

A complex pedagogy: the training response for social workers

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Abstract

In the profession of the Social Worker, where social contexts and social relations are matters of work, it is necessary to argue about the value of the internship as an integral part of university training. The situated work allows to reduce the gap between theory and reality, enabling the student to effectively understand the ethical principles of the profession, the development of an intercultural communicative competence, and the implementation of reflective action. Social relationships, imbued with emotional flows, allow the development of empathy, the deconstruction of the mental constructs, with which the individual interprets the world, and the constitution of a plastic forma mentis able to interact in the perspective of mutual growth with the other. The formative response of the Social Worker, a profession in which social relations are the conditio sine qua non of the social work itself, is contained within what wants to be defined, in this paper, as pedagogy of complexity — a theoretical, practical and relational triad.

Keywords

Relations, internship, Social Work, learning, pedagogy.

Introduction

The Social Worker works in the social context and with the social context. It is a profession that embraces complexity: society. As such, it involves the continuous encounter with the other, in an interaction characterised by perpetual exchanges of meaning. In a profession where working with the person (the User) and in the field are fundamental, it is necessary to think about a training that allows the future Social Worker to enter the working world with a forma mentis already predisposed to plasticity (Ellerani, 2014).

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Specifically, the Social Worker must be able to blunt his/her own mental schemes of meaning and open himself/herself to a reflexive and intercultural perspective. This perspective allows him/her to grasp the differences as an enhancement and not as a limitation, in order to be able to authentically understand and pursue some of the main ethical principles that guide the profession: acceptance, non-judgment, self-determination of the person (Fargion, 2015). The aforementioned *forma mentis* is believed to be acquired through what in the paper is intended to be defined pedagogy of complexity, i.e., a triad between theory, practice and social relations. In this perspective, theory — theoretical learning —, needs to be accompanied by a practical contextual framework — situated learning — and such situated learning, can not escape from social relationships that, inevitably, constitute the relational daily life of each individual — and the working one, specifically, of the Social Worker (O'Connor, 2020). In order to make the argument clear, first of all, the interconnection between knowledge and contexts will be explained, underlining the value that the practical context has in filling the gap between theory and practice (Bruni, 2021). Then, Social Work will be defined as a situated work — making clear that the role of theory (including the aforementioned deontological principles), in the profession of Social Worker, is conceived in terms of guidance with respect to practice (Dal Pra Ponticelli & Pieroni, 2016). Subsequently, in order to reach the topic of interest, it will be pointed out which factors act as learning in the social context, highlighting the role of emotions and that of social relations (Immordino-Yang, 2017; O'Connor, 2020; Sicora, 2021). Social relations, characterising the working practices of the Social Worker, are fundamental to prepare the future Social Worker towards an acceptant *forma mentis*. The Social Worker works with people establishing social relationships. In fact, the future Social Worker, in order to better understand the principles regarding the person to be pursued and how to work with this person, must be able to learn how to do this in the field through the encounter with the other (Ellerani, 2014; Kapuściński, 2018).

Interconnection between knowledge and contexts

The etymology of the word pedagogy (*παιδαγωγία*) comes from the Greek and consists of the noun *παῖς*, *παιδός* evolving human subject and from the verb *ἄγω*, lead, drive. Literally, therefore, it would mean guiding — in the sense of leading towards ascension, towards a higher level — the evolving individual (Potestio, 2021). This evolving individual does not necessarily want to be identified as a child, but as a person in a broad sense. In order to give context to the image just described, pedagogy can be summarised in the transformative process that connects two subjects in a given context (*hic*) and in a certain time (*nunc*) (Potestio, 2021).

The aforementioned transformative flow, therefore, in addition to being the key to understanding the concept of pedagogy itself, was also the protagonist of an era, that

of the XX century, which challenged the idea of traditional pedagogy (Bruni, 2021). The school-centric system, which limits the learning process to the context of education — codified to specific and disciplinary knowledge — needs to be overcome if the individual wants to be able to grasp the complexity of the reality that surrounds him/her (Bruni, 2021). If already at the end of the XIX century, under the impetus of positivism, the thought of a more scientific and experimental pedagogy began to assert itself; in the XX century, the first attempts to transform «theory» into «practice» took place, forming study areas dedicated to teaching and learning (Bruni, 2021). But how does one learn?

