

# Tutor and Mentoring in Education

edited by Raffaella Biagioli

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# Preface

*Simonetta Ulivieri*

Tutoring is spreading out all over Europe and Italy, and it is possible to recognize various models according to the type of intervention and the activities characterizing the Tutor role. The semantic area, that interlaces with that of mentor (similar to the meaning of *counsellor*), highlights one of the most important aspect characterizing tutoring: the educational care, interpreted as “the taking on the responsibility” of the student/protégée.

The centrality of such contents can be easily explained by two elements: the first is need, or even the urgency, of “rethinking” education, in light of the news skills and expertise required by the labor market; the seconds is the key role played by teachers and educational systems in developing such skills and expertise. Teachers’ education is widely recognized by now as one of the strategic elements for the improvement of learning quality. For this reason, the international debate about this issue pushes towards a drastic rethinking of strategies characterizing education, and according to the applied epistemology standard, the Tutor becomes a mediator, who helps identifying instruments and tasks, overcoming difficulty, arranging alternatives and enabling goals’ achievement.

The volume introduces the main operating models useful to discover the professional importance of tutoring for the beginning of teachers’ education, both in school contexts (in order to prevent school dropout) and in working contexts, as far as training is concerned. It is important for the Tutor to be able to manage the learning process, understanding the educational needs, supporting the learning ability of students in every situation, included marginalization contexts that highlight the holistic and personalized aspects of the tutoring action.

The book is wisely organized and set-up by the author and editor, Raffaella Biagioli, who avails herself of the collaboration of

researchers and specialists of the subject. Among the authors, we mention the contributions of Italian professors from various universities: Fabrizio Manuel Sirignano, who competently illustrates his experience of Mentoring in TFA (Active apprenticeship training) by the University Suor Orsola Benincasa, Naples; Marinella Muscarà from the University of Kore and Maria Ranieri from the University of Firenze, who describe the innovative didactic nature of the e-tutor and his/her tasks, as well as on-line education; Patrizia Magnoler from the University of Macerata, who wisely explains how the tutor acts in following, guiding and monitoring the students during their training path; Gina Chianese from the University of Bolzano, who extensively describes the educational role of the university tutor; Tamara Zappaterra, who combines special pedagogy with work and disability contexts, relating apprenticeship tutoring with teachers' formation in disability contexts. Another important participation is that of the Spanish professors Pillerà and Gonzalez-Monteagudo who deal with a topical issue such as training of educators working inside penitentiaries, both in Italy and Spain. To Following, we find educational researches and didactic analyses by Marina Baretta, Francesca Dello Preite, Donatella Fantozzi, Carla Maltinti, Lucia Nepi, Silvia Micheletta and Rossella Sant'Agata.

The main purpose of the book is increasing the awareness of the tutor about the importance of his/her role and activities, which should include the development of the ability to create action plan and use reflective approach, as well as all that can be put in action for a true transformation and improvement.

For the development of a "new educational system", we shall definitely start from confirmation and strengthening of those figures who actively contributed to the creation of a brand new educational structure for new-teachers. Even in virtual milieu the figure of the e-tutor has increasingly become a reference point for e-learners, which are busy in getting aware, along their educational learning process path, of all the procedures and strategies implemented during the process of knowledge co-building and processing. In the book, two different functions of tutoring stand out, both regarding the activities proposed to the student: the support function and the guiding function. Such functions support the different targets set by the tutoring: reducing delays and dropout, removing obstacles to the regular lesson attendance, promoting participation to academic life, contributing to cultural and professional development of the student.

Today, in fact, we witness the transition towards a condition defined by new characteristics, related, for example, to university choice. The latter, in fact, assumes a different meaning compared with the past, as it deals not only with how to continue the studies, but also with what one wishes to be in the future (that is the idea of oneself projected in the future). The academic context acquires a role of support to improvement and learning process, especially during the early years, becoming a field for planning one's adulthood, overtaking the disciplinary dimension: that is why career counselling becomes compelling.

Among the many differences characterizing the *teacher/educators* in the various national contexts and in the various stages of training to become a teacher, we highlight the following profiles:

- in academic context: professors of educational science and general and disciplinary didactics, researchers on educational subjects;
- in academic and school contexts: teachers with a manifest professional experience, with the task of supervising students' practice activities during training periods in school;
- in school contexts: mentors (also known as tutors, counsellors, coordinators, guides...) with a task similar to the previous profile, but carried out in the training period following the high school;
- Educators' associations, qualified for the refresher courses and recurrent professional development.

