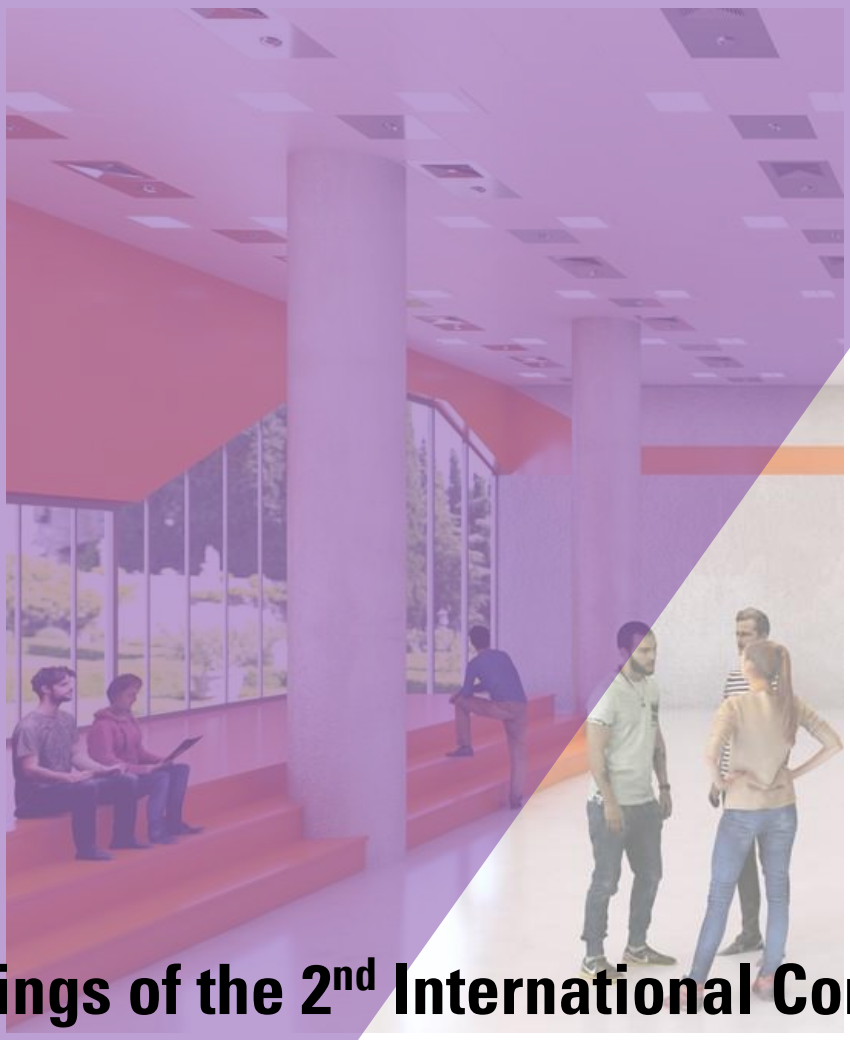

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REINVENTING EDUCATION

2-5 June 2021

VOLUME III

Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

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ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"
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Title **Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" – Reinventing Education VOLUME III Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time**

This volume contains papers presented in the 2nd International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place online on 2-5 June 2021. The Conference was devoted to the needs and prospects of Reinventing Education.

The challenges posed by the contemporary world have long required a rethinking of educational concepts, policies and practices. The question about education 'for what' as well as 'how' and 'for whom' has become unavoidable and yet it largely

remained elusive due to a tenacious attachment to the ideas and routines of the past which are now far off the radical transformations required of educational systems.

Scenarios, reflections and practices fostering the possibility of change towards the reinvention of the educational field as a driver of more general and global changes have been centerstage topics at the Conference. Multidisciplinary approach from experts from different disciplinary communities, including sociology, pedagogy, psychology, economics, architecture, political science has brought together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate constraints and opportunities for reinventing education.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and inter-disciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners' mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 800 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on research, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Space and Time
A Premise

Papers in this third volume deals with the Covid-19 pandemic which is having an enormous impact on education systems worldwide. Policy makers, teachers, school managers, parents and students have been called to the reinvent their way of 'doing school'. At the same time, the governance of the education system and schools' organizations have been exposed to unprecedented tensions.