In his text *Cognitive Psychology and its Implications*, John Anderson (2009) presents the results of sixty years of empirical-experimental research in the cognitive sciences and neuroscience, highlighting some issues inherent in the learning process — in line with what it wants to be covered in the paper (Trincherò, 2012).

Leaving aside the cognitive process of assigning meaning and related mental representation, Anderson's research emphasises that reasoning on concrete materials helps in the assignment of meaning (Trincherò, 2012). Specifically, it means that situations drawn from the real lives of learning subjects appear to act as meaning agents for abstract concepts and rules (Trincherò, 2012). Furthermore, practice makes cognitive operations automatic (Trincherò, 2012), i.e., situated action, accompanied by critical reflection of one's actions and ways of interpreting the world, allows cognitive operations to become increasingly automatic and implicit (Trincherò, 2012).

The new pedagogy, which, in the paper is defined as the complexity pedagogy, seeks to overcome the dualism between knowledge and contexts, outlining a communion between informal knowledge (driven by the daily experiential activity of the individual) and formal knowledge (belonging to various disciplines). In this way, it draws a path of construction of modus of thinking (Bruni, 2021), of attributing meanings and of acting based on the comparison-meeting-contrast between different points of view (Marescotti, 2000).

The blurring of the boundaries between formal and informal learning environments, leads towards the pedagogical principle of educational alternation, which does not intend to define itself in single teaching-learning paths such as internships, but to emphasise a broader issue: the need to alternate the polarities that constitute the human being: theory and practice, experience and reflection, work and study (Potestio, 2021).

Social Work: a situated work

In Social Work, «theory does not represent knowledge for knowledge's sake, but knowledge that orients operations» (Dal Pra Ponticelli & Pieroni, 2016), the main form of work that characterises the figure of the Social Worker. In this case, therefore, the theory is nothing more than a mental structure that allows one to understand and manage the

complexity of the reality with which the professional finds himself/herself operating (Dal Pra Ponticelli & Pieroni, 2016).

The role of theory is fundamental in order to acquire a mental model of meaning, whether it is inherent in the methodologies of the profession, the programming of intervention, as well as the structural issues of the social context and society at large; or it is inherent in the deontological code of the profession — with reference, in particular, to certain principles such as self-determination, acceptance, and non-judgment of the person (Fargion, 2015).

The first principle, the most significant of the operational principles related to the respect for the person, is intended to serve as a guideline for the future Social Worker. The entire process to be started with the User must be implemented with the person — and not for the person —, with a view to recognising the person's capacities and limits, as well as accepting his/her choices (Bonifazi & Giacconi, 2016). The above-mentioned principle, in some way, intends to deconstruct the hierarchical role «Social Worker/User», giving to the latter the possibility and the duty to play an active role in the pathway started.

The second principle, the acceptance, involves the indiscriminate acceptance of the person, regardless of his/her beliefs and actions. This does not imply the sharing of the User's choices, but abstention from judging on them (third principle) (Bonifazi & Giacconi, 2016). In any relationship in which, according to one's *forma mentis*, one comes into contact with the choices, actions and motivations of the other, one tends to think in binary terms, «right/wrong», revealing, directly or indirectly, a judgement (Bonifazi & Giacconi, 2016). If this is what happens easily in everyday life, it is more likely when, being in a different position from the User who asks for help or needs to be helped, the Social Worker finds himself/herself to establish the path to be started with the User. These boundaries — the path with the person, the non-judgement — can become blurred for the professional, when the motivations that lead to choosing this profession are «steeped in oblation behaviour» (Olivetti Manoukian, 2015), in the need to help the other. On this basis, it is easy to develop an action aimed at doing and solving, rather than understanding and analysing (Olivetti Manoukian, 2015), especially at the point of risk of not taking into account the User's point of view and wishes.

