

## Dialogic reading for the development of reflective thinking

### La lettura dialogata per lo sviluppo del pensiero riflessivo

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#### ABSTRACT

The contribution explores the use of dialogic reading in professional contexts. It investigates its potential and possible uses in relation to the development of reflective thinking of adults engaged in the professions. In this sense, it briefly illustrates the theoretical framework of reference, with particular regard to the construct of community of thought, a fundamental condition for the development of reflective thought with its characteristics of reciprocity, democracy and, indeed, dialogicality. It is precisely from the idea of the dialogicality of the community as logos, thought put in common – a condition for the transformation of reality and self-awareness, both in an individual and collective sense – that the hypothesis of the use of dialogical reading in professional contexts, whether ordinary, heuristic or educational, arises. For example, the community, as a group of speakers, through reflection on practices, described and noted down by professionals with special protocols, not only lays the foundations for the exchange of these practices and their improvement, but above all fosters awareness of one's own motivations, conceptions, and the values underlying one's actions, subjecting them to the critical scrutiny of thought and opening them up to third-level reflection, capable of transforming whatever is inadequate, outdated or limiting.

In the light of the same conception, the community use of the dialogical reading of theoretical texts, appropriately chosen, allows to trigger, in various forms and at various levels, a virtuous circularity between theory and praxis, capable of inspiring reflection about the conceptual generalization necessary for the true change of ideas.

In this sense, the contribution will return the results of the qualitative research *The Reflective Teacher* (Michelini M.C., 2016. *Fare Comunità di pensiero. L'insegnamento come pratica riflessiva*. FrancoAngeli) carried out with a group of preschool and primary school teachers from the Marche and Emilia Romagna regions, with the involvement of student trainees and some tutors from the CdL in Scienze della Formazione Primaria of the University of Urbino.

**Keywords:** dialogic reading, reflective thinking, community of thought

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## 1. Introduction

The exercise of the best form of thinking (Dewey, 2006, p. 61) is increasingly considered a core competence of all professions in the face of the swirling social, cultural and operational transformations. For some time we have been engaged in investigating its implications and possibilities from a pedagogical point of view, starting from a theoretical frame of reference that finds its origins in Dewey and important contributions in Schön and Mezirow. In relation to the training and development of the reflexive thinking of adults engaged in the professions, with this contribution we intend to explore the use of *dialogic reading* in professional contexts, starting from the qualitative research The reflexive teacher carried out with a group of preschool and primary school teachers in the Marche and Emilia Romagna regions, with the involvement of student trainees and some traineeship tutors from the graduate program in Primary Education Sciences at the University of Urbino. We will illustrate the concept of reflective thought upon which the research was built, with particular reference to the dialogical character of the community of thought, which we consider an essential condition for reflective thinking. We will then go on to describe its design and structure, with particular regard to the methodological dimension, dwelling specifically on *dialogic reading* used in different and articulated forms. This itinerary will allow us to explore the potentialities and possible uses of *dialogic reading* in the professional sphere, both with reference to ordinary activities and to training and heuristic activities.

### 1.1 Reflective thinking

As anticipated, we accept the view of reflective thinking provided by Dewey, who dealt with it at length in his production, defining it also as *consciously extracting the intelligent element from our experience* (1933/2006, p. 155), as well as *thinking as an art* (1933/2006, p. 155), thinking that prompts enquiry, i.e.: *active constant and diligent consideration of a belief or hypothetical form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it and the further conclusions to which it tends* (Dewey, 1933/2006, p. 68). And it is precisely the rigor of this method that makes it comparable to scientific thinking and makes it a method of intelligent learning. Schön's subsequent contribution will deepen the fruitfulness of its use in reference to adults, engaged in their professions and thus constantly called upon in the concrete circumstances of their actions, to connect knowledge and action, theory and practice, making choices in relation to purposes on the one hand and to particular instances on the other, solving problems, but also creating new forms of action and thought. Mezirow will develop the transformative profile that arises when reflective thinking reveals that the patterns and perspectives of meaning used up to that point prove to be inadequate, distorting or erroneous. In this sense, the creative dimension of the process implemented is highlighted and clarified.

In short, we can state that reflexive thinking moves in two directions that, in the wake of Dewey we consider within a unified vision of the same reality: awareness and change, or in Bruner's words (1992/2003, p. 107) *reflexivity in the strict sense* and *imagining alternatives*. In other words, we can affirm that reflexive thinking has a twofold purpose, the first is confirmatory, in the sense of the rigorous and critical reinterpretation of experience, through a logical and analytical procedure, by means of the use of the deuterotic clothes learned over time. The second is transformative (in Mezirow's sense) and, therefore, emancipative, corresponding to our incredible intellectual capacity to conceive other ways of being, of acting, of struggling. The Deweyan investigation, with its overall articulation, looks in both directions, including both the analytical and the innovative moment.

