Reflexive competence of adult education professionals in political adult education

La competenza riflessiva dei professionisti dell'educazione degli adulti nelle politiche di educazione degli adulti

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Abstract

The article examines the reflexive competence for professionals in adult education, mainly political adult education. Reflexive competences can solve teaching tasks in settings, in which adult learners are confronting with challenging current topics, such as populism and Euroscepticism. In spite of their differences, these two political phenomena demand innovative pedagogical approaches. A meta-level analysis of the reflexive competence highlights, on the one hand, the ways in which it can be fostered in adult learners, so that they may be capable to handle political questions in a holistic perspective, and, at the same time, how adult educators can master it both as a pedagogical strategy and a self-reflection process. Both analytic and descriptive considerations are provided, drawing on the different aspects defining the reflexive competence in the light of political education, so as to contribute to the professional development of adult educators and to improve practice in didactical settings.

Keywords: political education; adult education professionals; reflexive competence; populism; Euroscepticism.

Abstract

L'articolo si propone di analizzare la competenza riflessiva, necessaria per tutti i professionisti che lavorano nell'ambito dell'educazione degli adulti e con responsabilità politiche. Le competenze riflessive aiutano nel far fronte a sfide, complesse ed attuali, come il populismo e l'euroscetticismo. Seppure essi siano fenomeni distinti, entrambi richiedono la definizione di approcci pedagogici innovativi. Una analisi meta-livello della competenza riflessiva è utile per evidenziare i modi in cui essa può essere promossa tra adulti in apprendimento capaci di acquisire da un lato strumenti utili per la gestione di processi decisionali con approccio olistico e dall'altro per definire strategie educative e processi di riflessività. Il contributo offre elementi descrittivi e di analisi a partire dalle varie componenti della competenza riflessiva nelle politiche educative in quanto rilevanti per lo sviluppo professionale dei professionisti dei processi formativi e per il miglioramento di pratiche e azioni educative.

Parole chiave: educazione politica; esperti di educazione degli adulti; competenza riflessiva; populismo; Euroscetticismo.

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[1] The author(s) declare equal contribution and no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

1. Adult Learning and Education in Socio-political Contexts

Adult learning and education (ALE) is closely embedded in the specifies of our national contexts (Sava, Nuissl & Lustrea, 2016). In general, adult education plays a major role in enabling adults to find their ways in society, after graduating from formal schooling, and in helping them integrate and participate in their own social, economic, political, and cultural contexts. In one country, this means fostering national identity, while in another, developing human capital, or profiling cultural identity. But in any case ALE always supports individuals to cope with societal, professional, and personal challenges.

The challenges relating to ALE are unpredictable, radical, and fast. However, not any change is always a change to the better, as only for the last five years, many states have been confronted with different forms of radicalization, violence, extremism, and even terrorism. Lately, many European member states have been forced to deal with waves of increasing migration, which, at times, have generated insecurity, xenofobia, aggression, and other undesirable tendencies, opposing fundamental democratic principles. Even though such cherished values embracing democracy, civic law and human rights have been "the principles of European societies and political systems for decades, they need to be continuously maintained and fostered" (CoE, 2018, p.13).

It is the duty of education to reflect on the societal needs, on the one hand, and on our individual needs, on the other hand. Education contributes to a more stable and resilient society (Rodriguez, Vera-Toscano, Dinis da Costa & Weber, 2014), once it has equipped its citizens with the necessary tools to take more informed decisions, to be more aware of their impact, and finally to "make independent choices for their own lifes, to recognise others as equals, and to interact with them in a meaningful way" (The Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education - EDC/HRE, quoted by CoE, 2018, p.16). Thus, political education is vital to strengthen the creation of our future society.

However, the critical discourse and the statistical analyses of the main European documents on lifelong learning and education between 2000 and 2014 revealed that the European policy agenda has been almost exclusively focused on a rather utilitarian discourse of how to provide a skilled workforce, whereas the "humanistic aspirations have been increasingly washed away in EU documents, moving from a somewhat idealistic social justice to a more utilitarian, human capital based model" (Panitsides & Anastasiadou, 2015, p.139).

