

LEARNING AS EXPERIENCE-EMBODIED. REORIENTING LEARNING PROCESSES IN THE AGE OF HUMAN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TRANSITIONS

L'APPRENDIMENTO COME ESPERIENZA-INCARNATA. RI-ORIENTARE I PROCESSI FORMATIVI NELL'EPOCA DELLE TRANSIZIONI UMANE, SOCIALI E CULTURALI



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ABSTRACT

How can teachers navigate an era of transition, where technologies, environmental crises, and social shifts redefine education? What role does lived experience play in learning today? This reflection stems from a two-year professional development programme for in-service teachers, exploring the grammars of didactic processes and the implicit dimensions of teaching professionalism. The educator is a mediator of meaning, intertwining knowledge and lived experience to foster new forms of understanding. From a phenomenological perspective, learning is not an abstract process but an embodied experience, rooted in the dynamic interplay of body, mind, and environment. Teaching thus becomes an act of co-construction, where knowledge emerges through dialogue between subjectivity and shared epistemologies. Reaffirming the centrality of experience reimagines school not only as a place of instruction but as a generative space, equipping individuals to engage meaningfully with change.

In che modo gli insegnanti possono orientarsi in un'epoca di transizione, dove tecnologie emergenti, crisi ambientali e mutamenti sociali ridefiniscono il senso dell'educazione? Quale spazio ha oggi l'esperienza vissuta nell'apprendimento? Questa riflessione nasce all'interno di un percorso formativo biennale rivolto a docenti in servizio, volto a esplorare le grammatiche dei processi didattici e gli impliciti della professionalità insegnante. L'educatore è un mediatore di significati, capace di intrecciare sapere e vissuto per generare forme nuove del sapere. L'apprendimento, seguendo uno sguardo fenomenologico, non può ridursi a un processo astratto, ma va riconosciuto come esperienza incarnata, radicata nell'interazione tra corpo, mente e ambiente. In questo scenario, la didattica si trasforma in un atto di co-costruzione, in cui il sapere prende forma nel dialogo tra soggettività ed epistemologie condivise. Restituire centralità all'esperienza significa riaffermare la scuola non solo come luogo di istruzione, ma come spazio generativo, capace di offrire strumenti per abitare con senso il cambiamento.

KEYWORDS

Learning - didactics - experience - subjectivity – phenomenology

Apprendimento – didattica - esperienza – soggettività – fenomenologia

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Introduction

The research project "Conoscere Filosofando" was conceived within the framework of the Inter-University Research Center "Laboratory of Group Analysis and Epistemology" (CIRLaGE), a joint initiative of the Universities of Bari, Verona, and Genoa. This Center, long committed to investigating the transformative potential of education and didactic innovation, has consistently distinguished itself through its capacity to intercept and interpret emerging educational needs. The approach adopted not only addresses explicit demands from educators but also seeks to uncover latent needs and unspoken formative requirements, often crucial for the evolution of pedagogical practices. The project emerged in response to a specific solicitation from a group of primary school teachers eager to explore new educational horizons by integrating philosophical knowledge into their teaching practices. "Conoscere Filosofando" was not designed as a predefined and static pathway but rather as a flexible and dynamic formative device, co-constructed in close collaboration with the teachers themselves. How can educators orient themselves in a time of transition, where emerging technologies, environmental crises, and social transformations redefine the meaning of education? What place does lived experience hold in contemporary learning processes? These questions pervade the project, which was developed within a two-year training program for in-service teachers, aimed at exploring the grammars of didactic processes and the implicit dimensions of teaching professionalism. The educator is thus conceived as a mediator of meaning, capable of weaving together knowledge and lived experience to generate new forms of understanding. Launched in 2021, the project remains ongoing, continually evolving through significant feedback that has enabled its constant redefinition. One of the most significant insights gained was the realization that the formal request for tools to introduce philosophy into primary education reflected a deeper, implicit need: the need to develop an epistemological posture of inquiry capable of refining critical reflection on the educational role. The project's aim was not merely to implement new didactic tools, but to foster the creation of learning environments where the educational relationship itself assumes foundational significance, transcending rigidly disciplinary and technicist frameworks. This paper aims to provide an overview of the two principal axes along which the research was articulated: the theoretical-epistemological level and the applicative level. In particular, it interrogates the role of philosophical thought in teacher training, the specific contributions

phenomenology can offer to educational design, and how formative pathways might be structured starting from lived experience, placing the pedagogical relationship at the center of professional growth. Furthermore, it reflects on how the learning objectives outlined by the 2012 Indicazioni Nazionali per il Curricolo (National Curriculum Guidelines) can be rethought to enhance a more dialogical and reflective approach. These issues formed the core of the research conducted within CIRLaGE, supporting the hypothesis, previously explored in other studies (cf. De Mita, Modugno, 2020), that teacher education is intimately tied to theoretical problematization. A path of inquiry thus emerged, intertwining theoretical reflection and practical experimentation, generating a fertile dialogue between theory and pedagogical praxis. The heart of the project lies in the conviction, borne out by field experience, that the way in which the contents of philosophical thought are conveyed and operationalized in the context of postgraduate teacher education constitutes a matter of crucial theoretical significance. The project's main objectives are twofold: on the one hand, to deepen the value of critical thinking as a founding element of teacher professionalism and authentic educational relationships; on the other, to highlight how such an approach can enhance learning processes by fostering openness to inner dialogue and profound communication between educators and students.