All the authors considered highlight the difficulty of the professionals observed in bringing about the change of ideas and in particular of the beliefs that constitute the consolidated premise of their work. In

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this sense, they oppose resistance to change, putting in place mechanisms of self-deception that hinder and disturb the transformation, to the point of preventing it. At the same time, there are conditions that favor it, precisely because of the specific dynamics of reflective thinking. These are: *reflective conversation with the materials of the situation*, *emancipative mirroring*, *community of thought* (Michelini, 2013; 2016). Here we will briefly focus mainly on the first two conditions and we will dwell a little more on the third, which we consider the condition of conditions.

We derive the term *reflective conversation with the materials of the situation* from Schön, who makes extensive use of it in his work on the observation of professionals engaged in problem solving. It consists in: “bringing out, critiquing, restructuring and verifying in the field, intuitive understandings of phenomena of which one has experience” (1983/1993, p. 253). The expression immediately calls into question the dialogical character of reflective thought as a conversation that allows it to flow dynamically from the concreteness of practical situations (the objects, the materials, in fact), towards thought and back again. Schön faithfully reports such conversations by restoring their character of an everyday, usual and widespread form in professional contexts.

The second condition, *emancipative mirroring*, balances the intrapersonal character of the first, with the robust input of thirdness, metaphorically represented by the intentional use of mirrors that reflect and animate reflection, showing the various aspects of the issues according to multiple points of view. It refers to the need to project the contents of the investigation onto a reflective surface, in order to subject them to the subtle art of restructuring (Watzlawick et al., 1974, p. 101) and redefine mental images, with a view to change. Mirroring is emancipative in that it is aimed at liberation, at the evolutionary development of things by overcoming the representation to which we have become accustomed.

*The community of thought* represents the condition of the conditions of reflective thought, the context in which reflective conversation and mirroring are realized in a systematic and accomplished form. In this sense it represents the synthesis of the first two, but at the same time constitutes a landing place for reflection itself, if and when it reaches qualitative levels and precise characteristics. Communities of thought are intentionally set up in order to think, they respond to a conscious choice of the constituent subjects who decide to place at the center of their reflection not action, but thought about action. They are endowed with specific requirements that make sense of this construct, both from a speculative and operational point of view.

The word *community* recalls a significant pedagogical tradition, well summarized by the Deweyan conception of a place where values are pooled (Dewey, 1916/2000) and declares a democratic and participatory position, whereby people can take full ownership of their thinking, both in a personal and professional sense, in the context of highly shared and democratic contexts that we call *community*. From a pedagogical point of view, admitting such a hypothesis means taking on the commitment to give life to *community* contexts for thinking.

### 1.1.1 Reciprocity

As a characterizing feature of the construct of communities of practice, which he has developed and implemented in many professional contexts, Wenger (1998/2006, pp. 87-102) points to mutual commitment, even before common commitment and shared repertoire. This indicates that the mutual commitment between the participants of a community, as a choice of support, of comparison, of sharing, constitutes its qualifying feature for Wenger. Within the context of Brazil's military dictatorship of the 1960s he suggests an extreme meaning of reciprocity: “this is the great humanist and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors ... handing both over to a liberating praxis”, which leads the former to liberate the latter and the latter to become in solidarity with the former (Freire, 1971, p. 49 and pp. 74-78). This is a peculiar historical invocation, but also an educational one, a choice of reciprocity is needed for the authentic emancipation of the masses from the state of oppression they were in.

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Not surprisingly, in this context, he suggests the need for a path of conscientisation, common reflection and in the assumption of a joint and mutual commitment. Applying the criterion of reciprocity to the community of thought, we can state that it is not enough to be committed to improving practices or solving problems. What is needed is a choice to make one's thoughts on action available to others, in the knowledge that the reciprocal exchange of one's thoughts is a necessary element for the development and emancipation of oneself and one's partner. Hence the choice of aggregative and organisational forms that foster relationships of reciprocity. We speak of a community of thought when those who belong to it consciously choose to be for each other an essential element of self-development, starting with the sharing of practices, the object of thought.

### 1.1.2 Democracy

Entitling the community as the condition of the best form of thinking implies the need for this reflective space to be intrinsically democratic, so that everyone can make their own contribution, freeing personal potential, to the benefit of all. In this sense, in the pedagogical field, Dewey's contribution represents the archetype of the inseparable link between education, democracy and the consequent community form in which the places of educating and thinking must be structured. The best form of thinking, the one that, moreover, ensures the most brilliant, new and productive solutions to the problems of professional contexts needs more democracy and not more enterprise, as the dominant neo-liberal paradigm would have it, which ventilates alleged competitive advantages. We are convinced that "our world demands more critical thinking and more respectful discussion", (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 176), not the other way around.

