



# Adult Education in a global society: An historical point of view

## Educazione degli Adulti in una società globale. Una concettualizzazione da un punto di vista storico

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### ABSTRACT

In the light of this preliminary reflection, we can therefore assert that even today, at the beginning of the Third Millennium and in the full-time of information technology and complete realization of the global village, in short, in the area of diffused knowledge, the Adult Education, both as a scientific discipline and as institutionalized activity, retains the essential and original double meaning, on the one hand, of reflection/intervention to help the adult literacy to recover a deficit of alphabetization caused by the increasing technological complexity and knowledge of the contemporary world, and on the other hand, to care for the needs of self-education, cultural and spiritual growth of each person in the whole course of his life.

Just at the time when Adult Education is becoming more and more the character of an utilitarian, instrumental intervention required by the exigencies of technological upgrading of production world and signs of serious employment crisis in all sectors, it must also preserve the other function, that of activity meeting the most intimate needs, of more intense spirituality and freedom of the individual.

Alla luce di questa riflessione preliminare, possiamo quindi affermare che ancora oggi, all'inizio del Terzo Millennio e nel tempo pieno della tecnologia informatica e nella compiuta realizzazione del villaggio globale, insomma nell'area della conoscenza diffusa, l'Educazione degli Adulti, sia come disciplina scientifica, sia come attività istituzionalizzata, conserva il duplice significato essenziale ed originario, da una parte, di riflessione/intervento per aiutare l'adulto a recuperare un deficit di alfabetizzazione causato dalla crescente complessità tecnologica e conoscitiva del mondo contemporaneo, e, dall'altra, di sollecitudine per le esigenze di auto-educazione, di crescita culturale e spirituale di ogni uomo in tutto il corso della sua vita. Proprio nel momento in cui l'Educazione degli Adulti assume sempre più il carattere di un intervento di tipo utilitaristico, strumentale, richiesto dalle esigenze di aggiornamento tecnologico del mondo della produzione e dai gravi segni di crisi occupazionali in tutti i settori, essa deve conservare anche l'altra funzione, quella di attività rispondente ai bisogni più intimi, di più intensa libertà e spiritualità della persona.

### KEYWORDS

Education, Globalization, Society, Adults, Technology.  
Educazione, Globalizzazione, Società, Adulto, Tecnologia.

## 1. Introduction

Globalization is one of the most popular arguments of contemporary non-fiction. It is dealt with everywhere, from newspapers to television, from specialized texts to informative work. The formulations range among sociologicistic and ideologicistic ones, and thus, this cultural, social and political phenomenon ends up splitting in a Manichean and dogmatic way those approaching it. Some consecrate its manifestations, convinced that the economic model supporting it is the best possible, resulting in the exaltation of a conservative mindset of free market and, in short, of a substantial neo-colonialism. (Genovesi, Bellatalla & Marescoti, 2005)

In this sense, globalization and education are touching almost until merging in the constant pursuit of the relationship between all individuals, without exception, and of all things, in a perspective that seeks to achieve personal and social welfare, never aiming to exclusion, but always to inclusion and recognition of equal opportunities for everyone. In this line, education and globalization seem to restore a circular relationship strained to following of the same goal: the creation of a global, systemic and interactive world, on a human scale, where to each individual is recognized the own diversity, a real pivot of education itself and a secure basis for the refinement of conceptual strategies in the global world we have to face every day. The instituting of such a relation is made possible by belonging to a school, pedagogically founded, becoming formation place of the individual-citizen of the world, that thanks to formalization of knowledge to which the school always tends, manages to own and transfer at any time and place the conceptual mechanism of "as if" in order to design different and better worlds.

The public-economic transformations, above all, cause a true *displacement*, expressed in eschatological, apocalyptic attitudes (Della Mora, 1995).