At this stage, then, it is necessary to start discussing the value of practical traineeship in Social Work training and formation. As widely discussed above, the defined theoretical principles operate as theoretical-cognitive models that permit to guide the action of the future Social Worker. But in order to better understand and implement them, it is necessary to integrate them with practice and in practice. If theory can be seen as a template, closely related to programmed knowledge — to what one knows should happen and/or have to be done —; practical training allows to enrich this orientation model through seeing, doing and saying-telling (Zanutto, 2015). In this manner, in the situated context, even the acquiring of deontological principles towards Users — which

seem to be simple to be understood — can be tested, applied and understood on the basis of what social complexity teaches.

The social context offers a plurality of different meanings that become models for individual growth and reflexivity (Olivetti Manoukian, 2015). Specifically, the context allows us to see, in different cultures, what it means to be a woman, man, mother, father, belonging to an ethnic minority and/or a certain social class; what it means to be defined as a criminal or, on the contrary, as an honest person (Olivetti, Manoukian, 2015). The family background, the educational level, the personal experiences, the cultural context determine a different scheme of interpretation of the world in each individual (Mezirow, 2003). As well as being in a situation makes it possible to perceive the plurality that characterises the social context, reducing the boundaries in the right-wrong binarism and bringing the professional closer to understanding the other and internalising the deontological principles. In doing so, the theories in action defined by Schön (1983), i.e., the frames of reference (Mezirow, 2003) are mediated by what, in this paper, are intended to be called «contextual frames», i.e., the situated learning of operative reality.

The social context is imbued with sociality and the above-mentioned situated experience is characterised by such relationships. Not only because they are an integral part of society itself, but also — and in this case especially — because they characterise the work of the Social Worker. The Social Worker works with the person, in the situation, trying to establish what in the Social Work is called the relationship of mutual trust (Fargion, 2015).

Only through social and contextual interaction, the practitioner can achieve that degree of reflexivity able to analyse the theory studied in relation to the social context; see different points of view and improve his/her work through a meta-reflexivity (Merlo, 2014).

In the deontological code of Social Work, practical traineeship represents a process type of learning in which «the characteristics of reflection and re-elaboration prevail and in which discovery and creativity are valued, and so the involvement of the student's affective, motivational and practical dimensions, in addition to the knowledge that the experimentation in the field produces» (Neve, 2013). There is absolutely no denying the complexity of this process, which is not just practice but a guided re-elaboration that becomes experience (Neve, 2013). An experience that arises, on the one hand, from the encounter between knowledge and action, in the awareness that the knowledge acquired in the classroom is not enough, but that «along with the knowledge transmitted, it is essential to draw on continuous and persistent research to refine and deepen the knowledge necessary for the exercise of the profession, especially those that are developed by learning from experience» (Olivetti Manoukian, 2015). On the other hand, experience is also developed through the re-elaboration of the emotions felt by the student in the encounter with the world of services and the profession, with the organisations and, above all, with the people with whom he/she works (Stefanini, 2013). In the encounter not abstracted from reality, but situated (Olivetti Manoukian, 2015), that is, concretely anchored to the organisation of services (Rossi-Doria, 2014) and to a territory with its multiple actors, «the

acting appears interpenetrated and accompanied by a thinking about the act [that puts] students in a position to name what they observe, to understand it and to place it in a context of meanings and interpretative codes» (Civenti et al., 2018).

Once the role of situated learning and the social context has been emphasised, it is necessary to proceed in a spiral towards the learning intended to be emphasised in this paper. This is, indeed, situated learning, but it is also determined by social relations within the social context. As previously outlined, culture, education, etc. define the meaning that is attached to something specific, but these factors are discovered because people act as intermediaries. Each individual is imbued with the culture and context to which he or she belongs, because growing up and living in a certain sociality, one acquires and structures a well-defined *forma mentis*. This internalisation takes place through what Edward Burnett Tylor (1920) would call socialisation processes. «Since the individual is an inseparable and integral part of society and since culture is the very art of society, it cannot be unlearned» (Alioto et al., 2020). People's actions are nothing more than the explanation of the acquired *mos maiorum*. In summary, returning to the main topic, what internship allows is to increase one's orientation theory, through social relations — which are situated and a source of learning (Borgna, 2017; Sicora, 2021).