The Eurydice documents outline some of the areas of expertise in teachers' training: the first one – the ability to work in team – emphasizes values such as innate professional social inclusion for the development of the students' potential, together with the interpersonal and network skills, psycho-pedagogical knowledge and peer cooperation ability. The second one – being able to use knowledge, technologies and information – entails the ability to find, analyse, validate, pass down and meditate on different kinds of knowledge (therefore guiding students towards orientation in the information network) with a safe and appropriate use of new teaching and refresher technologies. This involves pedagogical, theoretical and practical skills in building and managing learning framework. Such goals, we deduce, can be achieved only through paths that, since the very beginning, assume as key elements the direct practice of teaching and the development of new teachers/experts professionals (as "tutor" and "mentor" are), in order to start partnerships between school and university – existing mainly overseas and in northern Eu-

rope. Those partnerships could represent a reference point for the creation of educational and training paths in Italy.

Educational science literature developed different kind of apprenticeship, and not all of them can be adopted in the same way for teachers' training. The most significant are briefly recalled in the book: the reflecting apprenticeship, the cognitive apprenticeship, the apprenticeship conceived as transforming and the one conceived as substantial. Even the new *Corso Magistrale* (Master degree) – LM 85bis (D.M. 10th September 2010, n. 249 – Guidelines for preliminary teachers training) – highlights the great importance of work-related learning, meant as concept, idea or device actualizing the concretisation process of theoretical knowledge; but, at the same time, it sets the conditions to discover and describe the knowledge existing in practice. The importance assigned to experience as founding element of the professionalizing path arises from various legislation elements, such as the increase of apprenticeship duration, its assessment in thirtieths (as for examinations), and, for the first time, identification of parameters for the selection of teachers-tutors who will welcome the students in school. They represent, together with the tutor-coordinator who operates between school and university, the essential reference point for the person who is approaching, for the first time, the world of work.

Apprenticeship aims for cognitive goals of the rational-constructive kind, which become explicit through the systematization-reconstruction-integration of knowledge. The availability of wider rational-constructive strategies, means for the training student, being able to handle different points of view along the path of deconstruction-reparation-reconstruction-reinvention of school knowledge. The relationship between theory and practice assumes thus an epistemological dimension, since teaching is connected with the way in which people, who directly engage with it, live and conceptualize practice.

Making it easy, we could say that the Tutor “teaches the teachers how to teach”: explicitly – through lessons, seminars, exercises – as well as implicitly, proposing didactical models in true situations. Doing so, theory connects and gives substance to practice, and the *student-teacher*, becoming teacher, as well as the *teacher-student* during professional development, learn to critically rethink and evaluate their own practices, making them more effective. Tutors, who have the task to support, follow and guide the trainee throughout the ap-

prenticeship experience, represent the joining link between school and university.

The model of Teacher preliminary training outlines a really well organized educating profile, aware of the importance of professional skills necessary to the teacher in order to face the challenges issued by the world of knowledge for school operators. The tutor allows the student to understand the job through a constant support, explaining actions and meditating on behaviors, giving the student the opportunity to observe directly the tutor's actions, following the young teacher operational path facing the first teaching experiences. Above all, however, the tutor is the person who acknowledges a sense of belonging to a future role, assigning specific tasks, appreciating the process and the results, including the student in the professional community, asking for advice, emphasizing the knowledge acquired by the student.

The book speaks therefore to those figures that, in various educational situations, are involved in planning and launching tutoring activities and tutors' training. It represents a precious instrument in order to build and plan new collaborative educational models, through reflective and operational synergies implemented between education professionals and young people in training.

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# Introduction

*Raffaella Biagioli*

In the present scenario of education, there has been a change in the socialization manners and in the interpretation models of the educational process: goals, methods, stakeholders, culture. In order to make people suitable for the society, able to comply with expectations and integrate with social roles, strategies and educational procedures shall be put into action, which enable everybody truly understanding and orienting; building a personal identity; discovering values and knowledge; producing significance.

Undoubtedly, traditional education of teachers has been centred on the educational activities and therefore on the subject of teaching; however, today it is necessary to move the attention on the goal of facilitating the learning ability. Paying attention to the procedures of learning facilitation means also taking care of the role of organization, the adjustment of structural models in the relationship between institutions/students and individuals in training. Here-hence the need to better explain typology, purpose and expertise of those professionals who are asked to support the educational activity, in the variety of the relative branches, and the need to understand which are their competencies in those fields that are always on the go.

