Self-Assessment Tools and Participatory Techniques. A Zoom on the Dyad "Rubrics" and "Online Focus Groups"[*]

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Abstract

In the methodologies for evaluation the use of rubrics as a specific tool for competences assessment (Cortoni & Lo Presti, 2018) is supported by a wide research tradition, especially in the pedagogical field, that has circumscribed their application within dynamic learning contexts (Davidson, 2005). In didactic-educational environments, the administration of self-assessment rubrics can accompany and assist the learning process of students, stimulating in them the acquisition of critical self-reflection skills and drawing attention to those fields of experience that are traditionally connected to the teacher's evaluative sphere (performance assessment, learning tasks, innovative teaching processes, etc.) (Dawson, 2015). In the research The Social Impact Assessment of DaD after COVID-19, promoted and funded by Sapienza University of Rome, combining tools for competences self-assessment (rubrics) and participatory research techniques (focus groups) has been particularly fruitful since it has helped students discuss the main changes experienced because of the pandemic regarding: *i.* learning styles; *ii.* leisure activities; *iii.* relationships with classmates and teachers. Combined with online participatory techniques, rubrics have maintained their nature as a non-reactive tool (Ametrano et al., 2001). In particular, the dialogic dimension generated by the focus group has made possible to neutralize the distorting effects associated with the concept of performance, preventing respondents from providing answers conditioned by social desirability. This has made possible to focus the discussion on specific aspects of the individual's experience, making the scoring process more closely aligned with the lived experience.

Keywords: rubrics, digital methods, focus group.

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1. Introduction

In the methodologies for evaluation the use of rubrics as a specific tool for competences assessment (Cortoni & Lo Presti, 2018) is supported by a wide research tradition, especially in the pedagogical field, that has circumscribed their application within dynamic learning contexts (Davidson, 2005). However, their use in social research can be even more fruitful if combined with participatory research techniques (focus groups), since it makes possible to understand what kind of experiences influence people's level of competence. Moreover, integrating rubrics in online focus groups can also help participants to feel more at ease and provide more sincere answers. In this paper is indeed presented a methodological reflection about the use of rubrics in applied social research, the possible advantages and disadvantages of the dyad rubrics/focus groups and the role that online mode can have on it. Moreover, a case study is presented to help understand the potential of this new research strategy.

2. Rubrics in applied social research

When talking about rubrics it is inevitable to refer to different tools based on the context or the purpose of use and on who is using them. Since the eighties, reference has been made to the term *rubric* in the educational field to indicate an assessment tool containing standards useful for determining the results in terms of student performance and guiding students in learning (Dickinson & Adams, 2017). In order to ensure the usefulness of the tool both in terms of judgment and reflection, the description of possible performance levels must be sufficiently detailed. This can be done either through analytical rubrics, which specifically describe the criteria used to establish the various levels of performance, or through holistic rubrics, which provide more general information (Allen & Tanner, 2006).

Surely the most used and well-known type of rubric is in the school environment, where rubrics are compiled by teachers to assess students' tasks; however, this type of rubrics can also be shared with students before carrying out a task, in order to guide them on the objectives to be achieved, and can even be given to the students themselves so that they can carry out a self-assessment or peer evaluation (Dawson, 2015).

The reference to certain criteria of judgment, to quality *standards*, is also fundamental in the evaluation of programs and public policies, just think of the pragmatist approach according to which a program can be judged on the basis

of an idea of value, or rather of intrinsic merit[1] (Scriven, 2007). According to Scriven, to judge the goodness of an intervention it is necessary to go through four elements: criteria, score, ranking and summary for the allocation of resources (Stame, 2016). However, the use of evaluation rubrics in the context of programme evaluation and public policy is relatively recent and is due to Jane Davidson's work published in 2005. Davidson proposes using rubrics to convert quantitative and qualitative data into an assessment of the quality or value of a given attribute or its level of performance; to determine the *merit* (absolute or compared to other *evaluandi*) it is therefore necessary to define on the basis of what a given quality criterion is considered more or less good; in this way it will then be possible to give a value to the empirical evidence and draw evaluative conclusions (Davidson, 2005). It will also be essential to use positive language that is easily understood by *stakeholders*, so that the evaluation can respect the transparency criterion. A strength point of the *rubrics* lies in the possibility of being shared with the interested parties, thus facilitating communication between them and the evaluator since it makes the quality criteria explicit for both parties (Dickinson & Adams, 2017). The rubric is therefore also a synthesis tool, in which the various criteria can be structured into dimensions and sub-dimensions.