1. Project Objectives and Methodology

The "Conoscere Filosofando" research project represents a valuable opportunity for scholars, researchers, and teachers, enabling them to appreciate theoretical thought as a privileged tool for critical analysis of the present and for integrating acquired knowledge with the complexity of everyday professional reality. A central element that emerged during the training process was the teachers' awareness of the necessity to embark on a research pathway grounded in theoretical inquiry, rather than adopting predefined and standardized models. This process allowed internal and external demands to be transformed into opportunities for rethinking and renewing educational practice. Through this process, it became possible to:

Strengthen and monitor the "Abercrombie-Giordano" methodological paradigm, the foundation of Interactive Group University Didactics (DUGI), as an innovation in teacher training;

Move beyond the Popperian view that theoretical thought is solely directed toward providing exhaustive answers, recognizing instead its critical and transformative role;

Center the reflection on the relational dynamics within which teachers and students are immersed, to reconsider the present and propose hypotheses for formative change.

The project's innovativeness resides not only in the choice of content and methodologies but also in the reconsideration of who the recipients of teaching are and how they can be engaged in a genuinely meaningful learning journey. From a phenomenological perspective, learning cannot be reduced to an abstract process but must be recognized as an embodied experience rooted in the interaction between body, mind, and environment. Within this scenario, didactics becomes an act of co-construction, where knowledge takes shape in the dialogue between subjectivities and shared epistemologies. The DUGI approach is based on the phenomenological matrix of the "Abercrombie-Giordano" methodological model, marking it as a pioneering proposal in the field of university and postgraduate didactics. The method privileges a phenomenological observational approach, involving not only teachers but also researchers and scholars in experimenting with new formative strategies. Introducing a phenomenological observational attitude into a post-academic context constitutes a distinctive feature of this experience. Through DUGI, phenomenological observation becomes both a style of thought and an intentional mode of exploration, grounded in the understanding of Husserlian theoretical cores and in teachers' capacity to foster, in their students, the re-signification of the philosophical question, innate in school-age children. This approach aims to promote a new critical awareness of the epistemological, formative, and cultural value of knowledge. These epistemological and methodological premises enabled the structuring of a comprehensive formative pathway, allowing teachers to recognize:

The critical function of theoretical-philosophical thinking and language in their professional contexts;

The importance of "learning to unlearn" (Abercrombie, 1989; 2003), to deconstruct conceptual schematisms and crystallized communicative-relational patterns.

The training unfolded on two levels: a theoretical component and a laboratory component. The former, organized through Professionalizing Scientific Thematic

Seminars adopting the DUGI methodology, delved into the thought of René Descartes and Edmund Husserl, focusing particularly on the problem of the "method of making method" and the risks inherent in the uncritical application of predefined educational design and evaluation models. The laboratory component took shape through Phenomenological Reporting Workshops, employing a Phenomenological Highlight Sheet to analyze assertive and perceptual data—the former referring to Husserlian "reality data," the latter encompassing the perceptive variables influencing interpersonal relations in teaching practice. The phenomenological approach does not limit itself to critical rationality but also involves intentional acts, initiating an "intentional modification" that redefines modes of "relating-to" and "interacting-with." This perspective allows fluid movement between dimensions: from individual to group, from subjective position to relational network, from cognitive to symbolic and cultural spheres. Within the project, the role of teachers and researchers took shape inside a complex network of questioning and answering, enabling the configuration of the relational space of didactics. This network is grounded in a sense of belonging to a common culture, where formative demand (explicit or implicit) and the response from the research team are integrated in a continuous process of knowledge co-construction.

2. Genesis and Development of the Project

The phenomenological analysis conducted through reporting sheets, audio recordings, and observations collected during epistemological supervision groups enabled the identification of several priority intervention areas. The evidence gathered during the research highlighted fundamental aspects such as:

The role of the temporal dimension of experience in the construction of formative meaning;

The value of narration as a tool for attributing meaning to lived experiences and reflecting on formative and evaluative processes;

The need for a dynamic context that transcends classroom boundaries, emphasizing corporeality in the learning process;

The importance of lived experience as the foundation of knowledge, privileging the "why" and "how" over the mere "what."