The tutor role (by now extended to every educational and training setting, whether it be a company, the university or a penitentiary), the school guiding intervention or the distance learning, require a methodological teaching and an all-around competency, suitable for the various contexts in which the Tutor is acting. Individual support and increase in opportunity thus become the driving force of the continuing education.

The book wants to highlight the different tasks of mentoring, with functions as mediation and completion, with regard to the institutional educational activities.

The first part, *The role of Tutor in academic context*, introduces considerations regarding the role of apprenticeship in academic context, the mentoring function that the expert assumes through the dual relationship between adult and young student, who is guided and inspired in the development of professional skills. Apprenticeship (*the field for professional mediation*) plays a key role regarding the curriculum, since not only one tutor but a complete team takes care of the teacher during the training. Thanks to direct reference to current regulations, the organizational path is described, together with the educational activities performed by tutors in order to enable students building their knowledge uniformly, through the dialogue between pedagogical culture (in cooperation with university professors) and acquisition of disciplinary skills in schooling situations, according to the cognitive apprenticeship model: observation, assisted practice, gradual approximation to experienced practice.

The second part, *International Models*, is dedicated to the description of tutoring procedures for professionalization and knowledge set-up, even in “special” educational contexts, such as the penitentiary one, where mentoring, guidance and counselling are developed by educators in support of the detainee’s fragile rehabilitation paths, with all due respect for the contribution given by education to the reformation and the social re-integration of the detainee. Such tutoring takes place beyond formal education, and penitentiary educators represent (or should represent) for the detainee an essential assistance in a very peculiar situation. In fact, the educator shall bear the close contact with the detainee, following every activity of the individual treatment (both inside and outside the penitentiary) and thus mediating between the detainee and the penitentiary management on one side, and the outside on the other sides (since the educator is crucial for the granting of work and study permit, as well as library manager and responsible for mail distribution and collecting of meeting and permit requests, and so on...). The penitentiary educator, therefore, similarly to the tutor, represents a guide, a mentor, a mediator, a reference point for the detainee, since he/she is the cornerstone of an intense re-educational and rehabilitative treatment.

In this part of the book, some effective methods for the teacher’ training are also introduced. Proposing practical situations, such methods engage teachers in cyclical process of action and reflection – both in self-observation and peer-to-peer groups, as well as with supervisors – that systematically give a feedback regarding the per-

formance. In particular, it is clear the importance of going beyond the one-dimension oral means, in order to rely also on multidimensional-visual message, facilitated in particular by observation and interpersonal debate through discussion both with peers and experts. Observation – self and other people’s –, in fact, makes it possible to promote the development of complex professional skills, combining theory and practice, giving concrete examples of effective strategies, making interactions explicit and stimulating self-reflection and self-analyses. Videos – to be understood both as produced and utilized objects – represent therefore a successful element, which – thanks to its intrinsic benefits – open up new interesting perspectives on teachers training.

Another model presented in this section of the book is the one experimented for more than 20 years by the researchers Ralph & Walker of the Saskatchewan University (Canada), known by the international community as the AdaptiveMentorship® Model. There is a widespread belief that the various kinds of help are itself positive for the individual, with particular regard to personal values; on the contrary, according to this research, tutoring and mentoring programs can impact in many different ways on those who receive the help (protégé/mentee); the result is a warning against the common idea that a tutor or mentor can always be able to reach the expected goal.

In the third part of the book, *The on-line tutor*, there is a focus on the fact that the gradual but also impressive widespread of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) caused dangerous repercussions regarding the cognitive implications produced from time to time by asynchronous educational exchange, thus causing, at the same time, a permanent review and renovation of employed instruments, methods and didactical strategies. In virtual milieu, the figure of the e-tutor has increasingly become a reference point for e-learners, which are busy in getting aware, during their educational learning process, of all the procedures and strategies implemented during the process of knowledge co-building and processing. The main task for the e-tutor is promoting and facilitating online learning process for a “network of collaborative people trying to reach the common educational goal”: in fact, a broader concept of tutorship, with which such role is connected, considers the fulfilment of various functions aimed at identifying the potentialities, helping the person in recognizing those talents he can use; fostering strategies for emotional and

motivational scaffolding; guiding the person through the outline of opportunities and perspectives; facilitating dialogue through interchange and integration of theoretical/applied knowledge among the different partners. It's a new professional position, that takes part in the management of educational activities (e-learning), based on the use of internet as main vehicle of learning process.