The word community, at the same time, carries with it a rhetorically positive semantic halo; it is not enough to name a context after the community, it is actually necessary to translate the choice into operational terms that decline its possibility. Wenger himself (1998/2006, p. 101) emphasized this need with regard to his construct: "I cannot emphasize enough that these interrelationships arise from commitment to practice and not from an idealized vision of what a community should be like". There is a need to think, design and implement effective and efficient forms of democratic exchange of common resources and purposes, of thoughts that are clarified and nurtured in confrontation with other members. It is necessary to identify organisational choices, tools, operational apparatuses that translate this concept into practice. From this point of view, research and experimentation are desirable, which respond to the democratic model of the community to foster the development of thought.

### 1.1.3 Reflexivity

To say that a community of thought is characterised by reflexivity might even appear tautological, the underlining is intended to highlight the reference to that peculiar type of reflexivity already mentioned in the introduction and which Schön calls reflection-on-reflection-in-action, as well as to the hypothesis of transformative learning put forward by Mezirow (1991/2003, p. 106). The latter emphasises the need for reflection on the premises and on the beliefs underlying facts and actions, going beyond the first two levels inherent to their content and process. The latter, in fact, are functional to the solution of problems and the improvement of action, exhausting their horizon within the limits and requirements of the action itself, not allowing, however, that change of ideas, that transformative learning to which we are referring.

What is needed is a kind of parenthesis of practice through the establishment of a *virtual world of practice* (Schön, 1993/1983, p. 13), in which practitioners make explicit to themselves and to others, not what they did and how, but what they thought while they acted, dialogically reconstructing their own intentions, convictions, theoretical hypotheses, beliefs. Reflection on the starting assumptions, on the epistemological, social or psychological conceptions that underlie and emerge through practical action, thus in the context of the thought/action relationship, implies a dialectical-presuppositional logic, i.e. a traversal of cognitive structures, under the guidance of the identification of assumptions and their critical evaluation,

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so that erroneous or insufficient visions underlying action can emerge. In this sense, the community of thought is marked by the dialogical character of reflection. Therefore, the thinking we are alluding to requires a community to seek to overcome the limits implicit in its actions, through the rigorous investigation of the theoretical implications, of the unexpressed references, of the convictions underlying its actions.

### 1.1.4 Dialogicality

Dialogicality in education and pedagogy has a long history. Just think, for example, of Plato who, in the *Theaetetus*, makes Socrates say when asked what he meant by “thinking”: “I mean the dialogue that the soul establishes with itself about what it is examining”. Or, again, in the *Menon*, about the question: can virtue be taught? Plato, in response, enunciates the paradox of learning, whereby one cannot learn anything, because either one already knows it, and therefore there is nothing to learn, or one does not know it, and then one cannot seek what one does not know. It follows that knowledge does not come from teaching, but from questioning, from asking questions, developing an argumentative dialogue (Pellerey, 1999, p. 188).

Vygotskij’s contribution on the relationship between thought and language highlights the dynamic that we might call generative, whereby thought goes beyond and is not fully expressed in the word but, through it, comes to light (Vygotskij, 1956, p. 161). The word, therefore, constitutes the condition without which thought, to some extent, would not exist. The external, or communicative, language, the one that most closely affects the community of thought, is the process by which thought is transformed into words, materialising and objectifying itself in them, through the extraction of meanings that drive the mediation between thought and word. Bruner (1992/2003, p. 93), on the other hand, spoke of the power of narration, one of the most widespread forms of discourse, aimed at the negotiation and renegotiation of meanings, as one of the greatest achievements of human development in an ontogenetic, cultural and phylogenetic sense.

The concepts just mentioned allow us to state that the community of thought, the condition of reflective thought, is characterised by dialogue, as the collective exercise of speech, necessary both to understand and investigate the specific problems the community is dealing with, and as access to self-consciousness. The community of thought dialogues, in various ways, both in order to extract the intelligent element from experience (Dewey, 1916/2000, p. 187), exercising, through speech, thought as *extraction*, rather than as *abstraction* (Quaglino, 2011, p. 39). At the same time, the community, as a group of speakers, through reflection on practices, becomes aware of its own motivations, conceptions, and values underlying action, opening up the possibility of change. Freire himself pointed to dialogue, nourished by critical thinking, as the tool that enables man to transform his world and himself, awakening his own creative possibilities: “Only dialogue, which involves critical thinking, is also capable of generating it. Without it there is no communication, and without communication there is no true education” (Freire, 1971, pp. 112-113).

