

THE CONTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH THE E-PORTFOLIO AS A TRANSFORMATIVE TOOL

IL CONTRIBUTO DEI DOCENTI ALLO SVILUPPO DELL'IDENTITÀ PROFESSIONALE DEGLI STUDENTI PER MEZZO DI UN E-PORTFOLIO INTESO COME DISPOSITIVO TRASFORMATIVO



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the educational potential of the e-portfolio introduced by the Italian Ministry of Education to support guidance processes for upper secondary school students. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of the Ef.Ate project, it examines how the e-portfolio, when embedded in intentional and well-structured educational contexts, can foster individualized, metacognitive, and transformative learning experiences (Mezirow, 2003). Special attention is given to the development of strategic competences, understood as cognitive, emotional, and metacognitive resources that promote self-determination and self-regulation in learning (Pellerey, 2006). From this perspective, the e-portfolio is presented as a narrative space in which students can recognize and enhance their strengths, strategically direct their educational efforts, and develop a conscious and goal-oriented vision of their learning journey (Varisco, 2004; Di Stasio et al., 2021; La Rocca, 2020). Finally, the paper highlights the 30 hours allocated to the tutor teacher as a valuable opportunity to promote critical reflection and transformative guidance processes.

Il contributo esplora il potenziale educativo dell'e-portfolio introdotto dal Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito come strumento di supporto ai processi di orientamento degli studenti della scuola secondaria di secondo grado. A partire dalle basi teoriche del progetto Ef.Ate, viene analizzato come l'e-portfolio, se inserito in contesti educativi intenzionali e ben strutturati, possa promuovere esperienze di apprendimento individualizzate, metacognitive e trasformative (Mezirow, 2003). Particolare attenzione è dedicata allo sviluppo delle competenze strategiche, intese come risorse cognitive, emotive e metacognitive a supporto dell'autodeterminazione e dell'autoregolazione nei processi di apprendimento (Pellerey, 2006). In questa prospettiva, l'e-portfolio è presentato come uno spazio narrativo in cui gli studenti possono riconoscere e valorizzare le proprie risorse, orientare in modo strategico i propri sforzi formativi e costruire una visione consapevole e progettuale del proprio percorso di crescita (Varisco, 2004; Di Stasio et al., 2021; La Rocca, 2020). Il lavoro evidenzia, infine, le opportunità offerte dalle 30 ore assegnate al docente tutor, considerate un'occasione formativa significativa per sostenere processi di riflessione critica e di orientamento trasformativo.

KEYWORDS

Professional identity; e-portfolio; transformative learning; strategic competences; guidance.
Identità professionale; e-portfolio; apprendimento trasformativo; competenze strategiche; orientamento.

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Introduction

The transition to adulthood and the development of a professional identity are among the most complex and significant pedagogical challenges in today's educational landscape. In a sociocultural context shaped by instability, fragmented life paths, and ongoing changes in the labor market, schools are increasingly expected to go beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge. They are called to act as intentional learning environments, helping students critically reflect on themselves, design coherent learning paths aligned with their emerging identities, and make sense of experiences gained in both formal and informal settings. This perspective calls for a rethinking of the traditional educational paradigm, placing at its center the concept of identity as educable and the need for pedagogical reflection on learning as a process of guidance and transformation. Within this framework, the present study is situated in the research and training project *Ef.Ate – From Hephaestus' Forge to Athena's Wisdom*, which supports the development of students' professional identity through the integration of soft skills, work-based learning (PCTO), and the e-portfolio promoted by the Italian Ministry of Education. The e-portfolio, interpreted as a transformative tool (Mezirow, 2016), is not limited to documenting achievements. It acts as a space for self-reflection and narrative guidance (Varisco, 2004), where students can reconstruct their learning paths and envision future scenarios aligned with their values, interests, and competences. The theoretical foundation of this research lies in the concept of strategic competences, defined—following Pellerey (1996, 2013)—as cognitive, emotional, and metacognitive dispositions that enable individuals to self-regulate their learning, guide their actions, and make informed decisions. These competences, conceived as “habits of mind,” are closely connected to personal and social skills and to the broader ability to learn how to learn (Grządziel, 2024; Allulli & Tramontano, 2010). They also interact dynamically with technical and professional skills, forming a transactive system that supports lifelong learning and personal development. In educational settings that promote intentional self-reflection and identity transformation, strategic competences represent key resources for managing learning effectively. This study is based on the administration of the Learning Strategies Questionnaire (QSA) (Pellerey, 1996), a validated and widely used instrument in Italian schools. It is designed to assess students' perceived mastery of 14 strategic competences, grouped into cognitive and affective dimensions. The data collected from three of the five participating schools are analyzed through cluster analysis, with the aim of identifying student profiles characterized by different levels of reflexivity, self-determination, self-regulation,