Emotions and learning

The social relationships, and especially the relationships between Social Workers and Users, are full of emotions. The experiences, the sensations, the experiential story of the other allow the development of an empathy that opens the door to learning — to the acceptance of the person as he/she is; to the plasticity of the mental patterns of meaning of the Operator (Schön, 1993; Mezirow, 2003; Sicora, 2021). But what is an emotion and how can it be related to learning?

If the theoretical definition of emotion were to be used as a starting point, it would have to be pointed out that it is «an emerging process depending on the organism and the events within a given context (situationality)» (Jacomuzzi & Legrenzi, 2021). Emotions, in synthesis, are devices for active adaptation to the environment (Jacomuzzi & Legrenzi, 2021) that allow the individual to give a flexible response to surrounding events.

This leads to the question of what is meant by learning through emotions.

In the VI century, a Greek playwright named Aeschylus (525/524 BC), emphasised how «feeling» enables learning; how having feelings enables us to relate ourselves to the context, to people, as well as to the subject matter. As he wrote tragedies, he was inclined to say that knowledge can also come through suffering (*πάθει μάθος*) (Gallici et al., 2011). Leaving aside suffering and extending the argument, this is meant to be the crucial point. Whatever makes us feel an emotion is capable of teaching us something (Immordino-Yang, 2017). In such a case, the Aeschylean man, after the experience of suf-

fering, is able to discern his own mistake and reshape the future behaviour on the basis of the mistake and of the emotional experience made (Gallici et al., 2011; Immordino-Yang, 2017; O'Connor, 2020). As Immordino-Yang (2017) would say, emotions are able to guide the cognitive learning process, through an anticipatory emotional response — able to avoid the individual to run into the same mistake, applying the previous learning to the new situation (Mezirow, 2003; Trincherò, 2012; Immordino-Yang, 2017).

The profound understanding of any subject also depends on the possibility of making emotional connections between concepts (Immordino-Yang, 2017). In one study, which takes into account subjects traditionally considered not to be emotional,

[...] it has been observed that when mathematicians see an equation that they traditionally think is beautiful and well formulated, instead of ugly and poorly formulated, they activate the same sensory and emotional brain regions that are activated during experiences of perception of beauty, how to admire a picture (Immordino-Yang, 2017).

Learning through social relations

The aforementioned emotion-concepts connection, if it can be carried out with numbers, in the study of mathematics and physics, can also be carried out and is carried out unintentionally in traditionally emotional disciplines, such as those dealing with interpersonal relationships and the complexity of people — the Social Sciences.

Learning, therefore, is considered to be a dynamic and social process and emotions are fundamental to the effectiveness of this process (Immordino-Yang, 2017; Sicora, 2021).

After having specified what emotions are, what the correlation between emotions and learning is, it is then necessary, for the purposes of the discussion, to highlight the role of learning through social relations, because, on the basis of what has already been stated above, interpersonal ties are imbued with emotions and establish generative flows of learning and self-learning.

This is certainly not the most suitable context to fully explain the theories that define the causes of the onset of emotions, but the value of interpersonal bonds can be mentioned. The human being is defined as a social and emotional animal. Specifically, emotions are fundamental to start, build and change the relationship with each other (Jacomuzzi & Legrenzi, 2021). The most diverse situations, whether of separation or attachment; of competition or conflict; or of collaboration and participation generate emotions (Jacomuzzi & Legrenzi, 2021). The manifestation of these emotions can be determined by the context where they are generated. The body of an individual, therefore, is a theatre where emotions are staged and made public. Spectators are able to understand them following a process of analysis and exchange with the actor (Jacomuzzi & Legrenzi, 2021). This is the outcome of a process that is called emotional intelligence. This is the ability

to identify one's own emotions and those of others, giving them a situated meaning and being able to regulate them (Jacomuzzi & Legrenzi, 2021).

Talking about emotional intelligence in some ways implies talking about learning. Recognising the emotions of others suggests the transposition of an internal learning towards the situated reality: that is, others.