As asserted by Francesca Rigotti, the globalization phenomenon, read in terms of history philosophy, or rather equipped with an origin in the past and a projection into the future, seams collocated at the end of the history. (Rigotti, 2000)

Globalization, therefore, induces liberating and progressive enthusiasms and, at the same time, fears of various kinds: political fears that assume birth of world totalitarian states, decrease of local expertise, subordination of national interests, abnormal growth of a political-economic-military power, abstracted from the world, ending up in exploiting and influencing individual behaviour; moral and psychological fears, loss of local identity in the name of a universal condition seen as not always desirable; cultural fears, of dismay in front of the loss of traditional cultures in the name of the global "*civilisation de pacotille*". (Ricoeur, 1964)

It takes only these brief opening remarks to motivate the commitment and the subject of this work: the effects of globalization are of cultural and moral character, manifested in the consciousness of every man and therefore can be *cured*, if not exclusively, primarily through the education.

It is no coincidence that in this decade we have been witnesses of a renewed commitment to reform in the field of training systems not only in the countries complaining backwardness or lack of reform, but in all countries, looking for the most advanced levels of quality and more effective answers to the educational needs of society.

At the same time, globalization has caused, or at least has meant and continues to mean the disappearance of labour (Mothè, 1997) as an expression of a crisis that seems irreversible, and that has created a new model of work to be qualified as *flexible*, as *temporary*: this emergency also requires a new kind of educa-

tional intervention, because the education system does not have to set out to prepare for a job that will last for a lifetime, but it has to promote the acquisition of such skills and abilities that enable each individual to address the systematic and permanent changes in the workforce.

Thus, the era of globalization, that is, our time, requires a rethinking of education in its two dimensions: education as training of spirit and education as training for work.

But most importantly, it is necessary to rethink all the organizational and institutional models, in which education has traditionally been pursued: for life, no more in specific agencies and institutions only, but in the whole society; in a word, it is necessary to move a view, already theorized in the early '90s (Frabboni & Genovesi, 1990) of an integrated and into perspective oriented *training system*, clearly elaborated in the 70s (Legrand, 1997) of permanent and educating society.

What are the educational goals of “social” culture? Basically two: the use – understanding – legitimization of the old and new “alphabets” (personal, impersonal, of mass) and participation – production of new cultural “values”. (Frabboni & Genovesi, 1990)

So did the educator, in 1989-90. We must emphasize it, because this intervention, among the many that could be certainly indicated, documents in an exemplary way the delay of politics compared to the analysis/proposals of pedagogical science: only because of the dramatic urgency and pressure of *social question*, we will have, in 1998, the “Social Pact for development and employment”, with which the government undertook to develop, by 2000-2002, a multi-year plan (*Master plan*) of activities, of time and resources necessary to achieve the objectives of reform and modernization of education, training and research, in a logic of development and integrated governance of the system. Before this document there had been a whole series of formal interventions and officials of international organizations (OSCE, Council of Europe), that had attracted the attention of national governments on the influence that education policies were intended to exercise more and more incisively on policies for the development of economy and employment.

However, pedagogy cannot refer only to the acquisitions already made, nor feel satisfied of theoretical elaborations responsive to social needs – training of past decades or years, but it needs to continue providing its contribution not only in terms of theoretical research, but we would say especially in terms of researching the methods and operational solutions through which the *ongoing education*, from the *utopia* of educator or political and social operator, would become an educational programmatic and intentional prospective, able to transform the *city* and, even before that, the *educational institutions* and the social and cultural *agencies* equipped with the educational potential, to make of them a *permanent educational environment*.

## 2. Historical evolution of Adult Education

In the UNESCO General Conference, held in Nairobi in 1976, was adopted the following definition of adult education: “The whole of the educational processes (whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or non-formal; prolonging or replacing initial education dispensed in school institutions or in the form of professional training) through which people considered adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and develop their attitudes or behaviour, from the double perspective of an integral development of man and

of a participation in a socio-economic and cultural well-balanced and independent." This definition sums up, it seems to us, the essential contents of Adult Education, in the sense that we have described above, and also the historical evolution that has characterized this activity. (Russo, 2001)

It seems essential, in the economy of this work of ours, to dedicate a space large enough to the historical reconstruction of some moments of Adult Education that still today are more significant, certainly not to respond to simple needs of historical erudition, but for a substantial reason: because we are convinced that, in a discussion about the type of functions and tasks to be assigned, today, to Adult Education, it is of the very historical reflection that there can be a more authoritative indication, up to found and justify based on *really scientific reasons* a model of educational activity in adulthood that not only responds to abstract sociological or psychological theories, but is also rooted in a reading of the concrete needs of contemporary man.