and disorientation. As observed in previous studies (Bonazza & Giacomantonio, 2023), these profiles can serve as a foundation for designing personalized and guidance-oriented educational interventions, with the potential to foster truly transformative learning experiences (Mullis et al., 2017). In this perspective, the teacher plays a central role—not only as a mediator of knowledge, but as a facilitator of reflective processes, capable of interpreting students' needs and co-designing meaningful and individualized learning paths. This requires the creation of formative environments in which assessment supports growth, lived experience is fully valued, and identity development is intentionally nurtured (Scierri, 2024; Pellerrey, 2021; Bevilacqua, 2023). The analysis of emerging student profiles will thus serve as a basis for exploring the educational conditions under which the e-portfolio can act as a meaningful and transformative tool for the construction of professional identity.

1. Theoretical framework

The development of professional identity can be seen as a layered and ongoing formative process that unfolds throughout the educational experience. It emerges through the interaction of lived experiences, reflection, narration, and personal planning. In educational contexts, this process plays a crucial role, as it helps students make sense of their learning pathways and navigate a constantly evolving social and professional landscape with greater awareness. Identity, in this view, is not a fixed or predetermined trait, but a dynamic and relational cultural construct, shaped by the individual's ability to recognize themselves within a life project that evolves over time (Bauman, 2000; Cambi, 2009). Contemporary schools are increasingly called to take on a transformative role that goes well beyond the transmission of knowledge. They are expected to function as intentional learning environments that support the construction of personal and social meaning and guide students through exploratory and self-directed learning processes. This requires the development of transversal competences, among which strategic competences play a central role. These are defined as cognitive, emotional, and metacognitive skills that enable individuals to learn independently, regulate their learning paths, adapt to new situations, and plan actions consistent with their goals (Benadusi & Molina, 2018). These competences are neither innate nor spontaneously acquired; they must be cultivated within reflective, structured, and experience-based educational environments that support their gradual development. From this perspective, learning becomes a reflective process rooted

in experience, where students are invited to interpret, transform, and integrate what they live into a coherent and evolving self-concept (Mortari, 2004; Stringher, 2021). In this regard, the e-portfolio can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool. It should not be seen as a simple digital archive, but as a transformative device that supports reflective, narrative, and project-oriented practices. Through the e-portfolio, students can document their learning, select meaningful experiences, interpret them in light of their educational journey, and connect them to a broader personal and professional development pathway. The educational value of the e-portfolio lies in its ability to foster awareness, make cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes explicit, and transform experience into reflective knowledge. It enables students to shift from unconscious action to intentional learning through reflection-on-action. However, to fully realize its transformative potential, the e-portfolio must be integrated into educational contexts that are intentionally designed to provide formative feedback, structured guidance, and reflective mediation. The teacher plays a key role in this pedagogical architecture, acting as a facilitator of both learning and reflection. They support students by proposing authentic tasks, encouraging their voice, promoting self-assessment, and fostering a relational climate that nurtures critical thinking (Bevilacqua, 2023). Teachers can guide students in selecting meaningful experiences, choosing “masterpieces” to document, and reconstructing their learning through narrative. They also provide stimuli, interpretive frameworks, and opportunities for dialogue. In this way, the e-portfolio becomes a space of pedagogical mediation, where individual and dialogic dimensions, introspection and sharing, personal growth and professional orientation come together. Building on these premises, the Ef.Ate project is conceived not merely as a digital platform but as an integrated educational tool aimed at supporting the development of strategic competences through guided experiences, reflective practices, and personalized feedback. The theoretical foundation of the project identifies three core pillars for constructing professional identity during adolescence: reflexivity, self-regulation, and the ability to envision the future with intention and coherence.