Furthermore, a recent study in Affective Neuroscience and Education, attempting to operate a crisis between Mind, Brain and Education (Immordino-Yang, 2017), underlines in effective terms what is intended to be made explicit in this paper. The neuroscientist and developmental psychologist Immordino-Yang (2017), in her book *Affective Neuroscience and Education*, reports the outcome of an interview, in which the participant is told a true story in order to induce compassion. The story describes the situation of a boy from a single-parent, single-income family in marginal economic conditions, sometimes unable to meet his basic needs. In addition to the explanation of the precarious situation, dictated by the premature death of the father and the working condition of the mother, the participant is shown a video. This includes the story of a scene that the boy's mother remembers vividly: she found a coin in the street that she used to buy a cake for her son, who had been at school all day without eating anything. The mother told how the boy, despite being hungry, offered her the cake. She, out of love for her son, said she had already eaten.

After understanding the social context of the boy in the story, as well as watching the video, the participant was asked how that situation made him feel and his response was imbued with reflective emotions.

I think this is the story that struck me the most. I'm not very good at verbalising emotions. But, um, I can almost feel the physical sensations [...]. It makes me think of my parents, because they give me so much and I don't think I thank them enough... I know I don't. I should (Immordino-Yang, 2017).

In this manner, it seems that by assessing the emotional implications of the situation narrated, the participant has reflected on and appreciated his own situation, thus constructing learning generated from previous knowledge and active accommodation of the new information that made sense of the current situation (Immordino-Yang, 2017).

Transferring the argument to the context «Social Worker/User», the above-mentioned life stories can serve as learning; or better, they can help, during the training phase and not only, they can also help the future Social Worker to interiorize the principle of acceptance and non-judgment of the person, as well as to see facets of reality and cultures otherwise unknown. This does not only depend on the contents of the dialogue. The metacommunication supporting the language allows it to communicate something more than the basic meaning of each spoken word (Anolli, 2010). Non-verbal language, therefore, has a relational function, aimed at sharing motivations, needs, desires and emotions with the interlocutor (Anolli, 2010). The tone of voice, the intensity of it, the

time of the speech, pauses, silences, facial expressions, gaze are indicators that allow to capture aspects congruent and incongruent with respect to verbal language. This helps to understand emotional and cultural aspects of the person (Anolli, 2010). As mentioned above, emotions are not only generated by the significant flows of dialogue, but are also staged by individuals. They are therefore connected to the visceral body system and manifest themselves by generating visible physical reactions. Similarly, the cultural aspects of the person, as well as being transmitted through communication, sight stories, etc., can be discerned by and in metacommunication (Anolli, 2010). Taking the example of the gaze: it generates and manages the image of the self. In North, Latin and South American cultures, holding eye contact while talking to one's interlocutor is a sign of trust, interest and sincerity (Anolli, 2010). On the contrary, in northern European and Japanese cultures, looking at someone for a long time denotes rudeness (Anolli, 2010).

On this basis, the focus here is on two issues that are considered relevant in order to better explain the aim of the paper: critical reflexivity, as a result of social and emotional interaction with the other person and situated learning through relationships.

Reflexivity implies the beginning of the practice of intentional learning, which relates the process of signification of experience and its reinterpretation of meaning (Mezirow, 2003). According to Dewey (1995), reflective thinking is «an active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or any assumed form of knowledge on the basis of the foundations that support this reflective thinking and the further conclusion to which this reflective thinking tends». Based on these assumptions, the training of the future Social Worker will focus on reflexive professionalism (Fargion, 2015). This means that the Social Worker will have to operate a theoretical reflection, depending on the peculiarities and life situations and emotions with which the Worker comes into contact (Fargion, 2015).

Reflexivity described in this way is a process of analysis of practice, capable of reconsidering visions and ways of thinking taken for granted (Fargion, 2015), which represent only one vision, one perspective of reality: one's own. According to White, Fook and Gardner (2006), this analysis is composed of four main stages:

1. a process of self-analysis with respect to the factors that govern each of us' understanding of reality: cognitive, emotional and experiential process;
2. the understanding of the connection between the aforementioned factors and the personal, cultural, social context of the person;
3. a re-examination of our visions and the meanings that each individual attributes to the reality surrounding the development of communication skills in practice;
4. the production of new interpretations of situations.