But the neoliberal educational model, which generates skilled workforce (OECD, 2017), is not sustainable if not completed by roughly the same amount of political education, or education for democracy (Chandler, 2014; Gale & Molla, 2015; Roberts, 2005). Therefore, many scholars have shown an increased concern about how one can develop a number of competences necessary to live actively in a democratic culture (Blasko, DaCosta & Vera-Toscano, 2018; CoE, 2018). Only in the year 2018, the Council of Europe has launched three volumes conceptualizing the Framework of Competences for a democratic culture and the related tools which enable educators to foster such essential competences (Boyadijieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017; OECD, 2017). Social competences, critical thinking, and cultural awareness are as important as digital skills or skills directly related to the workplace. "Quality education which promotes democracy, respect for human rights, and social justice, in a learning environment which recognizes everyone's learning and social needs, and enables learners to develop appropriate self-confidence and critical thinking to help become responsible citizens" (CoE 2016; 2018, p.24) is an essential goal for shaping successful future societies. Other studies are showing a close relationship between social justice and the funding granted by the state (Panitsides & Anastasiadou,

2015). This means that the whole effort for ALE needs to be reconsidered, as the patterns of participation in education are "more likely to reinforce, rather than mitigate existing inequalities" (Boyadijieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017, p.98; OECD, 2017).

Therefor efforts should be made for education to be able to foster democratic culture. In 2016, the first Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS) was carried out in 14 EU-member states, highlighting the most important civic attitudes adolescents should own (Blasko et al., 2018). This was followed by the policy briefs released by the Council of Europe (Blasko et al., 2018; CoE 2016; 2018), with the focus of promoting democratic culture. Many of these findings suggest developments that must be also implemented in ALE, so as to enable adult educators to formulate their own didactical concepts, as a response to these new challenges (Perryman, Ball, Braun & Maguire, 2017; Robinson, 2017). However, an appropriate didactical environment is welcomed but unfortunately not enough, as it has to be supported by a strong political will to create suitable institutional structures. More determinate action is to be taken now, to protect the future generations against irresponsible decisions and actions, to foster continuously the reinforcement of fundamental principles promoted by democratic societies (Chandler, 2014; CoE, 2016; 2018; Osler, 2015; Roberts, 2005; Wildemeersch & Fejes, 2018). Political education is one of these fundamental principles, which is also the focus of ALE, as will be further presented and analyzed.

2. Critical Reflection in Political Adult Education

Political Education is only a small sector in ALE, as compared to its vocational and other more general sectors. This means that there is only a limited number of educational offers and the participation rate is rather low. In some countries, this has prompted discussions about the possibility of a crisis of political adult education. Clearly, this is not only due to low quantities, if we only look at the numbers of participants, educational offers, hours attended by learners, or even money, but also due to two other major problems. The first one questions the quality of an appropriate form of didactics, while the second one examines the difficulty of measuring its effects and the manner of evaluation, which has become more and more relevant in the recent decades. The political support (also understood in terms of funding) for political adult education is at risk, since it is quite difficult to show how its effects and values can be quantified now that everything is measured in clear quantities and exact numbers. Partly because political adult education does not receive enough attention, there is only very limited ongoing debate about this type of education, while the existing discussions mainly focus on civic education. The truth is that critical reflections on didactics in adult education are more dedicated to vocational training, media competence, and intercultural learning.

Scarce political adult education may be caused – paradoxically – by the fact that it is now facing too many problems to deal with. It is in the economic sector, where globalization has been raising a lot of problems especially for the poor, resulting in a constantly and rapidly increasing gap between the rich and the poor, both at a national and individual levels, and further resulting in another possible breakdown of the economic markets. It is in the social sector, with increasing migration almost everywhere, where there are high levels of youth unemployment and where the social media has dramatically changed behaviour, communication patterns, attitudes, and beliefs. It is in this context fraught with growing uncertainties that individuals have to face the new realities of patchwork families and patchwork careers, while their future prospects are becoming more and more unclear.

Finally, it is in the political sector that political parties and institutions are changing themselves into less transparent and less credible organizations.