From what has been said so far it is clear that usually the *rubric* in the evaluation field, although it can be co-constructed with the interested parties just like in the educational field, tends to be used by the evaluator as an analysis tool to judge an intervention and as a guide for the implementation of the program by *stakeholders*. However, sometimes – always taking example from the school environment – rubrics have been adopted for the self-assessment of the subjects involved in the evaluation process (Cortoni & Lo Presti, 2018; Ametrano et al., 2001) or for a sort of peer evaluation, more correctly defined as group evaluation (Furco, 2003; Kecskes, 2008). The strength of these studies lies primarily in detecting the perceived level of performance/competence of those directly concerned with a tool of a non-reactive nature and which can therefore avoid responses conditioned by social desirability (Ametrano et al., 2001). Secondly, the transparency of these tools facilitates discussion among users and allows to detect an overall level of performance/competence and therefore more effective for evaluation purposes (Furco, 2003; Kecskes, 2008). In the first case, the self-assessment concerns the subjects themselves and was carried out individually and self-administered; in the second case, the assessment concerned the context in which the subjects were inserted and could therefore be either conducted independently and shared later with the other

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[1] *Merit*, value in itself; as opposed to extrinsic value, *Worth*, which indicates the value relative to a given context.

subjects to reach an overall evaluation of the context or be used in groups with the same purpose. These solutions, although effective from the point of view of a pluralist and democratic evaluation (Stame, 2016), could imply a loss of information useful for understanding in more detail the characteristics of a program, intervention or service and therefore hinder the identification of solutions to improve it: returning only a summary of the reflections that led to certain scores / judgments does not make possible to understand the numerous motivations that led to that result. Instead, it seems that the advantages deriving from the involvement of *stakeholders* could be further strengthened if the ideas that arise and change thanks to the comparison and relationship with others were mediated, and subsequently systematized and analyzed, by the researcher / evaluator who ensures a shared vision of the problem examined, as happens within a focus group (Cataldi, 2009).

3. Possible advantages and disadvantages of the integration between rubrics and focus groups

By integrating it with the focus group technique, the *rubric* becomes a stimulus for reflection in the hands of the subjects involved. Its use therefore shifts from the interest in the attribution of a score / judgment to the factors that led to the choice of that attribution. In this sense, it is interesting both the meaning that each individual gives to that particular level of competence / performance, and how and why it is perceived a change with respect to that level (e.g., if in the past the same score / judgment would have been attributed or if some events have led to an increase / decrease). Furthermore, the possibility of comparing the answers provided for a certain *item* of the column with what emerged within the focus group as a whole also allows to detect cases of coherence and incoherence, understood as moments in which the interviewees, speaking of something else, have again referred to elements previously exposed when they motivated why they were attributing a certain score / judgment.

The chance to carry out this control *a posteriori* is fundamental because, when the assessment of a context or of one's own skills / performance takes place in a participatory way focusing, participants could provide insincere responses due to group dynamics (Acocella, 2005). The fact that participants hear each other's answers provides them with the opportunity to adjust their narratives according to variations in the discussion brought by the group (Krueger, 1997), since during focus groups ideas arise and change thanks to the comparison and relationship with others (Cataldi, 2009). This allows to detect that collective negotiation of meanings that is the basis of everyday life and