This paper specifically examines the role of the Ministry of Education’s e-portfolio (MIM) in promoting students’ awareness of their educational and professional choices. The e-portfolio, understood as a space for reflective documentation and narrative guidance, offers students a structured opportunity to connect their experiences, aspirations, and abilities—thus supporting the development of a coherent and purposeful self-project. Within this framework, the Learning Strategies Questionnaire (QSA) plays a strategic role. This tool enables the exploration of implicit learning processes, self-regulation skills, and the

management of motivational and cognitive resources. It provides both students and teachers with a shared basis for reflecting on the quality and intentionality of the learning experience. Integrating QSA results with the qualitative analysis of students' narrative productions within the e-portfolio allows for a layered interpretation of learner profiles. It also supports the design of targeted educational interventions that are responsive to students' lived experiences and developmental potential. The Ef.Ate project identifies one of its key innovations precisely at the intersection between structured observational data and narrative self-reflection: the ability to generate transformative learning environments where students are not measured as objects, but accompanied as individuals in the active construction of their identity. In this perspective, the e-portfolio is not simply a guidance tool, but a privileged educational space in which students learn to recognize and express themselves, make meaningful decisions, and give direction and coherence to their life paths.

2. Rethinking the MIM E-Portfolio: Educational Potential and Critical Issues

The e-portfolio introduced by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIM), as part of the Guidelines for Educational and Career Guidance (Ministerial Decree No. 328/2022), represents a structural initiative aimed at promoting personalized learning paths and reflective, guidance-oriented learning. Conceived as a digital tool for documenting both curricular and extracurricular experiences in a structured and dynamic way, the e-portfolio is now integrated into the UNICA platform, which supports students in developing meaningful and personalized educational and professional projects. The structure defined by MIM includes several sections:

1. Academic Pathway – documents the student's school career, including certifications and transitions between school levels;
2. Skills Development – enables students to self-assess their skills acquired also in non-formal contexts;
3. Masterpiece – allows students to select and upload one significant work per year, representative of their acquired competencies;
4. Self-Assessment – a space for metacognitive and guidance-oriented reflections on skills and the educational path;
5. Documents – collects official certifications and relevant materials.

This structure highlights the transformative ambition of the tool but also reveals several operational challenges. The first issue lies in the contradiction between the promise of personalization and the rigidity of the platform's digital architecture.

The predefined sections are often based on descriptive logic and are rarely embedded in systematic educational reflection or narrative-based practices. A second critical issue involves the ambiguity between the e-portfolio's documentary and educational functions. When the former dominates, the tool risks becoming a simple digital archive of experiences, undermining its potential as a transformative learning device. This highlights the need for both conceptual and pedagogical clarity about what it means to implement an e-portfolio in today's schools and what role it should play in supporting students' personal and professional identity development (Rossi & Giannandrea, 2006). In practice, the e-portfolio is rarely embedded in a reflective and guidance-oriented curriculum. Many schools lack a clear instructional framework that defines timing, objectives, strategies, and formative criteria. The time allocated is often minimal, the activities tend to be repetitive, and the tool is frequently perceived as a bureaucratic formality. As La Rocca (2024) points out, this perception can strip the e-portfolio of meaning, reducing it to a task rather than a tool for self-discovery and growth. Further ambiguity arises from the operational definition of the educational roles involved in the guidance process. The Guidelines for Guidance (MIM, 2022) formally distinguish between the tutor teacher, responsible for providing direct educational support to students and families, and the guidance counselor, whose role focuses on managing data and integrating local and national guidance tools. Despite this formal distinction, role differentiation remains unclear in practice—particularly regarding specific training and instructional planning. The guidance counselor is expected to offer informational and analytical tools, while the tutor teacher is meant to facilitate students' reflective and narrative processes, encouraging personalized and ongoing dialogue. In the absence of shared models and coherent pedagogical frameworks, these roles risk overlapping or becoming ineffective, thereby weakening the goal of supporting individualized learning pathways. To overcome this fragmentation, the role of the tutor teacher must be pedagogically redefined as a mediator in the construction of identity. This role should enhance the e-portfolio's transformative potential by guiding students toward a critical awareness of their educational and professional choices. Although the Guidelines present an innovative vision of the e-portfolio—as a tool for documenting and reflecting on students' experiences, skills, and aspirations—several ambiguities remain. These include the rigidity of the platform's structure, the lack of methodological clarity, the ongoing tension between documentation and transformation, and the persistent risk of bureaucratization. For example, the reflective function of the “masterpiece” section risks being diminished unless it is