It is clear that political adult education is required to formulate its own response to all these recent developments and radical changes. Our society is at large the arena where knowledge and the free expression of our own interests are vital, together with our ability to pursue the practical implications of such interests. In a broad sense, political education aims to define this process of interest negotiations in smaller contexts, like the workplace, the neighbourhood and other organisations, as well as in wider contexts, like the city and the region, the state and other supranational organisations. To some extent, even the organisation of the family life itself can be the object of political (adult) education.

It is in this large arena energized by conflicting political problems, sensitive issues and pressing demands that professionals in political adult education have to perform simultaneously differing tasks in their didactical approaches. What they have to do is to translate political issues and problems into appropriate pedagogical settings. They also have to moderate and mediate the learning process of their learners in a learner-oriented way. In addition, they have to follow their pedagogical aims while trying to remain focused and also they have to settle down controversial arguments while trying to orient them to their learners' interests and benefits (Kloubert, 2018, p. 150 f.)[2] This is to say that, traditionally, political adult education has followed Immanuel Kant's credo: "Sapere aude"[3], which addresses the cognitive dimensions of our understanding.

Nevertheless, for several decades now, two factors have played a very important role in the (political) learning of adults. The interpretation patterns is the first factor, "Deutungsmuster" (Arnold, 1984), while the learner's emotions and beliefs are the second one. In all processes of political education, both of these factors are regarded as obstacles against rational explanations, and so the challenge faced by adult education teachers and trainers is how to deal with them, as well as with our reason and logic, and the factual reality. On the other hand, simply dismissing these as subjective interpretations, "irrational" emotions and personal beliefs would be too simplistic, as they are in line with our interests, so they cannot be irrational.

Political education is now confronted with a fundamental question and a new challenge: how can beliefs, emotions, and opinions be dealt with, as long as they are not based on logic and cognition and are devoid of a rational aim, found in a rationally structured world; for instance, an aim for political education would be the one of understanding democracy and knowing how to live in a democratic world. How to approach this non-cognitive level so that to be able to reach a set of political aims in a cognitive manner? This has always been a dilemma in political education, which attempts to bring together these divergent approaches of understanding and acting (Beck, 1986). But, nowadays, reason and facts are becoming more and more distant from everyday life, no matter if this happens in political and cultural contexts or in public institutions. There are obvious developments that are

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[2] Political adult educators from Germany call these three principles "Beutelsbacher Konsens", which is a voluntary agreement on the basic principles of political education, designed for adults.

[3] I. Kant, Answering the question: What is Enlightenment? Essay, 1784; his credo focuses on logical reason, while its origin dates back to the fight of the bourgeoisie against the monarchy. The "Aufklärung" (enlightenment) of the 18th century. In English, this Latin motto has at least three different translations: "Dare to know", "dare to be wise", "dare to think for yourself". In 1984, M. Foucault used the same guiding principle as Kant, but added new meanings to the term.

generating these changes: the progressive globalisation, the instant availability of information on the Internet and in other social media, the demise of more traditional social structures, such as the one of settled neighbourhoods. This new reality of life fails to address directly our emotions, feelings and beliefs, our social needs and self-esteem, which can be now hardly recovered in logical arguments.

Our focus here is less on elaborated didactics, but more on that competence vital to professionals, in their attempt to solve this dilemma. We believe that a reflexive competence, a self-reflexive one in particular, is the key to finding solutions for how to merge together the learner's cognitive, social and emotional needs in their learning, mainly in their political education. As it will be further explained, the critical reflexive competence is an individual and a social competence, which relates to both teachers and learners in two different ways: firstly, there is an ongoing cycle of critical reflection stirred by the argumentation process, the way of communication, the facts and the feelings, and secondly, there is a teaching aim that considers political thinking as reflexive thinking.