How much, then, can one learn in situation from social relations? It is worth noting again the value of practical training in a social profession, steeped in social relations, in emotions — because relationships are characterised by emotions and emotions, the more elaborated ones, imply learning moods (Jacomuzzi & Legrenzi, 2021). Emotional

intelligence makes it possible to develop empathy, which emphasises (putting oneself) in the (έν) feeling (-πάθεια); understanding the person's state of mind.

Through the emotional flow that characterises sociability one learns about the culture of others, which is acted out in context and told through communication; and consequently about the intrinsic motivations that drive people to behave in a certain way. Through social relations one learns the other. Every other subjectivity. The understanding of every other's subjectivity, is able to make one reflect on one's own subjectivity, on one's self (Kapuściński, 2018) — with a view to smoothing out the mental schemes that characterise our attribution of meaning of reality (Mezirow, 2003)

The self is not, the self is created in conversation and relationships [...].

Each of our selves is different from the others, representing an existential state that is reported. Selves emerge in communication and change according to cultural models and historical contexts (social self), personal biographies (individual self), and the people with whom we come into contact (relational self). Yet all of us, as human beings, share these selves (universal self) (Edelstein, 2003, p. 121).

Interculturality in Social Relations

A complex society and a profession that works in the front line with each and every individual in society can only require a communicative interaction open to the enrichment of one's own self and the other, at the basis of which reflexivity and emotional re-elaboration are fundamental for its success (Ellerani, 2014).

The complexity in which we live today and, therefore, the complex pedagogy that wants to be the fil rouge of the paper on the training of future social workers, includes within it the coexistence of multiple cultures. Therefore, the need for professionals to develop intercultural interaction. This implies not only the acceptance of the difference — defined by the deontological principle of the profession described above (acceptance) — but also the mutual enrichment with the other (Ellerani, 2014).

Each individual possesses symbolic devices for interpreting difference, which can be summarised in the concept of «us» — in terms of a cultural self —, which defines the in-group and in the concept of «others than us», where the motivations that generate the opposition just described are included. These devices make it possible to filter the experiences of contact and contrast with diversity, drawing bordering mental schemes (Fabietti, 2015; Alioto et al., 2020). Culture, therefore, is configured as a system composed of languages, habits, beliefs, and much more, whose traits exist in a relationship of co-variation: as one changes, the others change as well (Alioto et al., 2020). Cultures, in fact, are not products, but processes belonging to an ongoing flow of change. Why stress the flow of change of culture? Social workers, and all those who are training to become Social Workers, have chosen to work at the forefront of complexity, and in order to embrace it authentically it is necessary to change their symbolic devices, in favour of an intercultural perspective.

The intercultural perspective involves change, breaking down the boundaries of opposition «us/others than us», with a view to mutual growth (Ellerani, 2014). Specifically, interculturality is based on the hypothesis of personal and cultural relativity. Behaviour and values must be understood both in terms of the uniqueness of each person, and in terms of the culture of that individual, emphasising cultural relativity as a commitment not to prefer one *modus operandi* over another, but to consider it as an object of personal growth and learning (Ellerani, 2014; Fabietti, 2015).

The practical training, therefore, in the Social Service is a field of practice also for the application or improvement of the acquisition of the intercultural perspective — generated by the encounter with the other (Ellerani, 2014). Interculturalism always takes place in a context to be defined each time, since the relationship between the practitioner and the migrant or his/her family, between the practitioner and the culturally different user, does not fit into an aseptic context (Lorenz, 2010). On the contrary, it is embedded in situated contexts that are influenced by historical, economic and political aspects: in other words, by the «conjuncture» (Cohen-Emerique, 1993).

Thanks to the situated experience, the practitioner experiences processes of negotiation and mediation through which he/she contains the power dynamics that may occur within the relationship. This is achieved by not imposing his/her own point of view — in corrective terms — on the User and by internalising the principle of self-determination mentioned earlier, as well as acceptance of the person.

Therefore, it becomes necessary for the trainee to understand how to learn, to observe social situations and their meaning, building an independent meaning, what Gregory Bateson (1977) defines as *deutero learning*.