therefore influences the level of perception and consequently of performance / competence, helping participants to assign scores with respect to the various items of the most important aspects and closer to reality because reflection and group thought help people to consider also important aspects that they would not have thought of initially. In this way, however, there is also the risk of obtaining answers conditioned by social desirability, especially if dealing with particularly sensitive or controversial issues or with topics related to widely accepted behaviors and norms. Moderators should therefore act in order to prevent this type of responses by making sure that participants can't be heard from people outside the focus group and intervene by asking further questions about the experience of some participants when they have the impression that someone has not fully expressed what they had to say (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). With these precautions it is also possible to avoid the response-set and other superficial answers, which would not have been possible if a self-administered rubric had been used. For example, the comparison with the group can help people to recall some behaviors and facts, limiting the memory effect (Pitrone, 2009). In addition, making it clear to participants the purpose of the research can help them be more motivated and therefore more sincere; moreover, it increases the chances that they will not see the moderator as someone interested in judging their performance (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

In this perspective it is central also the relationship that is established between interviewer and interviewee. Since there is an inevitable imbalance in favor of the former, it is important that the moderator is able to establish a relationship of complicity, which depending on the situations and the interlocutor can also be friendly and personal (Pitrone, 2009). Moreover, interviewers can often benefit from engaging participants with humor and self-disclosure (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

4. The reshaping of the focus group in online mode

Another useful solution to prevent the social desirability bias can be offered by conducting the focus group in *online* mode, since group interviews conducted in this way help both to reach participants more easily thanks to greater flexibility of time and place, and to deal with more sensitive issues (Murukutla & Puri, 2020). In particular, it is advisable to carry out the meeting by video call, given the friendlier atmosphere that this medium suggests (James & Busher, 2016). In order to create an informal climate, it is essential that both the rubric and the focus group track are semi-structured, as they allow more freedom of expression to the interviewees and make it easier to respect the shortest times recommended in video call. In addition, for online focus groups

to be effective, a small number of participants is preferable (Murukutla & Puri, 2020).

Regarding the quality of the results, it should be remembered that previous studies have shown that focus groups conducted *online* or in presence lead to consistent results, given that the mode of participation of the group can influence the reaction of the respondents, but not the substance of the contents (Crisci, 2002). Indeed, even in focus groups carried out online via *chat* it was observed that the fact that the participants in presence spoke more is not necessarily an indication of more useful information, since the online respondents provided shorter answers, but went straight to the point and without interrupting each other, while the focus groups in presence, due to interruptions, lead to transcript of the conversation whose meaning became more difficult to understand (Woodyatt et al., 2016). The fact that in the *online* mode people speaking time is respected also allows the researcher to easily recognize who is speaking and therefore to attribute without difficulty, in the transcription phase, each answer to the correct interlocutor.

To ensure the quality of the data, other precautions related to the choice of interviewing online are also essential: for example, the members of the research team, and in particular the moderator, must be particularly familiar with the platform used to conduct the focus group to make the conversation familiar and easy for all participants and to understand and anticipate any technical difficulties that may arise (Murukutla & Puri, 2020). This is essential above all in order not to affect the feeling of security offered by the mediation of the screen and the familiarity of the environment from which the participants connect, especially if it is their own home or even better their own room, since the domestic atmosphere helps the interviewee to feel protected and therefore to report more private and personal information (Pitrone, 2009).

5. A case study: the social impact assessment of the DaD after COVID-19

In light of these reflections and following the indications previously exposed, in the research *The social impact assessment of the DaD² after COVID-19*, a University research project promoted and funded by the University of Rome La Sapienza, it was decided to build a self-assessment rubric to be administered in *online* focus groups with the aim of reconstructing the impact that the different teaching strategies proposed during the pandemic emergency have had on specific students' competences. In particular, since the COVID-19

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² Distance Learning modalities adopted in Italy during COVID-19 pandemic.

pandemic has highlighted even more the need for the spread of *lifelong learning* to allow people, and in particular young people, to acquire the autonomy necessary to face the challenges of today's society and to seize the opportunities it can offer, the interest fell on students aged 14-19 years. What has just been said has been indeed true even more in schools, where digital technologies have become an indispensable means to continue education and learning (Molina et al., 2021). This experience has also highlighted the excessive dependence that students tend to have on teachers, even when approaching maturity. The developments brought by the pandemic have instead made evident the need for a strong investment of the individual skills of each individual pupil and therefore emphasized the need for self-directed students (Mahlaba, 2020) and with a higher level of digital competence, which allows them to link what they learn in school with what they learn in everyday life, so as to achieve not only formal learning objectives, but also informal and non-formal ones that are equally indispensable for the development of competences – especially transversal ones – and for the increase in the range of future opportunities for students (ISFOL, 2015).