Within a short period of time, radical changes had to be introduced, simultaneously, at various levels of the school system. At national and regional level, there has been the need to rethink the way in which teachers are recruited, engaged and managed. National assessment and evaluation systems have been suspended or redefined in their uses by school actors The ways through which institutes were managed and organized had to be rethought, passing in a very short time through an on and off of dematerialization and hyper-normativity of time and space. Within schools, managers and teachers have been called to redefine the role of digital technologies in their didactic, as well as in their relationships with families and students. In some cases, these set of changes led to experience novel and unexpected daily proximities, in other prevailed a context characterized by distance and unsatisfactory relationships. Managers and teachers have been asked to re-invent their professionality to rethink their organizational, didactic and relational competences. Students and families, on their side, have been called to rebuild and reimagine new way of being at school, re-inventing the spaces and time of schooling and the way in which they relate among each other and with teachers.

The pandemic emergency has been a lens revealing intersections and structural tensions among various level and actors of the education system, but also allowing opportunities of changes thanks to the exogenous shock. At the same time, it must be considered that the emergency is interacting on pre-existing inequalities and contradictions. The pandemic clearly revealed the deep disparities of educational opportunities associated to students' life and housing conditions, beyond their access and uses of technological devices. Remote teaching and the enactment of an 'emergency didactic' has exacerbated learning difficulties for underprivileged students (children facing material deprivation, students with migratory background, students with special needs or disable, etc.). The interaction between the pandemic and pre-existing inequalities created different contextual conditions for actors' agency, orienting toward different directions the pandemic's transformational potential.

Higher education systems have been affected too: in constant evolution due to constant transformations of society and changed functions of knowledge, universities have undergone a structural

change along with pandemic times. Simultaneously, the growing relevance of knowledge for the economic development of the capitalistic system has profoundly affected higher education systems, characterized by the neo-liberal approach which his subject of increasing critical analysis.

However, Higher education systems are starting to be affected by other somewhat inevitable changing processes due to the evolution of knowledge and the consequent forms of its transmission. These forms have to be necessarily new both because of the availability of new instruments and the increased need to develop interpretative models of a constant and often unpredictable change. In this juncture the university might assume a renewed central role. At Higher Education System level, the growing use of digital instruments is envisaged in order to cope with the rising of the management rates of the training offer as well as to answer to the growing differentiation of user categories. A feasible consequence could be the increasing of the already pressure for the differentiation among the universities, with the related social implications.

At individual university level, it is foreseeable the demand for university involvement in tackling the problems of society and the economy will increase. And this at global, national and local level. From an organizational point of view the most significant feature is represented by the accumulation of traditional and new tasks that do not seem to be possible to manage. Whatever form the higher education systems will come to take, it remains that a central point to be clarified concerns the management of change. It will be the market that will impose its rules and the universities will organize themselves individually within the invisible enclosures that will guide their policies (with predictable growing social and territorial differences), or instead the State will choose incentive policies to direct its training system. It remains that in a condition of uncertainty and constant change the university's roles multiply and become – at least potentially – more and more central. It can therefore be argued that the university is not only called upon to respond to the demands of society but by elaborating answers and solutions to the problems it progressively affects the functioning of society.

We are fully aware that each educational experience produces specific results and definitions of teaching-learning practices. The well-established model of the magister teacher, based on a one-to-many transmission of knowledge, is complemented by new configurations of teaching-learning practices. There are teaching practices that cultivate the ambition to combine the technological innovation with the psychological and pedagogical issues. Educational technologies, such as the Interactive Whiteboard, incorporate a new grammar and pragmatic in which the emphasis is placed on the

involvement and the participation of the student, as well as on a "reverse teaching", compared to the traditional one. The diffusion of online educational platforms, based on algorithmic architectures and data-driven approaches, also draws attention to a personalized way of learning and a datafication of teaching. Digital technologies are therefore stimulating a series of transformations in the socio-material order of the class affecting the spatial and temporal configuration of teaching. At the same time, they are embedded in the complexity of the educational contexts that rework their practical and symbolic value.

In the European framework of strengthening the relations between the labour market and education, we also witness the implementation of teaching practices associated with the idea of knowledge as an economic and social investment. Recently, a large field of critical investigation has highlighted how teaching aimed at improving the employment prospects of students is deeply affecting public values in education. At the same time, different points of view in the educational field claim to postpone the transmission of skills related to the labour market to broader educational objectives of social inclusion and civic participation.