Generally, the origin of Adult Education, as institutionalized activity through specific structures, with specific programs and appropriate teaching techniques, dates back to the movement created in Denmark by N. Grundtvig and C.Kold; this movement, in the mid-nineteenth century, promoted the creation of the first *folk high schools (Folkehojskole)*; it should be stressed that Grundtvig fought for the peasants, who were leaving the school after having completed their compulsory schooling, in order to have kept alive Danish popular culture and strengthened, through culture, the national feeling. (Lorenzetto, 1976)

Thus, the inspiration for this model of educational institutions for adults was of a political and cultural character, responded to the need for educational continuity and for cultural updating and not so much to a recovery of non-literacy, as would happen instead in other social and historical realities.

The history of Adult Education is thus also the history of the battles fought by adults in society, in which they, as students and as teachers, were more and more incisively to assume a leading role and political significance.

"In Sweden with the People's University of Brunswick, and then in England with the founding in 1903 of WEA (*Workers Education Association*), the Adult Education, that was born and had grown especially in rural environment, is connected with the labour movement, with the unions, with the universities. "As long as we conceive education as destined to the development and utility of the individual, rather than as something he should keep and use, as trustee, for the greater benefit of the society, we encourage the individual to isolate himself from his social duties", wrote the founder of WEA, Albert Mansbridge. (Russo, 2001)

In front of the ethical-social rigor of WEA, independent of political parties and of trade unions themselves, in advancing through the discourse of adult education, the formation of a workers' consciousness is matched by the sensitivity to cultural themes that characterized the popular German universities, in particularly those of Leipzig and Weimar.

"Parallel to this movement, even of more ancient origins that date back to the French Revolution, was gradually developed and consolidated the whole movement of popular culture in France. Already in texts such as the report presented by Codorcet on *l'Organisation Générale de l'Instruction Publique* in the Legislative Assembly in April 20 and 21, 1792, we read the following statement: "Education should be universal and that is to be extended to all citizens. It must embrace, in its different levels, the entire system of human knowledge and ensure men in all ages of life the ease to keep their knowledge and acquire new ones."

In 1866, in France was constituted the *Ligue de l'enseignement* and in 1892 the *Ligue pour les droits de l'homme*. Also in this year was opened the first *Popular Universities*, having a considerable development in all these countries until the

First World War. In the years between the First and Second World War, associations of Adult Education in some countries began to denounce the elements of crisis and stagnation, with respect to the momentum of the first two decades of the century; in others, as in Italy and Germany, they were suppressed by anti-democratic regimes.

### 3. From Adult Education to lifelong learning

The concept of *lifelong education*, as evolution, transformation and enrichment of simple Adult Education (often seen as pure instrumental literacy), appears after the Second World War and it is stated fully in the 60s.

As observed by Mario Mencarelli, the perspective of continuing education has emerged, rather than through theoretical reflection of educationists, in the concrete action of educators among adults, who realized, working in the spiritual and cultural ruins scattered by the war, that the illiterate adult does not need only the tools used to read and write, but he especially needs to recover the reasons of his own identity and freedom, to have a full awareness of his dignity as a human being. This was an intuition of great importance, because it not only helped to radically change the methods for literacy skills, but above all, it gave birth to a new confidence, a renewed hope in education, a real new philosophy of education: that of continuous emancipation of man in the perspective of authenticity. (Mencarelli, 1973)

The discovery of this new dimension of education, that is, of its educational potential in the field of political rights of man and for the recovery of his self-propulsive abilities, determined the interest of major international organizations, first of all the UN, that through UNESCO awarded to the continuing education the strategic function of pursuing the actual triumph of *democratic virtues* in the whole world, spreading the ethics of human rights, promoting the economic development of underdeveloped countries and groups that were living, even in rich countries, in conditions of marginality.