A community that wishes to become self-aware, both in an individual and collective sense, to transform itself and reality, must engage in dialogue, pooling logos, thought and speech. As we have tried to show, dialogicality is imprinted in all conditions of reflective thinking. In the reflexive conversation with the materials of the situation, it is a dialogue between self and other than self, understood as the objects of the experience we are examining. In emancipative mirroring, the reflexive dialogue between self and ‘mirrors’ has a liberating function. The community of thought is the context in which dialogicality is made possible by the intentional animation of reflexive conversations with the materials of the situation and the dynamics of emancipative mirroring devices.

## 2. Materials and methods: research *The Reflective Teacher*

Starting from the theoretical framework to which we have referred, in the years 2013-2015 we conducted the research called *The Reflective Teacher*. The investigation involved preschool and primary school teachers, as well as students of the Primary Education Sciences degree course at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo and their internship tutors. The empirical research set itself the twofold objective of investigating the typical ways and forms of thinking of professionals in educational teaching activities and of triggering processes of change. To this end, reflexive devices were introduced and validated both of a cognitive type, corresponding to the first objective (phase 1), and of a transformative type according to the second objective (phase 2). To this end, a community of thought was implemented to concretely realise the conditions for the exercise and development of reflective thinking.

In order to promote awareness and change, qualitative research has assumed one of the criteria characterising action research: the existential involvement of the actors (Pourtois, 1986). In this sense, it is a hybrid form of qualitative research, with idiographic traits and distinctly participative characteristics. The qualitative option intentionally and convincingly corresponds to the specific object of the investigation: the thoughts of teachers engaged in the profession. The direct involvement of the actors represents an inescapable pivotal function. At the same time, the criterion of methodological rigour was pursued with regard to the procedures, investigation techniques and evaluation of the results, between objectivity of the data and intersubjectivity of the comparison. Figure 1 schematically shows the layout of the research.

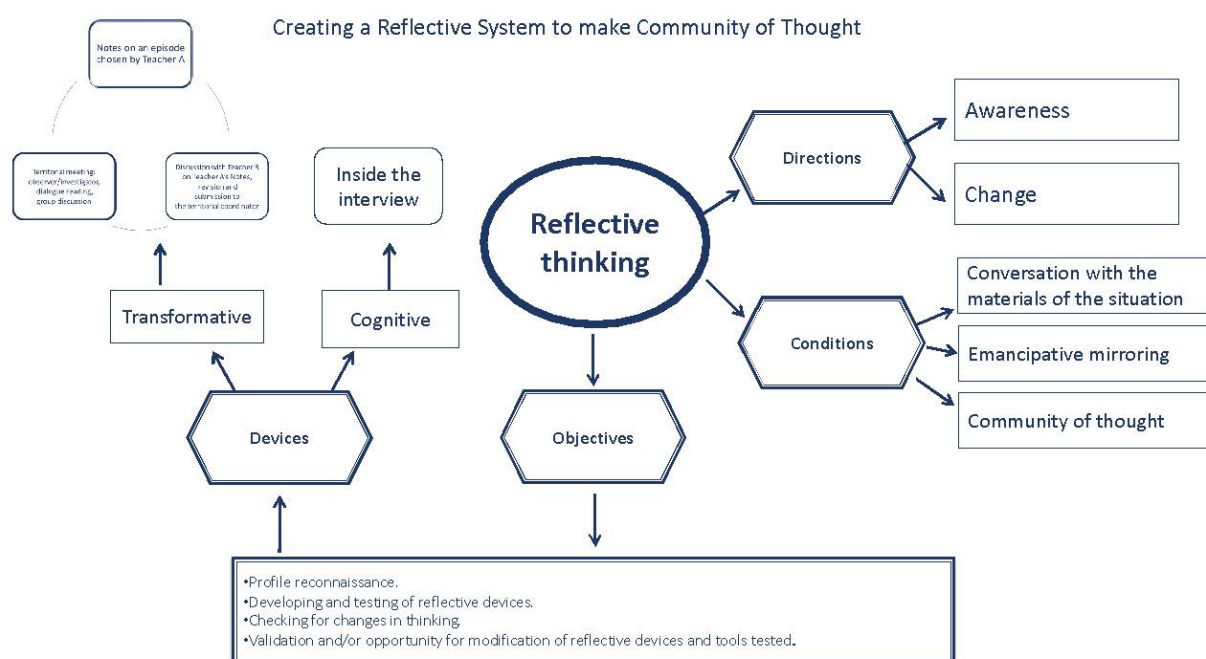


Figure 1. The research design

Throughout the process, dialogue reading was used at various times, in different ways, using different types of text. We will now try to explain its rationale and illustrate the main examples.