We would like to exemplify this by presenting two different topics, both closely related to political education: populism and Euroscepticism. Both these two topics have been heatedly debated for the last past years, the first one has been exposed to more global concerns, while the second one has been circulating within the borders of the European Union, mainly as a subject of debate in political sciences and sociology, but very seldom in pedagogy. Both topics advance discussions regarding democracy, human values, and human dignity. In both cases, several major questions arise: What is the role of education? What are its aims? What are its pedagogical means? In truth, political education can never be neutral, but always advocating for the rights of active, autonomous and social citizens, who are able to endorse solidarity for a better future (Kloubert, 2018). If both these topics do not allow a "black and white" approach, it is clear that critical reflection is needed for their understanding.

2.1. Populism

Populism is characterized by well-crafted strategies of polarisation, personalisation, moralisation, combined with elements of propaganda and rhetorical devices. Very often it addresses our feelings, beliefs, and emotions rather than our rational thinking. Arguments are designed "ad populum" ("to the folk"), "ad hominem" ("to the persons"), often resorting to our common sense, thus opposing elitist and scientific approaches. The populist approach always formulates "black and white statements", as the one claiming that there are only either friends or enemies. Populism is considered to be rather open to various aims and political ideologies, that is why it is a popular practice in both right and left wing political ideologies. Effective populism may be caused by the following factors: first and foremost, people are becoming less content with politics and the politicians' activities, who do not manage to address their interests and needs, but are felt to be too distant and technocratic. Secondly, individuals feel that they do not receive an equal treatment in society, and are therefore doomed to exclusion and alienation. Thirdly, migration is an important factor, which closely relates to the fear of losing stability, losing what the Germans call "Heimat" (this word has a more holistic meaning than the English word "home"), and the erosion of the social capital. A final factor is concerned with the recent changes of democratic institutions, felt to be away from peoples' needs, more oriented toward global aims and political structures (Foster, 2016; Osler, 2015).

In political education, individuals must examine and analyse facts, data, and empirical evidence, which are sometimes difficult to find or deemed to be irrelevant. In this light, the

political educator is a "translator" of real and factual data (Perryman et al., 2017). But such information is now readily available for almost everyone, on the Internet and in social media. In spite of this, people are nonetheless more and more dependent on forms of populism, or on what is now known as "fake news". This tendency to believe ready-made information is largely based on feelings, impressions, fears, and beliefs. The role of the political educator is essential here, at least from two perspectives: they need to activate rational thinking by allowing a confrontation of facts, by encouraging thorough analyses and valuable interpretations. Then they need to tackle the emotional and social dimensions, necessary to explain beliefs, interpretation patterns and outbreaks of resentment, to smother insecurities and negative feelings, like fear, anger, and weakness. A number of significant studies conducted in the last decade has shown the importance of emotions in adult learning (Arnold, 2016; Gieseke, 2009).

Kant's "sapere aude!" means that learners should always reason and make their decisions in a rational manner, based on cognition. For instance, democracy, representative democracy in particular, is a rational construct and functions rationally. Irrespective of the particular aims of the adult educator, he or she has to allow the transfer of emotions into rational thinking and facts. Having assessed the reasons for endorsing populism, we can conclude that it can be interpreted otherwise, i.e. emotions like fear and insecurity have their own rationality. We have to change Kant's paradigm into "reflectere aude!"

Thus, professional adult educators have to re-address the importance of emotions and interpretation patterns and integrate them in their didactical principles, which often involves listening to their learners in order to discover the rational side of their feelings, fears, and beliefs. This means listening carefully to their learners and reflecting together with them on what kind of reasoning has prompted their feelings and emotions. It is clear that the critical reflexive competence is essential for this intellectual enterprise. The reflection should focus on the needs of the learners, but at the same time on their own aims and personal convictions. Paradoxically, populism has positive aspects too, in the sense that individuals may be more easily approached and required to act with moral aims, while still following their ordinary interests. However, in order for populism to be understood in this way, not only should educated scholars adhere to its new meaning, but also less educated individuals should embrace this new perspective. This finally leads to a new didactic approach, very similar to the one endorsed by P. Freire (Roberts, 2005), which encourages working and reflecting together.

2.2. Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism is based on a number of different views, as often the term itself is not clearly used. For example, one of the most popular positions of Euroscepticism is the concern about national sovereignty, identity, and independence. Mainly in the Central and Eastern European states, there is a critical view, based on the experience of decades of dependency on Russia, as part of the Soviet Union. But Euroscepticism means also the contrary, the critics on the weak structure of the Union wish a stronger European federal state.