It contributed much to the clarification of the concept of lifelong education, the succession of conferences organized by UNESCO, from that of 1949 in Elsinore, Denmark, to that of 1960 in Montreal, Canada; of great importance was the "World Congress of Ministers of education for the elimination of illiteracy", which was held in 1965 in Tehran, Iran, attended by representatives of the UN and its organizations (including UNESCO). (Hely, 1966)

The concept, rather than the expression, was born in Montreal; it was during the conference that in Elsinore an idea had just flashed: education is a process that lasts a lifetime. It should be noted though, as already well-known, that the philosophy expressed by this statement was considered labile, equivalent to a real "compromise philosophy" ignoring the trends operating in the past and recent history.

It remains the historical importance of the Conference of Montreal, full of reunions forming a set of unprecedented international meetings on the subject, offering an opportunity for a deeper and complete study of the special problems implying adult educators. They allowed taking advantage of the experience, and technical specialists came to Montreal from all over the world. The idea of lifelong education was able to establish itself becoming a fundamental pedagogical principle in all countries of the world: for school education, as well as for education outside school.

We should also mention the action of the *Conseil de l'Europe*, which has been attracting the attention of member states on the problem; it intended to gather information on the experiences born spontaneously; it wished to con-

tribute, with the help of experts, to the conceptual clarification and the analytical detection of the true proportions of the concept of lifelong education; and it intended finally to rally around the implementation of some “projects” (we can remember the project *Animation* under the leading of J. Simpson and the *Permanent Education* project designed and created by Bertrand Schwartz in collaboration with experts from all over Europe). As international conferences have marked the work of UNESCO, a number of *Symposia* have marked over years highlights of the initiative of the Council of Europe. From these *Symposia*, which are served to the knowledge and dissemination of avant-garde experience, has emerged, as it did during the conference of UNESCO, the political relevance of permanent education, that postulating the most extensive and continued promotion of human potential, is identified with democracy or – more properly, with the *vis democratica*. That certainly cannot be denied, but we cannot assert that it has allowed a semantization of the concept of lifelong education in such a univocal way. (Lengrand, 1973)

It is difficult to determine how, in this process of clarification, there has been an influence – just for the remembered political dimension of lifelong education – of the ideological inspiration. It is certain, however, that more than once, if not recurrently, it happened that “lifelong education cannot be neutral”, making positioning more than legitimate, as it denies to the root the belief that the educational work should be indifferent to the values or in front of the great needs moving people and social groups. But it is not enough just to state that “lifelong education must not be neutral”. It is necessary to declare which side it will take: the side of the man, the side of the society, the side of the work that mutates its production criteria demanding an ever new preparation, or the side of technological development?

The questions do not constitute a complete list: their formulation should be to keep alive the issue and perhaps to invite to a more complex and not reductive explanation of the concept of lifelong education.

A second significant response is offered by Paul Legrand, among other frequent contributors to UNESCO: this response pays attention to the need to weld the two periods in which the individual has long been divided in views on life: the period of evolutionary age for education and that of adult age, to allocate to the responsibilities (work, family, social roles, etc.). There is in this thesis the facing of a widespread and therefore eclectic philosophy in our time: the philosophy of believing in productivity of *continuum* of experience, from which one builds the wealth of knowledge, skills, values, rules in front of life. Beyond eclecticism, in which the thesis is expressed, it is to admit in evidence that, in this way, the same expression *permanent education* becomes a philosophy, i.e. a way of thinking: the subject needs to be reared since childhood, right from basic schooling, also to avoid the traumatic force expressing the responsibilities of life when they occur.

There is no doubt that the permanent education can only be based on a secular, critical mindset, based on the dynamic activity of the region. But you cannot wait for all this to be achieved by spontaneous germination: the society can't avoid planning carefully what it takes for lifelong education to work the miracle expected by it. At this rationalism, to which are equivalent sharp geometries, is inspired the already mentioned project of *Education Permanente*, which condenses the meaning of visits to avant-garde experiences performed in Europe (in the school and outside the school, with children, youth and adults, people and the community) in order to set up an ideal system, however limited, of permanent education.