Let us start with the consideration that the use of dialogue reading is widespread in educational practices and in dedicated pedagogical and didactic research, especially with reference to reading aloud and text comprehension. To a lesser extent this has been the subject of use in professional contexts. In our research, we considered instead that it could be a useful strategy to create space and place where the truth of the in-

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dividual can emerge and act, to transform oneself (bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct), thus, as a technology of the self (Foucault, 2012). We have considered *dialogic reading* as a useful tool for subjecting ideas (and facts) to criticism, in the tension towards progressive improvement and the solution of concrete problems. That is, we have considered *dialogic reading* as a means of subjecting empirical experience to the Deweyan test of facts; at the same time as a reflexive means of verifying the internal coherence between theories and practices.

We considered it as a space that makes possible the logic of making sense of what is being discussed, in an integration of critical activity and argumentative rationality (Baldacci, 2012). In light of this, we used the *dialogic reading* as collaborative discourse proposed by Mezirow (2007), who traces his theory of learning back to that of Habermas and the basic distinction between instrumental learning and communicative learning. The aims of our research looked primarily at communicative learning, in which collaborative discourse is aimed at understanding and expressing the meanings of one's own and others' experience. It is about understanding what others want to say and making ourselves understood, when we try to pool our ideas through discourse. Discourse is contingent on mutual understanding of intentions and mutual recognition of constraints and frames of reference.

Collaborative discourse takes on the features of the debate and development of reasons, the examination of points of view, the critical rational analysis of assumptions, in the search for a better judgment on the justification of a belief. In this sense, it is a matter of fostering the process that brings out the implicits of action, in terms of the conceptions, premises, and frames of meaning on which statements are expressed. This process constitutes, in turn, the occasion for personal and mutual awareness, with all that follows. In this sense, Mezirow (2007) distinguishes different forms of critical reflection aimed at:

- objective recomposition, which focuses on the actual problem to be solved, on the useful actions in the instrumental action, on the reference data;
- subjective recomposition, which concerns self-reflexive criticism and implies examining the reasons from which the distorted or dysfunctional frames of reference originate, their nature and consequences. Subjective recomposition involves the critical analysis of the constitutive process of the frames of reference.

Freire also affirms the necessity of the dialogical methodology as an instrument of conscientization. In this sense he distinguishes authentic dialogue from anti-dialogue and *blah-blah-blah*, as sterile and unhinged, alienated and alienating verbiage (Freire, 1971, p. 106).

The rich array of devices and tools developed in *The Reflective Teacher* translates the above conception by activating different forms of dialogue on written texts. In some cases these were elaborated by the participants, as accounts of themselves, of their own professional history, or of individual episodes experienced; dialogues as peer-to-peer professional exchanges, in pairs or groups of teachers, on circumstances brought to collective attention by individuals. In other cases, dialogues were based on the reading of written pages by established authors. Dialogue reading was substantially used within all the cognitive and transformative devices, enhancing, in particular, the role of student observers, who were flanked by individual lecturers throughout the course. The student trainees, in fact, had to observe the paired lecturer using different protocols (e.g. lecture observation protocol and meeting observation protocol).

The written text thus produced was sent to the observed teacher. Subsequently, a reading occasion was created (with the student or with other lecturers) on that text to initiate a reflective dialogue according to the characteristics described above. We will illustrate in more detail two of these devices in which dialogue reading played a particularly important role. These are the cognitive device *Inside the interview* (first phase of the research) and the transformative device *Notes* (second phase of the research).

The device *Inside the interview* has a basically narrative and self-reflective purpose. Firstly, the teacher

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is interviewed by the paired PFS student, according to precise instructions in a place chosen by the teacher (usually at school). The interview as such was intended to allow teachers to consider their own professional experience in a novel form<sup>1</sup>.

Teachers generally consider the centre and object of professional storytelling to be the pupils, the proposed activity and not their own professional selves and ideas. The choice of this instrument was intended to somehow induce the idea of the importance of the teacher and his or her thinking with regard to usual teaching practices and one's own professional history. The interview, moreover, allows a narrative tending towards the formalisation of thought since it implies a public encounter and an external destination of what is stated. The interviewee narrates themselves for someone else who is asking them questions and who represents an external and extraneous hearer. In this case, the teacher was meeting the student interviewer for the first time. The interview was also intended to overcome a widespread teacher resistance to writing as a non-formal professional documentation. The student observers were asked to audio-record the interview, transcribe it (following precise instructions) and send it to the interviewing lecturer, as well as to the research supervisor. This allowed the teacher to read the transcript of their own words and reflect on them at a later stage. From this re-reading, each teacher was asked to choose an answer to which they wished to return to in order to better explain their intentions, to express second thoughts, etc.