The new proxemics imposed by the current pandemic challenge traditional spatial configuration, from the arrangement of desks to the mobile use of chairs, from the forms of communication in virtual environments to the interaction in the classroom. Therefore, this is to register the need to re-elaborate the ecology of the educational practices, starting from the socio-material space of learning.

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Which Trajectories to Train 'Second Level' Educational Professionals? Reflections about a University Traineeship Facing COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: *The university traineeship programme could represent a fundamental place for synthesis and composition (Galimberti et al., 2016). The Master Degree Course in Advanced Educational Sciences of Milano Bicocca University elaborated a programme meant to enhance the learning potential for students, firstly carried out in A.Y. 2015-2016 and labelled Tirocinio Formativo and di Orientamento (TFO) or Traineeship and Guidance Programme (Galimberti et al., 2015). The University traineeship programme for second level educational professionals will be presented, highlighting its pedagogical assumptions. Particularly, a specific focus will be dedicated to activities of research (Fook, 2002; Koustoulas et al., 2019) in an educational service setting with the aim to explore the educational second level professional functions being implemented there (Gambacorti-Passerini, 2019).The path, proposed for the first time in the 2015-2016 academic year, has been further refined year by year also referring to focus group discussions conducted with the students at the end of the full year of operation of the training. Important changes in the traineeship have been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic: a peculiar focus of the presentation will be also oriented to expose them and the educational reflections that justified them.*

KEYWORDS: *University traineeship, Master Degree in Advanced Educational Sciences, Second level educational professional, Didactic changes in COVID-19 pandemic, Research as training gaze.*

Introduction: working in education at a 'second level'

The paper aims to propose a specific reflection about the 'second level' educational professionals' training, with a specific focus on the changes of a University traineeship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Referring to a 'second-level' educational professional we mean a professional who is trained to act as a supervisor, trainer, evaluator, coordinator, or counsellor in the field of education, and who has therefore acquired a 'second-level' perspective on educational work.

Educational professionals working at a second level are involved in activities such as designing, managing, and evaluating educational

services in different contexts of intervention. These functions allow us to introduce the professional figure involved in education at a second level, who, in Italy, with the achievement of the Master Degree, has acquired the second level of specialist in training processes (Mancaniello, 2011).

At the legislative level, in the Italian context such a professional is defined as a 'pedagogist', including in this term the various functions he or she can perform. Within this formulation, in fact, coordination activities, complex planning, supervision, consultancy, training of educators and trainers, research can be included (Galimberti *et al.,* 2018). These activities, regardless of the specific function performed, act at a level that requires knowing how to use what has been learned in the training path to re-read and orient the practices carried out in the services, the logic that orient and build them, both referring to theories, and both knowing how to use elements and ideas coming from the educational reality. In this sense, the second-level educational professional should be characterized by an ability to signify what has been done in educational contexts, accompanying and encouraging educators to such a reflective habit and a research gaze. Developing such skills represents a challenge for university didactic because it entails a strong connections between thinking and acting (Schön, 1993), instrumental dimension and meaning making, theoretical and practical knowledge (Riva, 2011).

With respect to the normative and legislative definition, it should be noted that, both at a first and at a second level, educational professionals in Italy have long suffered from an uncertainty and non-definition that has contributed to weaken and make their professionalism little known and clear, also creating extremely precarious work situations (Perillo, 2017). Furthermore, such indeterminacy is also fueled by the complexity that distinguishes both the educational activity and its contexts of intervention and both the knowledge that should guide its action (Iori, 2018; Calaprice, 2017).

At this regard, the Italian context has seen in recent years a tiring and complex institutional path to arrive at defining professionalism in the educational field and the training that must distinguish it. This action is contained in the Iori law proposal n. 2656, and condensed in paragraphs 594-601 of art. 1 of law 205/2017.

Moreover, after about one year, the regulatory intent has further returned to integrate the provisions with respect to the training courses and areas of intervention of educational professionals, through an integration of paragraph 594 of the 2018 budget law, carried out pursuant to of the art. 1, paragraph 517 of the law of 30 December 2018, n. 145 (budget law 2019). This integrative effort underlines the intent to train 'non-improvised' educational professionals, trying to make more evident how defining educational work it's a complex effort, also with respect to its training, to the skills to be built and to the areas of intervention.