It should also be considered the answer to the problem of teaching of *personalism*, which takes the person as a principle of a of lifelong education peda-

gogy, because the person has within himself the principle of his being and his existence, and therefore the reasons legitimizing his rights. The identification of permanent education with the principle of self-education allows us to consider the whole movement for Adult Education as a special moment of the broader movement of contemporary pedagogy, that is, the activism pedagogy.

*Problems and perspectives.* Each segment of discourse has highlighted various challenges, ranging from the availability of facilities to the necessary skills, not to mention the lack of motivation that people and social groups reveal sometimes to the initiatives of permanent education. The most conspicuous problem, after having noted that permanent education is an “emergent culture”, is that of starting that will set in motion all processes that make living a system of permanent education. In this respect, the legislative action, both at central and regional or departmental level, it is important: to open spaces, to provide resources, to elicit motivations.

It is typical to consider even in times of economic recession the legislative intervention carried out in France with the so-called law of 1%, that privileging at a starting point the professional training, establishes that 1% of the annual wage bill is redistributed to companies, professional associations, etc. to increase the professional skills, for a more complete realization of those working. In other countries (such as Netherlands, Norway etc.), is privileged the socio-cultural animation. In Italy, a secure datum is the usability of so-called “150 hours”, a kind of “paid leave”, used primarily for the achievement of a qualification.

The comparative study of situation of individual countries shows that unfortunately achievements on this plan are rather modest. In reality, there is perhaps still to acquire a precise conviction on this plan: educators, precisely at the level of permanent education, are writers and journalists, film and television directors, politicians and legislators, political parties and professional associations. Simply put: you can give credit to school education as well as education outside school, but all can draw life from an *educating society*, i.e. a society that intends to give humanity to man, more than it intends to take it away from him through alienation, discrimination, exploitation or even through omissions alone.

#### 4. A school and culture policy for lifelong education

The prospect of lifelong education would be destined to remain little more than a utopia, if every time it is discussed, are not indicated also ways, forms, concrete means by which it can be realized. The commemoration of reasons, of instances, the economic circumstances of an economic nature, which in different historical moments in the past or in the present have led to maturation the design of permanent education, is the most useful way to elaborate achievable proposals “that meets the deepest needs of the person”. (Puka, 2012)

First of all, we must begin with what we have: the school in the first place, followed by other traditional educational agencies (family, associations, church, etc.); then the social and administrative institutions (local authorities, local health authorities, the media etc.).

Therefore, a serious and pragmatic approach of a policy aiming to build a model of permanent education must start from the critical analysis of these agencies and institutions that already exist, assessing their consistency and compliance with respect to the project and need for a lifelong educational process, rethinking and updating them as necessary, to imagine and create new ones; most importantly, to create a coordination and planning of training activities that the society, in its complex, is able to express.

In fact, that’s exactly what happened, at times with full awareness, and some-

times because of the urgency of contingent phenomena, in almost all countries.

The process of critical reassessment of educational institutions has developed since the '70s, in most industrialized countries, as recalled already in 1988 by Franco Frabboni: "Authoritative European and overseas countries – with those possessing models of high economic and social development in first line – have questioned without complexes the *state of health* of their *training systems* (in and outside school)." (Frabboni, 1988)

The result of diagnosis carried out in those years in the seven most industrialized countries of the world maintain a *therapeutic* utility still present today; as it seems due to bring again Frabboni's text containing, with the effectiveness of words and images usual to it, diagnostic and therapeutic elements altogether: "The report is in unison and lapidary on *one point*. This one. The negative *look*, the most obvious pathology exhibited by the education system is that of *disintegration*: that is materialized in the "incompleteness/discontinuity" within the school system and in the "shredding/separation" within the extra-school system "the human life coincides with a pedagogical plan", (Puka, 2008)

Within this dilapidated scenario of *disintegration* are to be isolated and reported *two images/ ne*, *two effects/notes* in charge of the school system.