accompanied by guided narrative practices and supported by a student-centered pedagogical framework.

In this context, the 30 hours assigned to the tutor teacher can represent a valuable opportunity to reposition the e-portfolio as a truly transformative tool—provided they are supported by coherent instructional models and a shared educational vision (Margottini, 2023). The e-portfolio can fulfill its transformative purpose only if it is embedded within an intentional educational setting—an environment that fosters sustained reflection on the self and on one’s educational choices. To achieve this, it must be integrated into a broader instructional design focused on developing strategic competences such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating one’s own learning. As Pellerey (2006) emphasizes, directing one’s learning is not just a matter of applying effective techniques. It also involves assigning meaning to one’s experiences, identifying personal goals, and organizing available resources to pursue them consciously. Within this framework, the e-portfolio can function as a metacognitive mediator—not merely a space for documenting products, but a tool that enables authentic educational processes through reflective and narrative practices such as:

- Guided reflective writing, using narrative prompts (“What did I learn?”, “What would I do differently?”, “What does this experience say about me?”);
- Competency mapping, through self-assessment grids or rubrics to evaluate progress in a developmental (not comparative) manner;
- Dialogic restitution, with regular one-on-one meetings with the tutor to present and reflect on portfolio entries;
- Motivational self-assessment, focusing on why tasks were undertaken and their personal significance;
- Connection between academic tasks and life experiences, with students uploading media (photos, videos, audio) contextualized by identity- and aspiration-focused reflections.

This transformative function can only be fully achieved through structured educational support, which includes a consistent intervention plan, scaffolding tools such as reflective journals and analysis grids, and formative—as opposed to summative—assessment strategies. The value of the e-portfolio lies not in the quantity of uploaded content, but in the depth of the reflective process, the emergence of meaningful connections, and the articulation of a personal and forward-looking sense of self. In this light, the “masterpiece” is not the most polished product, but rather what “most represents me”: a symbolic artifact that expresses identity, motivation, and intention (Pellerey, 2018). When properly

supported, working on the masterpiece becomes a powerful educational experience—an opportunity to pause, revisit, and recognize oneself. It encourages a non-linear narrative, marked by doubts, missteps, and changes in direction—a pedagogy of imperfection that values the unfinished as a sign of authenticity. The masterpiece is not a performance, but a liminal object that bridges lived experience and future projection. Within this educational horizon, the 30 hours assigned to the tutor teacher can—and must—become an intentional space where students connect experiences, reflect on their developing competences, recognize their contexts of action, and express emotions, aspirations, and values (Baldacci, 2008; Huber, 2007). The goal is not simply to support decision-making, but to foster awareness: to equip students with the tools they need to inhabit the present and imagine the future in a realistic and authentic way. In conclusion, the MIM e-portfolio can become a valuable educational resource only if it is reimagined as an integrated pedagogical tool—aligned with instructional pathways, mediated by the tutor teacher, sustained by intentional reflective practices, and aimed at meaning-making.