Following these trajectories, the contribution will focus now on a training proposal for 'second level' educational professionals, also thematizing the changes in it due to COVID-19 pandemic.

1. How to train 'second level' educational professionals? The traineeship programme of the Master Degree Course in Pedagogical Sciences of Milano Bicocca University

The formation of 'second level' educational professionals, therefore, basing on what we wrote before, can only be articulated in a complex experience, which tries to connect theoretical and practical instances.

Thus, on the one hand, it must be oriented to provide multidisciplinary theoretical perspectives to critically read and interpret what is happening in the world of services in the light of the changes affecting the contemporary world, identifying possible strategies for action and innovation. On the other hand, it must offer opportunities for knowledge and experimentation that put students in contact with the professional world, forcing them to enter a proactive professional dimension, in which research and the construction of their own possible professional trajectory become central.

From this point of view, the traineeship represents an extraordinary and necessary opportunity for the Master Degree Courses in charge of educating the 'second level' educational professional.

While it can connect the academic world with the world of work (Boffo, Moscati, 2015), on the other hand, it is a protected (Sandrone, 2013) and guided place for experimenting actions, skills, attitudes, looks, techniques and methods which, once practiced and acquired, will build the skills of future professionals. Furthermore, from a pedagogical point of view, the traineeship is configured as a place for learning by doing, a practice that does not involve so much being thrown into experience, but the possibility and need to 'learn from experience' (Mortari, 2003), refining those reflective skills that will allow the future professional to face complex, difficult and critical 'open minded' situations.

In order for the traineeship to actually be a bridge between the world of academic training and the professional world, capable of promoting active learning from experience, it must be designed in such a way as to promote particular teaching, of an experiential and laboratory type (Galimberti *et al.,* 2016); it also has to be effectively integrated into the curricular training activity of degree courses and, finally, it has to open to the world of work, assuming the confrontation with services and professionals as an essential element for planning and evaluating the proposed training.

The Master Degree Course in Advanced Educational Sciences of Milano Bicocca University devoted a particular focus on traineeship since its foundation in a.y. 2008-2009 and, starting from a.y. 2015-2016, it defined a traineeship path called *Tirocinio Formativo and di Orientamento* (TFO), or *Traineeship and Guidance Programme*, still in force, whose structure, pedagogical choices and the most peculiar aspects will now be highlighted.

The TFO program engages students for the period between October and June of the second year of the Degree Course, for a total of 150 hours

corresponding to 6 ECTS, divided as follows: 27 hours of classroom work with tutors, 60 hours for the field research, 43 hours of individual work, 14 hours of work on the virtual Moodle platform, 6 hours of participation in workshops. The participation of students is compulsory on all the time divisions indicated, while only for the hours in presence in the classroom with the tutor there is a 25% of the hours of absence allowed.

Students are divided into groups of about 15 members, each of whom is accompanied for the entire duration of the TFO by a reference University tutor. In particular, the main objective of the work desired by the tutors is to establish a setting characterized by high reflexivity (Scandella, 2006), paying attention to accompanying each trainee's learning both on the basis of their own experience, both on the basis of what each colleague shares within the group. What the TFO path would like to propose to students is, therefore, a tutor figure that leads to experimenting with an intentional reflection on the experience (Bastianoni, Spaggiari, 2016; Cunti, 2018), making it formative (Zannini, 2005).

The establishment of tutoring groups, instead of an individualized tutoring service, is conceived as a possibility to experience a learning environment (Contini, 2000) that stimulates a non-passive posture, not dependent on the tutor and aimed at building learning in a collaborative and cooperative way.

Between October and December, through face-to-face work at the University and with the guidance of the tutor, each group explores and analyzes the functions of second-level educational work, creating a written document that retraces what is thematized. In this way, each student can have sufficient foundations to approach the design of his/her own personal research project that will be developed in the next phase. In fact, starting from January, students will be called upon to carry out their own research project within an educational service, aimed at exploring a function of second-level educational work. In addition to the work in the classroom with the tutor, the path of each student is supported, since a.y. 2015-2016, by a virtual Moodle platform on which it is possible to intervene, ask questions, answer other people's questions, upload materials, in order to discuss other students' research projects even remotely.

Students are asked to carry out their research work by writing a report that will be delivered first to the University tutor and which, after his/her approval, will be returned to the service. This step is intended as a chance to offer to services a concrete restitution of students' work, but also to create the conditions for a formative discussion between students and professionals about the report.

