

Editorial

University didactics, innovation and inclusion. Assessment and feedback

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Educational research has, in recent years, explored new territories in the area of assessment, focusing its scientific attention, both theoretical and practical, on the relationship between assessment, design and learning and having, as a reference, a further triptych: the one represented by the virtuous and systemic entanglement between accountability, democracy, and equity (Ibarra-Sàiz et al., 2020). While the first triadic axis, as the specific field of inquiry of didactics experts and experimentalists in pedagogy, is now a significant group of colleagues, even in Italy, who have devoted indisputably worth studies and researches to this hermeneutic field, which also show an evident appeal and resonance even at a European level, and beyond.

The direction is towards a «holistic and transformational education », «an action-oriented, transformative pedagogy, which supports self-directed learning, participation and collaboration, problem-orientation, inter- and trans-disciplinarity and the linking of formal and informal learning» (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7).

A trans-disciplinarity that is, by now, a banner and a symbol for an increasing number of scholars, whose researches, at both a national and a European design level, are currently representing an advanced and indispensable border of cross-fertilization and interconnection between different epistemologies and speculative fields, with suggestive and prophetic operational consequences. In addition, in Italy, even the recent rules on new classes of degree are a point of no return and definitive modernization of the university system, to guide students towards a future of new professionalism and new job market and employment needs, many of which cannot still be conceived at present.

Indeed, how students learn has not only become different from the past but also in relation to a quite recent past.

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Just think of the growing, massive, and widespread advent of new technologies and media tools, such as social media, unimaginable until the end of the last century due to the vastness and to the change they have introduced in the minds and in the operativeness of the new generations. With many positive but also with some negative effects that the whole pedagogical research, not even excluding general and social research, must sort out. Nevertheless, the organization of knowledge has also equally become different since it is no longer, to this day, a single corpus already validated and defined, rather a fluid, liquid, and open “object.” That is a knowledge characterized by the presence and the frequently linear co-presence, but often to be rethought and brought back to the most remarkable practicable unity, of multiple fragments: cognitive, experiential, emotional, and aesthetic, which need to be aggregated into networks of meanings-many of them still to be intertwined, debated and written-which are built in either connoted, or describable contexts, by the recursive interaction between teachers, professors and students (Rivoltella & Rossi, 2019a; 2019b; Rossi et al., 2018).

Through a comeback to the professions of today, and above all of tomorrow, which today we sometimes hypothesize nonetheless with difficulty, but whose directions currently require, forcefully and without any further ado, figures able to deal with the unpredictability and changeability of working environments and with operational profiles, not even existing at present, but which will have to be designed and “grounded” (through the currently used and imaginative language used by the NRRP), when even not invented and filled with both meaning and contents, by the very students who are attending university (Martindale, 2017).

The relationships between experience and knowledge, as well as between theory and practice, are therefore presented as recursive, overcoming the linear and hierarchical paths of the past. The debate on university didactics is, first and foremost, the debate on didactics innovation and its binding need, on the new models of knowledge to be thought about and introduced, and on the culture of the post-digital, which is hugely changing the current ways of both being and thinking.

In this scenario, which is magmatic and constantly changing, university, our universities, and we the professors, can no longer exempt ourselves from questioning and rethinking the assessment as an essential element of the teaching action in the recurrence between design, action, and documentation (Rossi & Pentucci, 2021).

Furthermore, where the assessment, from a process for the validation of learning as “assessment of learning,” becomes, likewise, a process that can encourage and promote learning in the measure, form, and dimension of an

“assessment for learning” (Grion & Serbati, 2019) and, finally, a process of learning itself as “assessment as learning” (Winstone & Carless, 2020).

Such fundamental perspective requires, at present, a strong synergy between learning objectives, teaching approaches, and assessment strategies that are sensitive both to the opportunities and the limitations of the current situation (UNESCO, 2017, p. 51) and, at the same time, able to enhance the formative assessment (OECD CERI, 2008), to become further generative and transformative (Torrance, 2012; Popham, 2008). In addition, the active and conscious participation of the student is required within the framework of the transition from “assessment of learning” to “assessment for learning” and “assessment as learning” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 51; Sambell, McDowell, and Montgomery, 2013). Using a mix of both traditional and reflective methods, such as the “self-assessment” and the “peer-assessment,” able to lead, almost definitively, the students’ attention to processes of personal transformation and to an individual and social, communal, critical, and deep learning, as well as to the achievement of cross-cutting goals of sustainability and citizenship (UNESCO, 2017, p. 57).

An additional task and responsibility for didactics experts and experimentalists in pedagogy, as well as for pedagogists in general, is the one of opening and engaging with the complex and multifaceted world of the several and varied disciplinary didactics, to start an alliance of both work and transformation that is active and purposeful, unified, and forward-looking. It is appropriate for the university world, for its actors, and, first and foremost, for the students: the citizens and professionals of tomorrow. Therefore, for society too. In a dynamic of retroactive change, that is often “negative” according to Watzlawick (1971), or even “catastrophic” according to Thom (1985).