It challenges schools to move beyond a logic of tracking and accountability, and to restore the subjective and relational dimensions of learning, reaffirming the curriculum's existential as well as educational purpose.

3. Pathways of Meaning and Orientative Learning: The Educational Function of the E-Portfolio

Within the framework of the National Guidelines for Career Guidance, the 30 annual hours assigned to the tutor teacher for individualized student support represent a key opportunity to activate intentional learning pathways focused on the development of strategic competences. Far from being residual time, these hours can become high-impact educational moments—capable of enabling transformative learning experiences when structured around reflective, participatory, and guidance-oriented approaches. In this context, the e-portfolio serves as the primary digital and symbolic space for documenting, revisiting, and representing these pathways—provided it is embedded within a coherent pedagogical design supported by intentional and guided activities. Working on strategic competences means providing students with tools to understand themselves and their context, to interpret their experiences, and to make informed and conscious choices (Carruba, Giacomantonio & Pilotti, 2024).

These competences are not acquired through direct instruction, but through

reflective practices that engage students in activities such as self-assessment, intrinsic motivation, goal-setting, and progress monitoring.

In this educational horizon, the tutor teacher takes on the role of pedagogical guide and facilitator of reflection—not merely a technical supervisor or portfolio administrator. The tutor is the figure who can give meaning and direction to these activities, promoting self-narration as a transformative and empowering practice. The 30-hour plan should follow a progressive and cyclical structure. It begins with the mapping of meaningful experiences lived by the student, and continues with activities such as guided reflective writing, individual or small-group tutoring sessions, and narrative analysis of academic and personal choices. The process culminates in the creation of a masterpiece—conceived as a symbolic product that marks a significant milestone in the student’s learning journey. In this direction, the e-portfolio functions as a mediating device, helping students to identify and reframe the competences they have developed in both formal and informal contexts, and to construct a coherent and meaningful learning trajectory (Comoglio, 2003). The educational proposal presented here envisions the tutor teacher using the e-portfolio to design guidance-oriented activities based on narrative and reflective practices. These may include:

- compiling a personal diary of school-related choices and motivations;
- writing a narrative self-assessment of transversal skills;
- describing a meaningful experience or a “productive mistake”;
- composing a reflective piece titled “Who I am today, who I want to become”;
- creating a symbolic reworking of a project that represents a personal turning point.

Each activity should be followed by a dialogical debriefing session, enabling students to articulate and consolidate their reflections, to refine their intentions more consciously, and to begin shaping a vision oriented toward the future. The transformative potential of the e-portfolio is fully realized only when it is supported by a guidance-oriented pedagogy grounded in individualization and authenticity. This approach requires the tutor teacher to plan the 30-hour journey in a flexible yet intentional manner, adapting it to the student’s profile and incorporating moments of observation, dialogue, and revision.

Within this framework, a three-phase model can be proposed:

- an exploratory phase, focused on mapping meaningful experiences and identifying implicit competences;

- a reflective phase, centered on analyzing choices and developing narrative self-construction;
- a synthesis and projection phase, dedicated to elaborating the masterpiece and outlining future pathways.

This structure is not rigid and should be adapted to the specific characteristics of each educational context and to the evolving needs of the students (La Rocca, 2024).

In this light, the e-portfolio serves as a dynamic container for reflection that evolves over time, as well as a tool that enables the tutor teacher to document and enhance the learning process. Far from being a simple archive, it becomes a laboratory of meaning—an interface between students' lived experiences and their envisioned future selves. The tutor's role is to create the conditions for this space to be filled with significance, through the cultivation of educational relationships, empathic listening, and the ability to recognize and highlight what students often struggle to express. The 30 hours allocated for individualized guidance represent a critical resource for developing students' orientative and strategic competences—provided they are understood as fully educational time, not as a secondary or ancillary activity (Margottini, 2023). When consciously and competently integrated into this process, the MIM e-portfolio becomes a privileged tool for fostering reflective, project-based, and identity-building growth—thus restoring to the curriculum its formative and transformative function.

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