In the next phase, between April and May, the TFO path includes participation in workshops conducted by professionals operating in the services, aimed at presenting and outlining further aspects of second-level educational work, strongly anchoring them to professional contexts and practices. At the end of each workshop, the group of participating

students is invited to create a shared writing that documents the work done, connecting it with the theoretical knowledge learned during the University courses addressed up to that moment.

Finally, in the last part of the internship, students are accompanied by the university tutor, during some classroom meetings, to reflect on their current professional identity. They are offered a self-assessment of their skills to identify strengths, criticalities and possible spaces for action in view of creating a personal development and professional growth project.

On the occasion of the last meeting, each student is asked to offer a return to the group and to the tutor of their training path during the TFO. This delivery is not provided exclusively in written form, but it is proposed to students to use any communicative and expressive tool to involve the group in crossing the meaning and significance that everyone has attributed to the months of work together and to their personal and professional growth.

On February 2020, the TFO traineeship was going on through the research phase in educational services when the COVID-19 pandemic appeared and caused a reconsideration of modalities and practices to continue students' training (Premoli *et al.,* 2021).

2. Facing the pandemic in March 2020: the traineeship in the first phase of emergency

In Italy, starting from the 22nd February 2020, all the didactic activities in University were stopped, including traineeship paths. In that moment, students attending TFO were focused on the research phase in educational services, that is the part of the traineeship where an immersive experience in practical contexts was particularly wished for.

In the first days, students' activities in the services were stopped, while thinking about how to let them continue their traineeship notwithstanding pandemic conditions (Bruant, Crowther, 2020).

So, initially, a hard work was conducted, mostly on a bureaucratic level, in order to understand how to authorize online working modalities. When this step was completed, the Coordination of TFO asked University tutors to undertake an arduous effort, working with students in order to re-discuss and re-define their research questions. This new definition was necessary because research questions were thought to be explored on the field and then, due to the pandemic restrictions, research questions had to assume a focus to be explored via online instruments (Hora *et al.,* 2020). Professionals of the services where students are inserted were also contacted to understand if they were able to tutor students' researches via online modalities. Where conditions for activities in smart working were not possible, a new context for students' projects was found.

Tutors started a new way to lead students' groups, working about research questions: the meetings, in fact, were not allowed to be carried

out in University, but they were scheduled on virtual platforms. The coordination of TFO devoted specific attention in taking care sf students' fragilities in using technologies and online instruments to manage meeting and training.

In this first part of dealing with emergency, the coordination of TFO acted quickly decisions, in order to allow students in going on with their traineeship, their research projects and, in the same time, creating the conditions for tutors to work with them in online modalities.

A specific focus of redefining TFO in facing the COVID-19 first emergency was oriented to workshops: previously, these appointments were organized in University or in the educational contexts but, for the edition of May 2020 they must be totally and quickly redefined through an on-line modality.

At this regard, the coordination of TFO tried to reflect about how to simplify this redefinition without losing the possibility of a learning chance for students. Following these directions, engaging tutors in sharing ideas and points of view, the coordination of TFO foresaw the organization of only 6 workshops (instead of the 25 of the previous year), giving custody of their management to professionals that are already expert in organizing online training events.

Because of the scant offer of workshops, the number of students attending was superior than 20 for each of them: in this sense, the Coordination of TFO undertook a specific reasoning about the shared writing as the final task at the end of the workshop. This writing was thought as a collaborative process for a small group of students, focused on a shared and reflexive re-elaboration of a common experience. The conditions of the 2020 edition during the pandemic didn't allow to pursue the educational objective of the shared writing, so, exceptionally, this task was removed from the path for the TFO experience in 2020.

Surely, this stole a formative step from the traineeship, but the effort of TFO coordination was oriented in maintaining the possibility of taking part in a workshop managed by educational professionals, notwithstanding the pandemic conditions.

After the workshops and the last students' meeting with tutors, the TFO edition of a.y. 2019-2020 ended, but an intense work started for thinking about the traineeship of the next year, that involved the coordination of TFO, the President of the Master Degree Course, University tutors, educational services involved in the path.