Therefore, 31 *focus groups* were conducted[3], for a total of 154 students attending 7 different institutes in Rome, during which was presented a self-assessment rubric built *ad hoc* to detect the level perceived by these students with respect to their level of experience in reference to competences related to self-directed learning (in Appendix). The rubric was built on the conceptual model proposed by Song and Hill (2007), which brings together the necessary characteristics for self-directed learning to take place (Candy, 1991; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Garrison, 1997; Cit. Song & Hill, 2007). The dimensions identified – for a total of 14 indicators (Lubben et al., 1996; Patterson, 2002; Figueiredo, 2005; Stockdale & Brockett, 2006; Biesta et al., 2009; Thornton, 2010; Trinchero, 2014; Süleyman & Coşkun, 2016; Cortoni & Lo Presti, 2018) – are attributable to three areas: *Personal Attributes*, *Process* and *Context*.

As for the scores for self-assessment, it was decided to give only an orientation to the students rather than specifying for each score the corresponding state of experience / competence; this is both because a more detailed description would have required a greater effort of attention and memory on the part of the students during the focus group, and to leave open the possibility of a construction and negotiation of meanings within the group (Cataldi, 2009). The choice to use numerical values and not judgments was instead made as it is advisable to avoid the use of negative terms (Dickinson &

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[3] Focus groups were organized in two phases: in the first phase students were asked to reflect on their competences and to answer in turn, while in the second phase students answered thematic questions as in a traditional focus group.

Adams, 2017), as they can cause a reaction to the instrument. In addition, pupils are accustomed from a scholastic point of view to a numerical assessment scale; however, it was decided to use a scale from 0 to 5 instead of one from 0 to 10 both to facilitate the display of the rubric, and to ensure a higher quality of the data (Mauceri, 2001): in the analysis phase, in fact, such an extended scale would make it even more difficult to compare the answers, already conditioned by the numerous and varied reflections that accompany the scores attributed by the boys in the interview.

The administration of the *rubric* during the conduct of *online focus groups* was effective in the first place for two reasons: on the one hand it allowed to detect the perception of the boys with respect to the motivation in the development of their competences and their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994), factors that can cause effects on students' learning styles; on the other hand, the use of Google Meet for the conduct of the meeting, that is the same platform used by teachers and students during the lessons, allowed both to detect the familiarity that the interviewees had with the medium, and to detect any problems of connection or management of domestic spaces that may have made teaching and learning activities difficult, thus making the choice of Internet useful also for the research objectives (Salmons, 2012). In this regard, the *online* mode was also effective in order to obtain sincere answers from the students. In addition to that, the rubric was presented to the students as a tool aimed at detecting their direct experience, necessarily subject to individuality and separated from the concept of performance; moreover, it was compiled by the researcher based on the scores attributed by the pupils without them being able to see them. In this way it way possible to both not to solicit the memory effect or the *response-set*, and to not make pupils pay attention to the scores recording.

The coherence check showed that focus groups generally worked, because in cases where it was possible to carry out this check, contradictions were almost never observed in the pupils' stories. Elements of incoherence in the students' stories have been found only in 5 cases; this happened mainly in smaller groups (between 2 and 4 students). This aspect is particularly significant considering that out of 29 focus groups[4] considered, only 8 *focus groups* were composed of a maximum of four students[5] and among these the one that presented a case of incoherence are 3.

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[4] Reference is made to 29 *focus groups* instead of 31 because in two meetings no explanations were given after the assignment of the scores.