A second position is the one popular in several Western European states, in which there is a constant fear of losing one's workplace to migrant workers coming from other European states, mainly from Eastern and South-Eastern countries. This has played an important role in the Brexit affair too. However, the other side of the coin is that many industry branches, like gastronomy, elderly people care, and public services in general, would have probably disappeared without the incoming workforce from the other European countries.

The third position advertised by Euroscepticism would be the fear of diminishing social standards, which are very high, especially in the Scandinavian states. There is some ambiguity here as well: these standards have become a European brand, competing with global standards and even exceeding them.

But what we believe to be truly sceptical views are those related to the different cultures and societies in which the citizens of the European Community live. Not surprisingly, these views overlap with the one supported by the doctrine of populism and which draws attention to the growing gap between political institutions and their decisions and the people, along with the lack of transparent European policies. This seems to be the most problematic aspect in the discussions about Euroscepticism (Forster, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2014), together with the European Union's tendency to emphasize the instrumental neoliberal dimension of skilled workforce in its policies, against the socio-emotional dimension (Panitsides & Anastasiadou, 2015; Wildemeersch & Fejes, 2018). Apparently, this is related to the "overhead" of the European Parliament and European Commission and to the structures supporting the whole construction of the EU, perhaps too complex and too intricate. In addition to this, there is the mistrust in the aims and interests dominating "Brussels". There is a constant lack of visibility, which can be understood as a lack of responsibility, at least for what concerns the individual. The ones in charge of acting and taking decisions at the European level are far away; there are language barriers, cultural diversity, and elite structures. Those in Brussels appear as an ingroup, as experts in foreign languages and negotiations, but with no links to the real world, the culture and the interests of the people. These Eurosceptic views are advanced by "ordinary" people (Chandler, 2014; Chopra, 2013; Forster, 2016 Osler, 2015).

Besides, one question still remains: in very concrete terms, how do I take advantage of this supranational entity? This is difficult to answer. There are real advantages in trade exchanges and economy, as it was initially established by the European Economic Community. Nevertheless, these measures cannot be clearly noticed in one´s daily life, but quite the contrary, the decisions of the EU, influencing almost everything ranging from traffic, money, education to law, are not always felt as support measures, but rather as real obstacles.

In political education, the discussion mainly revolves around ideas and identities. In countries run by strong right wing governments that have experienced historical periods of foreign domination, like the Central and Eastern countries in Europe, the questions of identity are vital. By contrast, in left wing governed Western European states, people have experienced the fear of losing their workplaces and social standards once the market has been adapted to European standards. In this context, the difficulty for educational professionals is to begin their reflection process and establish their own position regarding Europe. It is unlikely that they will avoid formulating their own position. Undoubtedly, they may think that Europe is a great idea, but is it great in practice for ordinary people and their needs? Is it good for them or just better for the economy and only for an elite group? Indeed, this is a very difficult question, often raised in all types of political teaching and learning processes involving adults who try to position themselves to Europe and its Union.

On this view, professionals in education need to acquire the reflective competence, regarded as a necessary skill to find, together with their learners, a position, a perspective, and a strategy. Irrespective of the driving force generating Euroscepticism in learners, the pedagogical process must always lead to an open-ended conclusion, advocating for more European unification, or for less significant aims, for unification in other new conditions or perhaps in ways that cannot be foreseen now. Open-ended conclusions require deep

reflections in any stage of the teaching and learning processes, allowing arguments of all kinds, either rational or "irrational". In the end, it is more about constructing arguments more precisely and more convincingly, and finding common ground for our positions, as well as learning how to make compromises.

