Chapter 3

Didactic Models and Professionalization of Teachers: Research Approaches

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the possibility and potential of using video devices as recording instruments for didactic practices, within the context of the discussion of lines of analysis, aimed at the development of didactic models, as artefacts produced by pedagogic research in support of teaching processes and the professionalization of teachers. The main theoretical references are cited which analyse the validity of didactic models in teaching innovation processes and which point to possible new avenues for research in this field, with specific attention focused on practice-based approaches. Exploring and developing the potentiality of video research in line with directions specifically corresponding to the problems of analysis in the education field is clearly important. The same is discussed starting from an analysis of specific research experience.

INTRODUCTION

One of the main tasks of research in the pedagogical-didactic field involves the elaboration of knowledge in support of the professionalization of teachers and educators. With specific reference to applied research and research-development, the studies aimed at refining innovative methodologies, construction of didactic devices and materials and the definition of good practices represent a work direction that has to take into account the fact that professional training processes are particularly linked to an acquisition of the ability to analyse and compare practices, design and regulate action, and to reflect on one’s own practices and those of others (Rossi, 2015). If one considers the paradigm of normativity and prescriptivity as definitively superseded, an analysis direction that seems to be coherent with these requirements is represented by the elaboration of didactic models as theoretical-practical artefacts that can offer actors contexts for operational principles and criteria, sustaining them in the processes of conceptualisation,
analysis and reflection regarding their work, thereby promoting self-regulation. This is an option that implies recognition of professional practice as essential for any innovative proposal and the subject of study to be prioritized by research in that it constitutes a primary source of problems to be studied and tackled and a definitive criterion for discussing and evaluating the depth of knowledge acquisition and the solutions identified. New Didactics Research- La Nuova Ricerca Didattica (Damiano, 2006; Rivoltella & Rossi, 2012), an area in which the study presented in this chapter can be framed, when it focuses on the question of the most suitable research strategies for the elaboration of didactic models, is mainly committed to explication processes, analysis and discussion of the body of knowledge inherent in the professional practices of teachers, as an essential knowledge base in support of innovation processes and the improvement of teaching processes, within the context of a practice-theory-practice research strategy. According to this approach, the researcher does not aim at elaborating solutions for practice, starting from theories of a general character, but at valorising and developing, including thanks to conceptual outlines and explicatory hypotheses, made available by “contribution” disciplines (psychological, sociological etc.), proposals based on the practical knowledge which the operators have available as a result of their professional experience. This is essentially in relation to repeatedly recognised difficulties regarding knowledge of a general character in “covering the subject” directly and adequately, or in understanding and explaining teaching processes that aim at promoting learning processes from the point of view of the actors in situ and their need to take decisions “here and now”, in conditions of relative uncertainty. This constitutes a research strategy that tends to implement processes involving ‘theorization of practices starting from practices’, in accordance with some essential stages: descriptive reconstruction of actions; distancing with analysis/interrogation of action modalities to test and interpret them; elaboration of hypotheses and operational principles starting from practice, in relation to development. The expected results of this type of research are first and foremost represented, as the basic outcome, by reconstruction of the phenomenology of the practices to the study, aimed at offering knowledge in the service of adequately informed designing and decision-making. These are descriptive outlines that refer to theoretical-conceptual systems and categories in which operators can recognise themselves, but which must also embrace features that can be potentially transferable, such as to render them intelligible and usable beyond their specific contexts, on the part of other actors working in the field, and also accessible to those who are not in the profession, or by researchers. A fundamental challenge posed by this research approach is represented by the creation and refinement of analysis systems that make it possible to embrace the development of professional action viewed from within, in accordance with approaches of a holistic and contextual character, which restore, as faithfully as possible, the dynamic complexity of actions and their meaning for the subjects. This represents a research logic that involves the participation of actors as sources of investigation, within a context of alliances to be constructed (Damiano, 2006; Hadji & Baillé, 1998) on the basis of agreed questions and objectives, and the use of specific observation devices, including videos and narrations which acquire strategic significance. Within the context of these factors, the chapter sets out the process and main results of research aimed at identifying modelization lines for innovative didactic practices, starting with the Fenix Programme (Coggi, 2009; 2015). This is a didactic artefact that is particularly focused on the need to support learning on the part of subjects with scholastic difficulties, constituted by an organized set of materials of a ludic-multimedia character, to be used in support training and reinforcement in the acquisition of knowledge, abilities, logic skills and motivational dispositions relative to basic curricula elements, in workshop settings, which provides relative autonomy of exploitation on the part of the student (within the context of courses having a mainly individual or small group character) and mediation facilitated
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