[5] The *focus groups* had to be composed of 6 students, three from one section and three from another, divided by class (from first to fifth grade) in each Higher Institute involved, but in some cases some guys didn't participate even though they gave their willingness to do it.

The elements of coherence made instead it possible to identify those competences that were perceived as more central and therefore recurring in pupil's experiences. These are in particular the competences *Digital*, *Initiative*, *Individual*, *Awareness* and *Problem Solving*. Already from this it is possible to understand – as it will be shown later – that for some students DaD and DDI[6] have been helpful in learning how to better manage time and understand the importance of having one or more learning areas (e.g., sport) even in non-pandemic periods; similarly, these experiences have taught them to self-regulate, which helped them learn how to study independently if a topic was not explained to them by someone, for example with the help of the Internet.

6.   Main results: changes in formal and informal learning

In order to obtain more detailed information with respect to the analyzed competences and experiences, it was decided to conduct both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. First of all, a principal component analysis of the 14 indicators of the rubric was conducted, which highlighted 5 latent factors; of these, three (for a total of over 40% of variance explained) were considered the most relevant from a statistical and theoretical point of view.

The first factor is characterized by those pupils who have assessed themselves positively especially with respect to the ability in *Planning* their learning, recognizing the information that can be useful to improve their learning method and their performance. They also believe that they are good in Assigning priorities and in *Evaluating* strengths and weaknesses in the strategies they implement to achieve their learning goals. Finally, they claim to be able to learn from *Daily* experiences as well as to have a high *Initiative* in learning and a high capacity for *Problem Solving*. It therefore seems that in this factor we can find students who think that they have the possibility of increasing their knowledge and competences thanks to all the information and experiences they can meet during their school life and free time, which also leads them to deep / learn topics spontaneously and for this reason to know how to reconcile their various interests, giving precedence to one or the other according to the needs that may arise, without commitments or unforeseen events preventing them from doing what they consider important for their psycho-physical well-being. For these reasons and considering the literature on these topics, this factor could be called *Leisure Literacy* and will present on the positive pole students who consider their free time as a source of personal growth, while on the

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[6] Hybrid or Blended Learning modalities adopted in Italy during COVID-19 pandemic.

negative pole those who use free time mainly to relaxing and recreational activities, without recognizing their potential in terms of learning.

Table 1. Accrual values of the three main ACP factors.

	Component		
	Leisure Literacy	Self-Efficacy	Digital Literacy
Awareness			
Initiative	.523		
Control			.419
Responsibility			
Problem solving	.487		
Recognizing		.435	
Planning	.680		
Assigning	.562		
Evaluating	.507	-.383	
Reflecting		-.352	
Individual	.475	-.397	.441
Collaborative		.551	
Digital			.455
Daily	.552		

The second factor presents students who have assess themselves generally attributing medium-low scores with the exception of the ability to learn in a *Collaborative* context. They also feel quite good in *Recognizing* their level of theoretical and practical knowledge on a given topic, probably because they have learned what kind of feedback (e.g., grades) their actions can obtain. On the contrary, they perceive difficulties in learning in an *Individual* context (therefore autonomously) and in *Evaluating* the strengths or weaknesses of the learning method; consequently, they are not good in *Reflecting* on how to improve their learning method or how to use it in more learning topics and contexts. They therefore seem to be pupils with a high level of insecurity who need to know the opinion of others to understand whether or not they are getting good results, which is negatively poured on individual results and positive on those achieved in groups, going to reinforce this insecurity. Theories of self-directed learning suggest calling this factor *Self-Efficacy*. Therefore, students who believe little in their abilities will be on the positive pole, while on the negative pole those who are more self-confident.

The third and last factor considered is instead represented by those pupils who have declared a high competence mainly with regard to learning in the *Digital* context and who, probably thanks to the conscious use of technologies, also consider themselves skilled in *Individual* learning and do not perceive that they have difficulty maintaining *Control* in front of adversity, because they know

that every obstacle can be overcome and can be a source of learning. This factor will then be called *Digital Literacy* and will present on the positive pole the students who use digital technologies in a formative way, while on the positive pole those who do not exploit its full potential.