3. The Reflexive Competence

For the last two decades, competence has been the key term to defining various learning outcomes, be them formal, nonformal or informal: "competence is really a catch-all term for the combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes which enable people to do their job well" (Mulvey, 2013, p. 271). As opposed to "qualification", competence may also refer to practice, in the sense that being competent means being capable of doing something in practice, based on acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes. The network for Innovation in Career Guidance in Europe defines competence as "the ability of people to meet complex demands in particular situations, drawing upon adequate affective, behavioural and cognitive resources in a reflective manner" (NICE 2012, quoted by Mulvey, 2013, p.271). Moving on to reflection, it can be noticed that it is not a competence in itself, but more a way of thinking. However, the ability of reflection is needed once it has become a personal competence, which makes it intentional and structured. Then, reflexivity is not only a cognitive part of one´s personality: "deep engagement with one´s values, beliefs and assumptions is required in teaching, which may be associated with the purposes of reflection and the dispositions required" (Benade, 2015, p.50).

For teachers in political education, this reflexive competence is not only personal, but also professional. It has to be activated and performed at three different levels:

- as self-reflection, the reflexive competence involves rethinking one's own position in the process of teaching, debating freely one's own convictions, sharing these views while being open to change and adapt them;
- as a didactical method, the reflexive competence involves ordering the stages of interaction with the learners, prompting open discussions and creating opportunities for argumentation, which are expected to produce different results, allowing in this way learners and educators to reflect together;
- as a focused learning objective, the reflexive competence is necessary to define the intended learning outcomes; educators are thus able to develop the reflective competence of the learners in a systematic and structured way.

In political education, where different points of view, beliefs, and new sets of values and experiences are expected to form a unified whole, the reflective competence organizes the didactical process without necessarily looking for the "right" answer. But this is not anything like "moderating", since it follows a clear pedagogical aim. It also requires special pedagogical skills intended to stimulate the learners' awareness of other views, different from their own values and beliefs, to pay attention to the learners' needs and make their voices heard, and, if necessary, disrupt their judgements in order to encourage them to reconsider their own thinking and finally embrace "new ways of being and acting […] in which new identities might come into play" (Biesta, 2014, p.6). Indeed, learning by encouraging reflection, which leads to the formation of a reflective competence (Biesta, 2014; Wildemeersch, 2014), creates a new kind of reflective pedagogy. Engaging in a process of co-investigation, co-creation and joint experimentation brings learners and educators together, as they both share a common ground for their views and beliefs. In this

way, there is more space for a plurality of voices and for more opportunities for a direct confrontation of differences (Biesta, 2014; Wildemeersch, 2014). For many teachers, however, it is rather difficult to accept this new position of the learners, since this seems to be a way of "losing control" in class, which might be in contradiction to their professional responsibility for ensuring progress and reaching learning outcomes. Reflexive competences include therefore a thorough reconsideration of the teacher's role in class, their teaching aims, and the distribution of the roles in the teaching-learning process.

Thus, the diversity of opinions is always welcomed, allowing access to forms of human rights education (Reimer, 2018; Robinson, 2017) and creating mutual understanding and pedagogic encounters, as a "potential site for social justice, cultural critique and reimagined possibilities for democratic living" (Wildemeersch, 2014, p.824). These mutual reflections and co-creations are spaces for social interaction, in which each contributor talks openly about their own beliefs and attitudes while showing respect and accepting other points of view.

In this light, reflexive competences are also social competences. In some national qualification frameworks, reflexivity is included in social competences (e.g. "Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen" - DQF). This leads to the understanding of reflexivity as a necessary tool in teaching and learning processes. Teachers are advised to use and develop reflection in their classroom activities. Scholars Rantatalo and Karp (2016) support this view: "Collective reflection … can be concluded to hold an emancipatory potential because it provides opportunities to make visible social and cultural premises of a particular context that are often taken for granted" (p. 710). Their main research outcome analyses different types of "collective reflection": firstly, there is "the 'polyphonic reflection' which does not have an apparent goal orientation; secondly, there is the 'dialogic reflection', which validates forms of understanding and follows a guided sequence of events; then, there is the 'specular reflection', which borrows a lot of elements from performative acts, such as monologues and stories performed in front of others. This last form of reflection is the most individualized version of collective reflection" (ivi, p. 717 f.).