In a subsequent meeting of all participating teachers, subgroups were formed on the basis of the answer chosen for the in-depth study. In them, a dialogue reading of all the answers given by the different teachers to the same question was initiated. The teachers had the opportunity to experience an emancipative mirroring on a specific question in the comparison of different answers given by teachers unrelated to their own professional experience.

In the transformative device Clipboard, the dialogue reading took place in different stages and between different subjects (Figure 2).

In the first step each teacher had to choose an episode which had happened in the classroom that had particularly affected him/her. The teacher was asked to fill in the first part of the *Notes (Appunti)* protocol (Figure 3), which was deliberately kept basic and flexible in order to facilitate writing by initiating a reflective conversation with the materials of the situation. The text was sent by Lecturer A to Lecturer B, who was unfamiliar and uninvolved in his/her own professional context. The latter had to read it and express observations, suggestions, questions. The two teachers had to discuss in their preferred way (by telephone, email or in person). Through this emancipative mirroring, teacher A was asked to produce the second part of the *Notes*, crystallizing the discussion with his/her colleague. The final product is a written text which was sent to the contact person in order to plan the territorial meeting. The *dialogic reading* on some of the *Notes* chosen takes place at several levels: with other teachers (in particular the narrator and

- 1 Questions (asked to the teacher by the SFP student) during the interview according to a well-defined procedure.
  1. Briefly describe your professional history
  2. From whom or what did you learn to teach?
  3. Where do the programming and educational projects you create originate?
  4. What gap exists between your planning and the results you get?
  5. When a situation particularly strikes you in class, what do you do?
  6. When a problem arises in class that seems impossible to solve, what do you do?
  7. When you realize you've done something wrong in your classroom activity, what do you do?
  8. To whom/what do you entrust your thoughts about class work?
  9. Tell an episode from your professional experience in which you particularly recognise yourself or which has particularly marked you.
  10. What more than anything else causes you discomfort in class work?
  11. How would you define your teaching style in three words?
  12. What words do you say most often in class?
  13. What is the most important thing you have learned in your teaching experience?
  14. What would you like to improve as a teacher?



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the investigator) and with the territorial group. Subsequently, again during the territorial meeting, the *dialogic reading* was done in subgroups, on excerpts of texts chosen by the research leader.

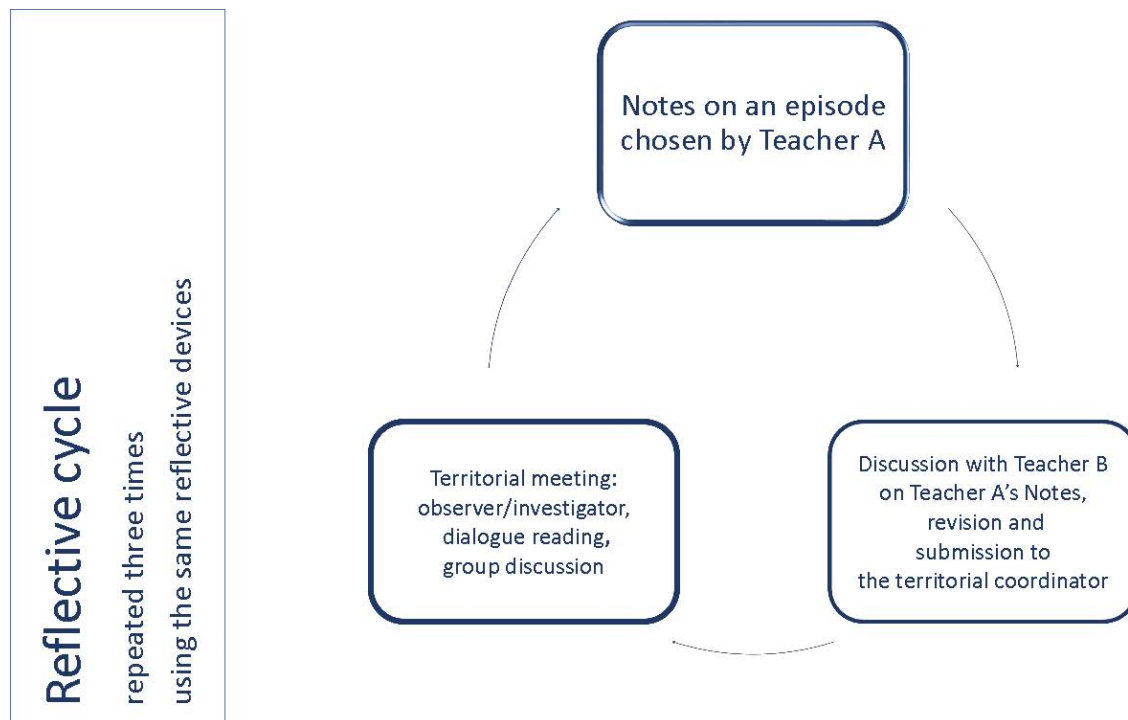


Figure 2. Reflective cycle "Appunti" (Notes)

