowledge of the classmates; this may contribute to the formation (construction) of a collective knowledge.
The authors of reference of the constructivist approach are L.S. Vygotskij, J. Piaget, J. Bruner, D. Merrill.

1.2 Social interaction in the learning process

The dynamic character that underlies the learning process causes social interaction to play a vital role in the process of the cognitive development.
We showed above how the concept of learning has been developing over the past twenty years, along the line of cognitive and constructivist thinking.
In the cognitive perspective, during the learning process, all the processing and reprocessing made by the subject on the acquired information are relevant. Constructivism can be considered a particular aspect of cognitivism: Jean Piaget, with his studies on the stages of cognitive development and on the importance of cognitive conflicts

for the construction-renovation of knowledge, can be considered a forerunner of constructivism. Constructivism has not stopped, however, with the theories of Piaget, but has gone beyond them thanks to the contribution of scholars such as Jerome Bruner, L.S. Vygotskij, Seymour Papert, David Jonassen.

Papert, a student of Piaget, introduced research on artificial intelligence in the late 1970s, focusing on the development of what Piaget had called "operating thought". At a time of important social and cultural transformation, Papert – thanks to the contribution of new technologies arriving from the States in those years – intended to create "gyms for thought", school environments where there would be cooperation and support of the teacher and peers. This new perspective, defined as "constructionist" by the scholar, implies sharing, negotiation, mediation by the teacher in an atmosphere of sharing and motivation. This theory is incorporated in the psycho-pedagogical perspective of "socio-cultural constructivism", which today represents the main theoretical horizon of the modern school. Socio-cultural constructivism refers to knowledge as a shared construction but subjective in interpretation, requiring a thought process which was narrative, reflective and with cognitive purpose, different from the previous "behaviourist" tendency, based on the knowledge transfer mechanism, according to a stimulus-response structure. For constructivism, knowledge is complex, relative, contextualised and subjective, constructed in a relentless exchange of trading and sharing of meanings. Knowledge is built by the subject gradually, as he tries to sort out his own experiences; it is built in the mind of the learner. Thus, learning becomes, "significant", active and collaborative.

Actually, the learning environment also takes on a new significance: it becomes a laboratory, where one can learn to integrate and interact with others, promoting cognitive processes for the solving of the problems (*problem solving*) and search for new problems to tackle and overcome (*problem finding*), in an atmosphere of creativity, discussion and exchange of views.

Jean Piaget, introducing the concept of psychological structure as a product of a slow process of construction – which happens in childhood – catches a glimpse of the consequent need for self-regulation of this process, as a result of the need to manage materials and experiences that become increasingly complex with age. The development is a gradual process, tending more and more towards

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