From the intersection of these factors (taking into account the inverse polarity of the second one) it is possible to identify an index of Self-direction in learning, since these three skills are central to the development of this competence. Relating this index and the division into classes of the average level of experience in self-directed learning perceived / declared by the students was obtained the following contingency table:

Table 2. Relationship between Self-direction in learning and Self-directed Learning experience.

Self-directed Learning experience	Self-direction in learning			
	Low	Medium-Low	Medium-High	High
Low	43.8%	35.7%	19.6%	0.0%
Medium	56.3%	51.8%	49.0%	60.0%
High	0.0%	12.5%	31.4%	40.0%
Total	16	56	51	20

It is possible to notice that the lower the level of Self-direction, the lower is the experience that students have perceived / declared to have with respect to the skills related to Self-directed Learning. It is interesting in this sense to investigate, from pupil's explanations, what are the characteristics of the "ideal types" (Weber, 1903), that is students characterized by low or high levels of both Self-Directed Learning and Self-direction, and identify the points of difference and / or similarity they present with respect to deviant cases (High Experience in Self-Directed learning and Medium-Low Self-direction; Low Experience in Self-Directed learning and Medium-High Self-Direction) in a perspective of Positive Deviance (Lo Presti, 2020). In fact, it is believed that from the analysis of these cases it is possible to identify alternative solutions that could further enrich the understanding of what should be done or not to facilitate the development of transversal skills in children through the integration of digital in schools. The answers provided during the administration of the rubric and within the entire focus group by these students have therefore been compared, thus identifying different experiences and reactions to Distance Learning, both from the point of view of learning, relational aspect and free time.

6.1 Curious independent students

From the analysis of the stories provided by the "ideal types" with high scores emerges that they tend to perceive their competences high even before DaD / DDI. The pandemic experience has therefore generally not influenced their competences except in a transitory way, often as a response to excessive pressure from teachers.

> At school there are also, as they say, more interesting subjects. When you are interested in a topic you want to deepen it, but perhaps it is more likely that this desire to go to deepen things is out of school, perhaps because at school it is a mandatory thing [to study these subjects]. (CaV_S4)

> The professors demanded too much, so […] you never knew how much you could have, and grades were always a disaster. And then the professors asked our class absurd things like "look at the ceiling, stand to the side", because they thought we copied. (DaIII(1) S6)

However, DaD and DDI have strengthened skills already developed or modified some habits related to these, also thanks to teachers and digital integration.

> On this aspect the pandemic has helped me a lot because before I was more... I kept the goals, however, "maybe I'll skip this day", a bit like this, I procrastinated. While now, if I have a short or long goal, I make a program and a strategy, to achieve the objectives even from several points, from a point A to a point B, if it goes wrong (CaII(1)S3)

> The teacher taught us a color method, she visualized the text on the wall, projected it, and with colors we did logical analysis, for example the subject and the verb with various colors. This also helps us now on paper during tests. [...] Now even if we are all in attendance sometimes to repeat, I do not know… Greek before a test, we are still on video call in the evening, we maintain this habit. (ArII_S5)

The high motivation to deepen and learn new things combined with resistance to teachers who limit freedom in learning suggests calling students who fall into this type *Curious Independent*.

6.2 Insecure improvisers

The pupils who fall into the "ideal types" with low scores tend not to reflect on themselves, which leads them to be not very responsible and to act in learning without a precise strategy, perhaps because of the fear they show towards failures.

> I think that, as Giulia said, I break down rather easily in front of failures, because by checking the various errors I can understand… or maybe ask a person who knows more than me what mistake I made so as to be able to move forward. As for the successes, I do not get very excited because I also expect so much from me, so... (RaIII_S2)

> I'm not one who puts herself there to plan how I have to do things, how it comes is ok, in the sense that when I am there in front of what I have to do, I just do it. (VoII_S3)

All this led these students during the DaD to copy during oral or written tests and in general to study less, which inevitably resulted in the lowering of the level of experience compared to some competences.