Hence, the pivotal role played by feedback, which, from being the natural response by the expert to the beginner, takes the shape of a circular and recursive comparison between the feedback provided by the professionals and those promoted and granted by the peers, together with self-assessment processes that make use of rubrics and portfolios, which are helpful in stimulating reflective processes (Winstone & Carless, 2019; Nicol, 2020; Boud & Dawson, 2021; Rossi et al., 2018, 2021; Giannandrea, 2009, 2019; Coggi e Ricchiardi, 2018; Laici, 2021; Laici & Pentucci, 2019; 2021).

Therefore, feedback, either from a simple “comment” by the professor as a reasonable and debated comparison on a performance or as a correction on an assignment, that is “feedback as telling” (Sadler, 2010), becomes a recursive and open process (Laici, 2021), able to engage students firsthand in further activities where they both request and provide feedback, fully understanding its meaning and, by then, able to use the information either about their work or

about their approach to learning in productive and progressive ways along time (Winstone & Carless, 2019).

Wherever changes related to the purposes of both evaluation and feedback are parallel and able to interact with those concerning educational practices, enabling the emergence of new and “different” synergies between ends and means, new strategies, and models of action.

At the same time, the reflection on the support that technologies, both old and new, can currently offer in terms of accuracy, sustainability, and timeliness, becomes parallel.

What has been stated and described so far has been duly and carefully analysed and explored during the International Conference, held on 5th-7th October 2022, as part of the 7th Week of Excellence promoted by the Department of Education, Cultural Heritage, and Tourism of the University of Macerata, within the framework of the project of excellence achieved by the latter in the 2018-2022 period. Hence the performative “words” of this editorial are also the terms and figures of the same project of excellence: innovation, internationalization, and inclusion. In favour of the university of each and every one, none excluded, modern and open to the future, supportive and democratic, as nowadays required by contemporary culture and the irrepressible, indispensable politics.

All the papers presented at the above-mentioned International Conference find their space here in the booklet as contributions aggregated into four macro-thematic areas.

The first is related to the experimental paths on **assessment** launched in **university** contexts: from the “embedded assessment” in the paper by Federica Pelizzari, Maria Cristina Garbui, and Pier Cesare Rivoltella to the “situational learning” in the one by Rosita Deluigi and Ilenia Marino; from the “gamification” with Barbara Bruschi, Manuela Repetto, and Melania Talarico; and Delio De Martino, Andrea Tinterri, and Anna Di Pace, to the “self-direction” in the paper by Franco Bochicchio, Valentina Pennazio, Samantha Armani, and Sissi Pisano, as well as **school contexts** with the reflections by Francesca Gratani, Lorenza Maria Capolla, Lorella Giannandrea, and Pier Giuseppe Rossi; and Nicola Nasi and Letizia Caronia, and also **formative** ones through the articles by Andrea Tarantino, Ezio Del Gottardo and Salvatore Patera; and, again, the one by Salvatore Patera and Ezio Del Gottardo.

A second block of contributions relates to **feedback**, with the intention of grasping and overcoming an approach to feedback considered as “feedback as telling” (Sadler, 2010), rather to progressively approach it as a recursive and open process. The articles by Marta De Angelis, Filippo Bruni, and Livia Petti; by Nadia Sansone, Iliaria Bortolotti, and Manuela Fabbri; by Gemma Carotenuto, Cristina Coppola, Michele Fiorentino, Antonella Montone, and

George Santi; and by Chiara Laici and Maila Pentucci are towards this direction.

A third thematic area relates to **digital training ecosystems to support assessment**, addressed in the articles by Francesca Crudele and Juliana Elisa Raffaghelli; Maila Pentucci, Annalina Sarra and Chiara Laici; Giovanna Cioci; Miriam Cuccu and Francesca Mondin; Antonio Marzano; Francesca Starai and Iliaria Salvadori; Filomena Faiella, Giuseppina Albano, Paola Attolino, Maria Chiara Castaldi, Marco Giordano, Maria Grazia Lombardi, Emiliana Mannese, Valentina Mascolo, Maria Ricciardi, and Giulia Savarese.

Finally, the fourth area comprises the contributions by Iliaria Ancillotti, Maria Ranieri, and Alice Roffi; Stefano Cacciamani; Emanuela Zappalà and Paola Aiello; Catia Giacconi, Noemi Del Bianco, Iliaria D'Angelo, Aldo Caldarelli, and Simone Aparecida Capellini; Ignacio Pais; and Mirca Montanari, who studied, in their systematic and multifaceted nature, **the relationships between inclusion and assessment**.

Confirming the always multi, inter and trans-disciplinary outlook of *Education Sciences & Society*, the article by Tiziana Mascia on nonfiction literature for children and adolescents in international perspective, closes this issue, as customary of this journal, in the “Alia” section.

In additions to these articles, there is also a review by Grazia Romanazzi dedicated to Pierluigi Malavasi’s intriguing and valuable volume on *PNRR e formazione. La via della transizione ecologica (NRRP and education. The way of ecological transition)* published by Vita e Pensiero in 2022.

And, now, enjoy your reading and have a good deepening of your studies.

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