The versatility of e-tutor functions usually lies in the ability of conducting on-line activity, fulfilling three typical needs of the virtual learning context: the preparation of the lesson contents; the facilitation of the learning process; the management of interactions between students and other people involved in the procedure.

The tutor can operate as *instructor, facilitator and moderator* – considering the magnitude of the management of teaching process and online learning –, as well as expert of the subject, with specific disciplinary and didactical skills and psycho-social knowledge, able to encourage motivation and socialization, or also as observer of interaction process and group activities, through the production of periodical report, useful also for final assessment.

The fourth part, *The tutor functions in the school contexts*, offers suggestions about the tutorial role in schooling context, especially regarding trainee integration in a particular scholastic situation, and the relevance of the internship. The welcoming tutor shall in fact guide the trainee towards the systematic and critique observation of the teaching activity. The welcoming teacher acts as a behavior model especially in those scholastic aspects which are unknown for the trainee and difficult to manage. The trainee assimilates not only the teaching practice, but also the established knowledge of the organization. During the apprenticeship inside the school, the trainee's individual skills get in connection with cultural elements of the organization, mixing up and transforming, and thus becoming general skills of the very same organization, and actively contributing in changing it.

Personal and social aspects interrelate, in search of their own way of being inside a mindset or common practice. Concerning the trainee approaching the teaching activity, acting inside the classroom as a teacher enables him/her to test the professional gesture, living a full-immersion experience that makes him/her understand the complexity of the system in which he/she operates, starting a always more deep comprehension process, both for the elements and the relationship existing among them.

In this section of the volume we also find a focus on the teacher as a support for students in order to face the school drop-out. The figure, explicitly recalled, is the tutor who can play the role of supporting guide for the students, in order to help them dealing with studies, overcoming difficulties and frustrations, and not being unmotivated by failure. Although in many school institutions the tutor presence is still disobeyed or subject to job insecurity, there are a lot of *tutorship* “good examples and practices”, which give an interesting reference framework in order to examine purposes and goals characterizing the tutorial role, the skills to be developed by the teacher in order to hold such task inside the school, the kind of relationships to build, first of all with pupils and students, and at the same time with other teachers and parents.

The fifth section of the volume, *The Tutor in working and disability contexts*, faces the connection between school and work world, realized through the mechanism of work-related learning, so that the student can acquire a set of specific skills and knowledge intimately related to the profession and the work setting. In such framework, the role undertaken by the Tutor is the one of expert guide, characterized by a sound expertise and a professional identity, aiming at facilitating learning situations, organizing the different experiences and orienting the elaboration process, since work-related learning consist in realizing paths which are planned, carried out, verified and assessed under the responsibility of school institution, based on specific agreements with companies or representative associations.

Working experiences can be adjusted for people with disabilities, in order to promote their independence, also for the purpose of work placement. Learning periods inside the company are structured according to parameters such as gradualness, in connection with personal, cultural and professional student advancement. The school institution evaluates and attests the skills acquired by students also considering the information given by the company tutor, according to the Ministry certification model. Far more than a well-defined series of activities, the tutor role develops through a constant creation and recreation of relationships, that enable the protégée to learn how to revise and improve cognitive strategies and emotional dynamics, used in order to get into relationship with socio-organizational contexts.

In details, it is highlighted how the work placement of disable people has been conceived more as a pietism and a kind of state intervention aiming at relieving the family of the care needed by the

relative with disability, rather than an instrument aimed at identifying the productive potential of the very person. For this reason, it is hoped for a tutorial figure able to support the work in progress and act on two different levels: the ability to work with the disable person so that the latter can enter the work world aware (as much as possible) of his/her limitations; and the ability to work with the remaining employees in order to have a real integration and welcome of the disable colleague, everybody being aware of the right acting manners, and of the tasks he/she can actually carry out, or the fragilities that can show up, especially in case of psychic disability; the tutor shall also be able to evaluate the colleagues' level of tolerance, that is, being able to glimpse the burn-out risk, and finding effective strategies to avoid or solve it.

From the overall text dissertation we gather the idea of tutoring as a complex educational practice, related to different contexts and fulfilling mediation and support during learning and professionalization process, pursuing the general goals of educational institutions in order to conquer individual independence. Tutoring is thus a pedagogical practice for support and development of people, in order to expand their meta-cognitive skills and adjust their cognitive process.

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