> Let's say that in DaD we were much calmer, in case we had found ourselves in difficulty we could have tried to copy. (ArV_S5)

> School was... you could even copy, so I didn't think about it [study] at all. (CaIV_S1)

For these reasons, the pupils who fall into this type can be defined as *Insecure Improvisers*.

6.3 Enthusiastic discoverers

Enthusiastic Discoverers students present a medium-high/high level of *Leisure Literacy* and a medium-low level of *Self-Efficacy* and *Digital Literacy*; they are the ones who, despite the medium-low level of Self-Direction, have declared a high experience in Self-Directed Learning. The fact that they do not have confidence in their abilities or that they are not used in using digital technologies for learning has made their experience in DaD / DDI particularly complex, but they have attributed high levels of their current competences because, precisely due to the difficulties encountered, they have understood the importance of formal and informal learning, considering it useful for personal growth and in

general for the development of skills that go beyond the contents /subjects learned and the experience itself.

> Maybe there was also a little more openness on the part of everyone in socializing, because anyway we all realized that we had actually just spent a year knowing 10 people [...]. Maybe as soon as you met a classmate you remembered him only because in that sporadic episode of November he had quarrelled with a guy for an absurd reason and then maybe you had a prejudice towards this person [...]. Then knowing him better you understand that it was something that remained exclusively to the period of DaD. (ArII_S3)

> A teacher, perhaps even last year and that we no longer have, told us that for us school is like a small world of work, however, more restricted because in any case one at school learns subjects and learns things, learns knowledge that will be useful in the future […]. But one also learns to be with people, to live. [...] At school you can learn much more than just subjects. (CaII(1) S1)

This enthusiasm given by the discovery of a new awareness linked to their learning has probably led them, given the gap between DaD / DDI and presence, to overestimate their ability in Self-Directed Learning, perhaps also due to the fact that they are particularly young guys (14-16 years old).

> In DaD last year, for example, there were tests in a subject I hadn't studied for and I wasn't prepared. It was easy, I would go out and skip the question. Instead, this year if I have a test I study and go, also out of respect for my classmates. If it is not today, it's next week [the test]; things I didn't understand last year. (RaI_S3)

> During the DaD […] I was not so interested in the study in general, then now I would give myself a 4 because anyway at school I became more interested, even the spirit of being all together... (ArI_S6)

6.4 Anxious recreational students

In contrast to the previous type, *Anxious Recreational* students have a medium-high level of Self-Direction, but little experience in Self-Directed Learning. This seems to be due to the fact that these pupils know how to use digital technologies to learn and have sufficient self-confidence, but the negative

way in which they live formal learning strongly limits them: on the one hand there are those too tied to *performance*, who therefore study mainly for fear of low grades instead of thinking about one's own learning; on the other hand, there are those who consider school a waste of time and are therefore impatient to finish it in order to devote themselves to something else.

> First of all, from a scholastic point of view I would give zero. Because that is, it seems to me that the school lately... That is, the true essence of the school, lately, is dead. Professors constantly remind us why we have to study certain subjects. And I, even if I like some subjects, recognize that at the moment they are useless for my life. (ArIII_S4)

> There are too much subjects that require more effort... I can't keep up with well-being. I think more about getting high grades or helping other people than helping me. (BoII_S3)

In both cases, the physical and psychological energies occupied by the school make it difficult for these pupils to devote themselves to informal learning, thus living free time as a source of distraction and relaxation rather than of personal growth.

> Before the pandemic I was much more interested in following the lessons at school, I really liked the subjects I studied, I also liked going to school, actually. Now, however, I see that I am forcing myself to follow the lessons, I am forcing myself to study, that is, I really see that I no longer want to do anything. (RaIV_S4)

> I deepen many useless things, that is, I know a lot of things that are useless, because I read something and I go to deepen it even if it will not serve me anything in life. (RaIII_S3)

7. Conclusions

The diffusion of the *rubric* for the assessment of competences and programs in the educational field makes useful to understand how to make this tool increasingly effective. In a pluralist and democratic perspective of evaluation (Stame, 2016), it was decided to experiment with the integration of the *rubric* in the focus group, thus exploiting the strengths of one and the other and using the *online* mode to stem the possible disadvantages that this dyad could entail.