This is in order to trigger a virtuous circularity between theory and praxis, starting from the reinterpretation of the in-depth episode in the light of theoretical texts, referable to the fact itself in the sense of conceptual generalisation. If, for example, the incident concerned relational problems and aggression between pupils, reading selected pages from Jean Piaget's *The Moral Judgement of the Child* or Gregory Bateson's *Mind and Nature* allowed the problem to be reconsidered and deepened in much more abstract and general terms than in previous activities. The bibliography used for the dialogue readings was chosen on the basis of the degree of theoretical elaboration in such a way as to shift the level of reflection on the facts, illuminating them from a different point of view.

The activity of dialogue reading, grafted into the reflective device on one's own classroom experience, responds to the need to activate a positive dynamic flow between theory and practice, also by making high-level texts more easily accessible, through reading aloud, dialogue between three, four teachers at most, the possibility of proceeding at one's own pace and everyone's contribution. At the end of the dialogued reading, the sub-groups reported their reflections on the text to the large group, referring explicitly to the content of the *Notes* examined and formulating, in relation to it, decision hypotheses concerning possible changes to be introduced in teaching practice.

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*Notes (Appunti)*  
*Teacher's reflection tool*

Of teacher \_\_\_\_\_ in service in the school Kindergarten Primary of \_\_\_\_\_  
 Class/section \_\_\_\_\_ n. student present \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_  
 Circumstance \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ duration \_\_\_\_\_

First part (individual compilation before discussion)

Today it happened that \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

It made me think \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

I aim to \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Afterwards...I realised that \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Second part (compilation after discussion with the Teacher)

The Teacher told me that \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

It made me think \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

I aim to \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 3. The Notes Protocol

### 3. Results and discussion

Overall, the use of dialogue reading in the research appeared to be a very fruitful tool both in reference to the texts produced by the teachers and in reference to the theoretical texts used in the territorial meeting envisaged in the *Appunti* device. In the first direction, in particular, we noted the generosity of the teachers in telling about themselves and their professional experience. The Interviews collected produced texts between the narrative and the colloquial, between the formal and the intimate. Explicit but above all implicit conceptions, convictions and mental habits, ways of thinking about the profession emerge from them, as does a high ethical profile of their work. The teachers experience improvement as an identity trait and as a desire, especially in view of the constant social changes and the pupils themselves. In M.'s expression, it was not a call, but a construction, the awareness of many of the participants is summarised. Professional identity is understood as the fruit of a construction, through a reworking of positive and negative experiences. A good summary of this overall attitude emerges from R.'s words: Every school day is not a work day to be fulfilled, but a life project, a work project, a personal project to be realised. This high ethical and project tension also results in expressions of great emotional involvement in work. Defeats and losses in a professional sense are recounted to highlight how one has overcome them or the desire to do so. Participants expressed appreciation of the dialogue reading both in reference to texts produced by the teachers themselves (such as the responses to the *Interview* and *Notes*) and in reference to theoretical texts. This

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was confirmed both in the comments of the student trainees and in the teachers' own statements. In particular, this emerged from the answers to the Final Questionnaire, administered to the teachers at the end of the research.

For example, to the question: Could you indicate the most important fruit of your participation in the research

“The reflective teacher”? M. replied: The revaluation of diary writing not only for initial training but also for in itinere training and, hence, the enhancement of the teacher-colleague comparison based on the same documentation. The practice of writing has been waning to the point of almost disappearing with the advent of the electronic register, which has also replaced the module diary: the only real mediating tool between teachers in a class. Pen and paper, better than the PC, give an account of current events, of life passing by, of thoughts being formed, of decisions taken and shared; and allow re-reading at any time. Another fruit: group reading of good and valid pedagogical texts as well as legislative and/or regulatory texts that, more often than not, overlook and overwhelm the teacher's work.

In M.'s words, the need for professional writing that does not remain on the level of formal fulfillment shines through. For this reason, reading and discussing with colleagues what has been written about a school experience is considered a great resource.

At the end of the research, a questionnaire was also administered to the student observers. When asked about the teachers' observed enjoyment of the devices used in the research, the students put reading and comparing with the matched teacher (B) on their own *Notes* in first place. This is followed by the reading and comparison with the area group on the *Notes* examined. Stopping on a sheet of paper a few significant hints of a professional experience, reading them and comparing *Notes* on them, seems to be a strategy that encourages reflection and the emotional distancing necessary for it. It seems to be a functional tool for awareness and change. And it is precisely reading to others that assumes a strategic value, as it favors the emergence of the implicit by opening it up to questioning.