3. Projecting the traineeship for the academic year 2020-2021: working in pandemic conditions

Starting from the very beginning of September 2020, the Coordination of TFO undertook a great effort in thinking about how to manage the TFO path for the a.y. 2020-2021, because of the uncertainty due to the persistence of pandemic conditions (Gill, 2020).

A first step was dedicated to involve University tutors and professionals working in educational contexts in thinking about how to organize the training, with a particular focus on the research phase in services, considering the emergency conditions and difficulties.

First of all, the focus was on how to manage the meetings between students and University tutors. While projecting to maintain an online working modalities for students' groups with tutors all over the a.y. 2020-2021, it was decided to anticipate the first meeting in September 2020, in order to manage it in presence in University, taking advantage of the favourable ongoing of the pandemic in that period and of the fact that courses were not yet started, allowing an easier use of classrooms. This allowed the students and the tutor to know each other in presence, before starting an online modality of work due to the continuation of the pandemic during autumn and winter.

Tutors and professionals of the services involved in the path were also asked to think about how to organize workshops and the students' research projects during a year of health emergency. After an animated and interesting debate, the decision was to propose a changing in the usual time-table of the TFO, with the aim to position the research activities in the spring time, thinking this could have facilitated their management mostly on the field: so, workshops were anticipated in January 2021 and the research phase was foreseen between March and May 2021.

Soon, the projecting of workshops with educational professionals started. Thinking to propose them on January, in fact, meant to imagine an online modality for their management, due to the ongoing pandemic during autumn and winter. Involving professionals in this planning work since September 2020 allowed to foresee a substantial number of workshops, making possible the final task of the shared writing for the groups of students attending to them. In fact, finally 18 workshops were realized online in January 2021.

The research phase started on March 2021 and most of the students undertook their projects in the services, at least for a part. The online modality was used to face closures due to quarantine or restrictions in particular moments of the pandemic.

While the academic year was going on, the coordination of TFO and the group of tutor reasoned on how, in the difficult conditions that characterized the pandemic period, it was really necessary to assume a research gaze in order to question how the events were managed, the educational thinking that guide didactic choices about TFO, the effects of them on students' learning and the lived experience of this particular year, both for students, both for tutors.

A last happening confirmed these thoughts: in May 2021 the University opened the possibility to propose events in presence for small groups of students at the end of the semester. The coordination of TFO, in agreement with the President of the Master Degree, told tutors about the possibility to propose the last meeting with students in University and

not via virtual platforms. The tutors' and students' reactions were a mix between enthusiasm, happiness, relief, but also anxiety and strain.

In this sense, the possibility of returning in University for the last meeting showed how the changings and difficulties due to the pandemic were becoming habits, generating learning and routines. Assuming a research gaze was so significative to question the experience of the pandemic years, thinking about the effects of the re-organization of the traineeship and on 'how it worked' for students and tutors.

Following these directions, research actions were undertaken by the Coordination of TFO and by the tutors in order to implement a continuous thinking work on TFO to improve its proposal.

Conclusion

What is reported in this contribution was made possible by an aspect that has accompanied the research and traineeship activities since the start of the Degree Course, namely the attempt to take a research gaze on this experience by the people engaged in TFO path over the years.

The research posture as the ability to take a critical and curious gaze on the educational phenomena that is proposed to the trainees was also thought of as an attitude to be taken by the coordination group, by the tutors and by the Degree Course Delegate to traineeship activities, particularly during the facing of COVID-19 pandemic conditions.

In this way an attempt was made to keep the curiosity awake about the effects that the changing in the modalities of traineeship activities produced, even carrying out small research actions, still ongoing, to explore the experiences and perceptions of the students. By following this direction it was therefore possible to reflect about the structure of the path during pandemic conditions, about how to implement and modify its structure for the a.y. 2020-2021, with the aim of improving the proposal.

While proposing to students to undertake a research gaze in their traineeship, also the coordination of TFO and the group of tutors tried to assume a research posture which, articulated on an open and not rigidly pre-defined path, has led to reflect on the changings due to the pandemic conditions. In this sense, it allowed to consider the pandemic experience of TFO traineeship reflexively, generating thinking and new possibilities of training.

Such an attitude, proposed to all the people who over the years have alternated in the management of the TFO, proved to be a fruitful opportunity to undertake and implement a path of continuous exploration and reflection on the TFO itself, allowing to highlight some aspects that, little by little, can be further points of investigation and traces for continuing to think and search.

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