Reaffirming the centrality of experience thus means repositioning the school not merely as a place of instruction, but as a generative space capable of providing tools to meaningfully inhabit change- The project is therefore configured as a concrete response to the need to move beyond a transmissive didactic model in favor of a formative environment where knowledge emerges from lived experience and educational relationships, intertwining into new forms of learning. These guiding elements informed the research design, leading to the identification of three strategic areas:

1. Context: Emphasis on the spatiotemporal dynamics and their impact on education;
2. Methodology and operational tools: Development of innovative didactic practices rooted in a phenomenological approach;
3. Thematic openings: Exploration of new formative perspectives, including narration, relationality, and the experiential dimension of learning.

From this foundation, an experimental initiative was launched and incorporated into the PTOF (Three-Year Educational Offer Plan) of the participating institutions, with a particular focus on the care of time and space as key elements of didactics. The project was structured on three levels:

Personal: Offering students meaningful experiences to develop critical thinking through the narration of self and reality;

Intersubjective: Educating for emotional awareness and the construction of relationships based on reciprocity;

Community: Promoting active participation in social life by integrating bodily experience and the political dimension into education.

The didactic intervention began by engaging the Indicazioni Nazionali per il Curricolo (2012), transforming learning objectives into concrete formative experiences. The methodological process followed a recursive structure, articulated through the following phases:

Designing the experience of meaning: Analysis of disciplinary content and its connection with students' daily lives; consideration of experiential dimensions (corporeality, emotions, cognition, perceptions); recognition of life stories and individual needs;

Didactic action: Creation of the formative context with careful attention to time, space, and tools; development of relational and emotional dynamics; valorization of questioning as a tool for problematization; realization of formative experiences in which the student is an active protagonist;

Evaluative action: Analysis of the meaningfulness of the experience for the student; reflection on the cognitive and emotional processes activated; connection between new knowledge and previous experiences.

The research, characterized by a strongly qualitative approach, was supported by specific methodological tools, including:

Audio recordings analyzed through the method of Empirical Phenomenology and integrated with group-analytic approaches;

Phenomenological reporting sheets used to collect assertive, perceptual, and emotional data;

Discussion groups aimed at analyzing didactic and relational dynamics.

The entire process was accompanied by epistemological supervision, ensuring methodological rigor and promoting a circular approach between analysis and action. The research, far from adhering to rigid and linear models, followed a complex spiral logic, in which lived experience intertwines with the generalization of formative processes, nourishing a continuous re-elaboration of knowledge.

3. Conclusions and New Research Scenarios

The described project has significantly contributed to promoting the transfer of knowledge from the school environment to the everyday lived territory of children. The experiences developed within curricular teachings proved fundamental for fostering active and conscious citizenship. In this sense, the formative path also assumed a political dimension, following the thought of Bertolini (2003), stimulating in children the construction of a civic consciousness that must be cultivated from an early age. One of the guiding questions throughout the project was: How can the discoveries made at school contribute to improving one's living environment? One of the project's key outcomes was the systematization of children's perspectives, returning them to the community and promoting their active engagement in the public sphere. Thus, their contributions to participatory

processes are valued, providing opportunities for authentic dialogue with political and cultural institutions, in line with the principles expressed in the Manifesto for the Participation of Minors. The data collected thus far reveal encouraging results. In particular, the comparison between classes involved in the experimental initiative and those not involved—though taught by the same teachers—showed a noticeable increase in the acquisition of key European competencies (2018), especially :

Personal, social competence and learning to learn;

Citizenship competence;

Cultural awareness and expression competence.

A particularly significant result concerns the field of mathematics: in the experimental classes, there was a greater acquisition of disciplinary skills, with learning outcomes exceeding the expected average for the respective grade levels. Based on these findings, two future research directions emerge:

1. Rethinking the evaluation systemically, leveraging opportunities offered by current regulations, as indicated by the 2020 ministerial guidelines;
2. Deepening the understanding of emotional, perceptual, and cognitive dynamics that orient didactic action, making explicit the implicit structures underlying every educational process.

This latter direction appears particularly crucial: investigating formative implicits represents a still underexplored but essential dimension for improving the quality of the educational offering and innovating teacher training pathways. Since its inception, the entire project has moved within a framework that conceives education as a transformative space. Lived experience becomes the matrix of knowledge, and the figure of the teacher is redefined in its epistemic and political function. Beyond theoretical, practical, and methodological knowledge, one central question persists: Who takes care of the being of the teacher's being? We believe that continuing to research this dimension is essential for a truly transformative school, capable of generating meaning and fostering human growth.

Author contributions

Introduction: Antonio Ascione

Par. 1-2-3: Giovanni d'Elia

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