This openness is responsible for breaking the introversive and confirmatory vicious circles found in teachers, in favor of initiating virtuous circles (Michelini, 2016). In B.'s words, this is understood as learning: *I learnt to listen more and try to understand others' motivations. A. emphasises the ability to rethink one's work from several points of view by also asking the opinion of colleagues and referring to expert texts.* Returning to the second part of M.'s words, one grasps the need to read good and valid pedagogical texts in groups. In this case, in particular, M. belongs to the group of teachers who are used to reading. Yet in the dialogue reading aloud in the small group M. detected a greater value. This was also the case for other teachers.

Certainly the task of referring the reading to the episode examined positively stimulated the theory/practice dynamic whose inadequacy the teachers had also repeatedly emphasised in the interviews. N. states: *I find comfort in the theories, in the texts: to reconnect theory with practice, because if this does not happen, practice dies of everydayness and one loses the sense of what one does.* Moreover, the dialogue itself triggered by the reading proved particularly stimulating. Indeed, it prompted a profound confrontation on everyone's beliefs, going beyond the limits of the episode under consideration. This is confirmed by the teachers' answers to the questionnaire administered one year after the end of the survey. During this period, they had received no further feedback or solicitations referable to the research.

The aim, in fact, was to ascertain whether the acquisitions made through participation in the research had been consolidated, turning into habitual ways of working. After one year, 73.4% of the participants stated that they continued to read theoretical texts regularly/occasionally, as opposed to 25.7% who stated that they never/exceptionally did so. The percentage of teachers claiming to have continued to talk to other teachers about theoretical texts regularly/occasionally drops to 57.1. The percentage of those claiming to have done so never/exceptionally rises to 42.9%. We find a similar trend with regard to the comparison on the written *Notes* with reference to an incident. Yet this had been noted by the students/observers as

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most liked. They continued to confront teachers on their *Notes* occasionally or regularly 17.1% versus never/exceptionally 82.9%. 25.7% stated that they continued to confront each other in a similar group on their own *Notes*.

At 74.3%, the percentage of those who say they have never/exceptionally done so during the year rises to 74.3%. Consequently, only 37.1 claim to have occasionally/regularly continued to review their *Notes* after comparison with others. 62.9% admit that they have never/exceptionally done so. We also asked the teachers to explain the reasons why this decline occurred. The answer given by the vast majority traces the problem back to lack of time. D. states: *It would be good to find a time just for this. Not clippings, but an exclusive time, I would say.* Others attribute the responsibility to obstacles in the ordinary context of their work (unavailable colleagues, too many classes...). Only in a few cases does reflection identify internal resistance that translates, for example, into mismanagement of time that is in any case available for discussion (such as programming hours).

## 4. Conclusions

Overall, we believe that the *dialogic reading* used within a complex and articulated reflexive system proved to be very effective. This emerges from the outcomes of the research and also transpires from many of the participants' statements. The student observers in some cases also pointed out how the awareness and change achieved translated into professional behaviour. For instance, student A. states: *The arguments brought up in the meetings provoked reactions and reflection* in R. In another example, observer E. states: *You tried to filter these arguments and bring them into the classroom. In some instances, the teacher worked to make it conceptually and visually clear, showing that she took advantage of the valuable contribution of colleagues and theoretical texts, to reduce the learning difficulties related to the difficulty in understanding the work delivery and to be a reflective teacher, always ready to question herself and her own working methods.*

This applies both to the reading of theoretical texts and to the reading of texts prepared by the teachers with reference to what happened in the classroom. The teachers we worked with activated that dialogue as critical thinking (Freire, 1971, pp. 112-113) that we consider necessary today for quality professional profiles. They exchanged deep reflections on their own conceptions and misconceptions in a participatory and reciprocal manner. In many cases they translated the change of ideas into behaviour. Nonetheless, one year after the end of the research, there was a tendency to abandon practices that the teachers themselves considered extremely useful. The research confirms, precisely, the fruitfulness and at the same time the need for accompaniment of sensitive reflective activities such as dialogue reading. There is a need to institutionalise contexts and forms of support for teachers' thinking, enhancing the potential of practices that have proved fruitful.

Even more, it is a matter of avoiding dispersing uncommon intelligence and commitment, which often implode within practices overloaded with criticality. This accompaniment must be systematic, allowing for extremely complex reflexive processes that cannot be reduced to the use of activities, however effective they may be, that can be delegated to the sole responsibility of the individual. It emerges from our work that true reflection – capable of producing awareness and a change of interpretative schemes – requires an itinerary that is not only individual, but open to confrontation. It requires a reflective system. Within this, activities such as dialogue reading constitute essential resources.

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