Coming back to the two examples of populism and Euroscepticism in political education, we would like to shed more light on the meanings of reflection. In pedagogical processes, when the topic of populism is debated, reflection means finding out together relevant facts in relation to the subject of populism, by revealing the learners' emotions, fears and beliefs, and openly discussing their need for orientation, moral beliefs, and the sense of security and "feeling home". The fact that these elements are integrated in their learning and understood as essential needs leads students to evaluate them as more important than "facts". On the other hand, the topic of Euroscepticism gives another perspective on reflection in pedagogical processes. It means being open to accept a diversity of learning outcomes. For instance, learners may hold conflicting views on Europe, no matter whether they are for or against the European Unification. In both cases, learners develop their own reflective competences as the main learning outcome.

4. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

In conclusion, many didactical concepts should be readdressed in the light of the findings on the reflection process, performed by teachers alone or together with their learners. In addition, reflection has also been examined as a competence, more exactly regarded as a learning outcome. This whole reconsideration of the reflection process has to begin with

the teacher's education: "L'insegnamento efficace può essere promosso già durante la formazione dei docenti, favorendo lo sviluppo di abilità cognitive trasversali, come il pensiero riflessivo" (Concina, 2016, p. 24).[4] To reach this aim, we would need to reflect on the initial didactic formation of teachers. McClay (2000) rightly acknowledges that education is an "unbalancing" act, "an act of introducing foreign bodies of thought to our students and, in turn, allowing a reciprocal unbalancing or re-positioning of our own intellectual equilibrium. … If education involves translation and creation of interpretative spaces, then perhaps teacher education´s productive third space of translation culture is a space that provides support for the intellectual challenges we offer" (p. 421). The teacher is then an "interpreter" of different policy discourses discussed in the didactical setting, but originating in international, national, local, or even organizational levels (Bergh, 2015). Here, teachers ought to use their autonomy, while accepting that they themselves are politically biased, and should try to be aware of their personal grid of selection and of how they approach political issues (Bergh, 2015). This is yet another dimension of the reflexive competence that comes into play,

In relation to the reflection process, there are two main principles that need to be developed in a teacher´s formation: one would be the fostering of the reflective competence in teachers, the other one would be the discovery of a number of appropriate teaching methods and didactical approaches for implementing reflectivity in the teaching and learning processes.

As concerns the first principle mentioned above, it is important to analyse the reflection capacity of prospective teachers and to foster their transformative learning. It is necessary for them to acquire knowledge in various pedagogical fields, but this has to be permanently linked with processes of reflection on the role, the duties, the limits, the interests, and the personality of teachers. In conclusion, the cognitive processes must be acknowledged, but also equally important is "the content of thinking (what they reflect on), the goals of their thinking (why they reflect) and how their thinking influences their teaching practice in the classroom (what transformative learning they experience)" (Liu, 2015, p.139, apud Mezirow, Brookfield).

The second principle concerning the reflection process enables prospective teachers to learn how to handle suitable reflective methods in their dialogue with the learners. Narrative learning is such a method (DeGroot, 2017), the influence over other views, the mutual feedback on a given topic. It is clear now that political phenomena like populism and Euroscepticism cannot be handled properly in teaching and learning processes without this reflective ability (Waghid, 2014).

Furthermore, in today's society, in which there is always the risk of insecurity and unpredictability, teachers are required to create a resilient learner, able to master a set of core competences, the reflexive competence being amongst the most important ones. These competences allow them to act responsibly. In this sense, the Council of Europe (CoE, 2018, p. 38) has developed a reference framework of competences for democratic culture, including values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding – all of these competences demand for intensive acts of reflection.

It is now a fact that teachers are often asked to prevent in class forms of radicalization, manipulation, populism, violence, and extremism. To be able to do so, they need well-

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[4] "Effective teaching can already be fostered during the qualification of the teacher, by supporting the development of transversal cognition, like reflective thinking".

grounded reflexive competences, carefully integrated in their professional development (Concina, 2016; Frish, 2018), sometimes developed in active coach training (Ciuffetteli Parker, 2017; Mulvey, 2013), and later used in their actual didactical practice (Gale & Molla, 2015; Roberts, 2005; Robinson, 2017; Waghid, 2014).

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