The results of the research *The social impact assessment of the DaD after*

COVID-19 suggest that including a rubric for the self-assessment of competences within a focus group can be a valid research strategy, given that the rare cases of contradiction that emerged from the responses of the students have allowed to note that, even when a tool such as the *rubric* is integrated within the *online* focus group can be applied the same "rules" of influence and recommended numerosity of the traditional focus group (Krueger, 1994). In fact, in all the meetings with the desired number of participants, the students felt comfortable enough to openly tell their experiences. This also made it easier for them to honestly self-assess, because the high subjectivity and variety that emerged prevented them from being ashamed to give themselves higher or lower scores than other classmates or schoolmates. The integration between rubric and focus group has thus made possible to notice how the same average score of competence provided by the students can depend on very different experiences. In particular, it has been possible to highlight which are the most important aspects to be considered to promote Self-Directed Learning in students, such as the ability of teachers to convey to their pupils the value of learning in their daily lives, so that they can exploit both opportunities for lifelong learning and personal growth (Kleiber, 2001), and the flexibility and transversality of digital technologies. In this way, the most autonomous students can obtain the right level of independence and, at the same time, it suggested to the most insecure and less curious students the chance to achieve both personal and scholastic goals through different paths, which could help them to fear less failures thanks to the discover of the existence of numerous solutions to every difficulty; similarly, this could help to perceive more connected the various learning contexts and thus increase motivation in pupils (Roberson et al., 2021), essential for them to be more inclined to undertake self-directed learning paths.

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Appendix

Rubrica di auto-valutazione per le competenze dell'apprendimento auto-diretto:
0 = nessuna esperienza/competenza maturata; 5 = massima esperienza/competenza maturata.

		0	1	2	3	4	5
Attributi Personali	Consapevolezza[1] Spirito di iniziativa[2] Controllo[3] Responsabilità[4] Problem Solving[5]						
Processo	Riconoscere[6] Pianificare[7] Attribuire[8] Valutare[9] Riflettere[10]						
Contesto	Individuale[11] Collaborativo[12] Digitale[13] Quotidiano[14]						

Note:

[1] Capacità di riconoscere i benefici dell'apprendimento formale e informale, con riferimento alle esperienze scolastiche ed extra-scolastiche.

[2] Capacità di interessarsi e intraprendere percorsi di apprendimento/approfondimento senza che sia richiesto da parte di terzi.

[3] Capacità di superare gli ostacoli apprendendo dai fallimenti.

[4] Capacità di assumersi la responsabilità dei propri successi e fallimenti.

[5] Capacità di dedicarsi al proprio benessere psico-fisico e alla realizzazione dei propri interessi/obiettivi nonostante impegni e imprevisti.

[6] Capacità di riconoscere il proprio livello di conoscenza teorico e pratico rispetto a un ambito specifico.

[7] Capacità di raccogliere informazioni utili per identificare un metodo di apprendimento.

[8] Capacità di identificare le priorità e riconoscere le risorse necessarie per raggiungere gli obiettivi di apprendimento.

[9] Capacità di riconoscere i punti di forza e di debolezza del metodo di apprendimento utilizzato.

[10] Capacità di progettare, se necessario, un nuovo metodo di apprendimento e/o capire come applicarlo ad altri ambiti.

[11] Capacità di apprendere in autonomia, senza bisogno di indicazioni da parte di terzi.

[12] Capacità di apprendere in gruppo e in modo partecipativo.

[13] Capacità di apprendere utilizzando internet e gli applicativi digitali.

[14] Capacità di trasformare la propria esperienza (di studio, relazionale e sociale) in un'occasione di apprendimento e di crescita personale.