Conclusions

Traditional pedagogy, i.e., intended in school-centric terms — where the institution is considered the only learning environment — needs to be overcome if the individual wants to grasp the complexity of the reality around him/her (Bruni, 2021). This argument is necessary to underline the importance that the internship, therefore the situated work, has within the training of the future Social Worker. It is a profession, that of the Social Worker, in close contact with the Users, where complexity turns out to be the daily working context of the professional. It is necessary, therefore, that the preparatory training of the Social Worker is characterised by what, in this paper, wants to be defined as complex pedagogy, a triad composed by theory, practice and social relations.

As far as theory is concerned, it wants to assume, in the Social Service, an orientation framework for the activity of the profession (Dal Pra Ponticelli & Pieroni, 2016). In addition to defining methods and practices of intervention, it emphasises the deontological principles that the Social Worker must pursue during the work with the User: self-determination

of the person; non-judgment; acceptance (Fargion, 2015). These principles, theoretically, seem to be simple to understand and internalise as correct. Despite this, they can be difficult to implement in practice, when the professional, like every individual, has mental schemes of meaning — with which she/he interprets the surrounding world — determined by his/her own social context, culture of belonging, training, experiences, etc. (Mezirow, 2003) and with which it is easy to run into the determination of what is «right» and what is «wrong» (Bonifazi & Giacconi, 2016).

In this regard, situated work, i.e., the internship, could help to narrow the gap between theory and practice (Neve, 2013). It would imply the encounter between knowledge, action and the re-elaboration of the emotions experienced by the future Social Worker in the encounter with the world of services and profession, with organisations and, especially, with the people with whom the Social Worker works (Stefanini, 2013). The balance between theory and practice is not the only benefit of the internship. Through it, as mentioned above, it is possible to carry out a re-elaboration of the emotions generated in the perspective of developing a reflective capacity, that is, an «active and careful consideration of any alleged form of knowledge» (Dewey, 1995). At the same time, emotions, when they are processed, can be considered a source of learning, because they allow a connection between the individual — who feels and understands the emotion — and the context, the subject of study, the person with whom he/she converses (Immordino-Yang, 2017). Through the emotions that are generated in the situation, the future Assistant is able to give an anticipatory emotional response (Immordino-Yang, 2017) with respect to something similar that they have already seen, tried and experienced in the field.

Emotions, especially in the profession of the Social Worker — where one works in close contact with the Users — are generated, of course, by the context, but in particular by social relations (Immordino-Yang, 2017). The professional, in his/her work, needs to establish relationships of trust with the User in order to initiate the pathway between each other (Merlo, 2014). What does the future Social Worker learn, then, in the field, through interpersonal relationships?

This brings us to the third part of the above triad: social relations.

Social relations help to develop empathy and allow us to understand, through biographical stories, and not only, the experiences and actions of the User with whom the professional works (Borgna, 2017). Such understanding allows to blunt the patterns of meaning that guide the future Social Worker and help him/her towards the development of an intercultural *forma mentis*, that is open to mutual exchange and growth with the other (Ellerani, 2014). In this way, it is also possible to internalise and authentically acquire the value of the deontological principles that guide the profession: the acceptance, the non-judgment, the self-determination of the person. Meeting with the other, in the field, during the training period, can help the practitioner to understand the theory of the profession, which has an orientation value with respect to practice. It can help him/her also not to run into, once qualified to the profession, in dynamics of relational power between

Social Worker and User, at risk of detriment of the latter. Moreover, the knowledge of the practitioner will consist of different points of view and his/her mind will be predisposed to accommodate other facets of reality (Ellerani, 2014).

If the theory, therefore, is an orientative frame to the operative practice of the Social Worker, the situated context allows to learn in situation what cannot be internalised and learned from books, including the diversity of each situation, the complexity of reality in all its facets, the intercultural vision, the reflexivity. All this is discovered thanks to the other, because the social context is full of individuals interacting with each other and establishing social relations. The work of the Social Worker takes place in the context and with people (Dal Pra Ponticelli & Pieroni, 2016).

The question raised is: is there enough practical training in Social Work courses?

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