*The first image* is that of the school as a cultural toy increasingly *broken*, *to pieces* in its interior degrees and in its relationship with other training agencies: *historical and otherwise*. It is the ancient scourge of *discontinuity*: flailing, longitudinally, the "*integration/unity*" of its subsectors (the interaction-fitting between maternal elementary and upper middle education), and across the board, the cultural "interdependence/reciprocity" between "knowing the inside" and "knowing the outside of school".

*The second image* is that of "senescence/non-productivity" of *knowledge* because of a school increasingly as a slow wagon of a train with the cultural locomotive (development/scientific and technological progress) literally in a *spaceship*. In other words, the *turtle-school* awkwardly impersonating a cultural coin (education) *off-course*, rarely spent in social districts that possess cultural goods by *alphabets* and *knowledge* from one thousand miles more advanced than those cooked – often rhetorically and pathetically – inside the school.

This *double image* is likely to transform school systems from capital city to cultural "suburban", from centre of gravity to "marginal" terrain (although *reserve of luxury*, because of its high cost) of the training system.

The *report cards* on the education system are not limited to formalization of non-sufficiency, but suggest also corrective/amendatory lines, unavoidable to achieve the "sufficiency", to proceed further, to give "centrality" to the training system. And the "winning" recipe, edited in different languages, to cure the illnesses of school and extra-school, is that which has as a title the call to the cause of individual nations to inaugurate the *season of great choices*. This is the strong thesis, shouted chorally by the international relations. Precisely because such *structural nodes* of single countries – as model of economic development and labour market – tend to limit and marginalize, on the outskirts, the *structural archipelago* of training system (of school and culture), it is necessary more than ever – immediately and without hesitation – to qualify and enhance this "archipelago": the only one capable of ensuring – tomorrow – a solution and a development of *structural nodes* in harmony and in the equation with the existential objective of *the quality of life*. A "*quality*" that is possible by starting from a widespread maturation, near future generations, of elevated coefficients of *cultural emancipation, social solidarity, collective morality*.



## 5. A pedagogy between theoretical and operational dimension

The pedagogy has always devoted her attention to the problems of growing age, moving on the general assumption that the intellectual, theoretical training preceded the practical application: the school curriculum was characterized by the prevalence of knowledge over competences, understood as ability and skills.

The reflection on the new focuses the attention on a hypothesis built for both the institutional and organizational aspect, as well as for the content-cognitive aspect.

There are various elements that are introduced and that qualify the new option, but for the fact that they are considered important and essential, represent the values around which to build the new model. The pedagogical option remains, however, the central point giving a new meaning to these components and it is based on the *concept of relationship*. "The image of oneself that every individual tries to affirm in respect to others is inspired on the largest autonomy and personal freedom". (Puka, 2011)

With this choice are addressed differently classic dichotomies of study and work, intellectuality and manuality, basic training, technical-professional-citizenship training.

The study is certainly an acquired value; it has always been a value, even if in the past only for a few. Today it is definitely considered an essential value for all. The problem to be addressed is not so much the value of the study for all, but the relationship that the study needs to establish with another value, that of labour. The news does not therefore regard the study, but the introduction of labour concept in the curriculum of study as a training concept, essential to understanding the labour itself. In this different vision of curriculum, the subject of labour represents the new fact and contributes to a better definition of the relationship with other contents and, above all, with the fundamental value: the man and his actions in the world. The cognitive aspect of labour covers only one part of the subject, while the other regard real operations, that is its dynamic in the moment in which it is implemented and put in act.

The organization of training must therefore be established, compared to the past, in a different relationship with the labour world and its multiple expressions. Between study and work are identified a series of cooperation forms representing articulated models of possible modalities and, as a result, of learning. We can thus enter into the logic of identification of learning not with the study only, but also with different forms of study - labour.

So it can be argued that the study is only a modality of knowledge and that in order to achieve a better knowing, it is essential to correlate the forms of study with the forms of labour. The study is not the only condition for knowing. Knowledge is the product of integration between theoretical and operational dimension. The man is a unity in the itinerary of his training, and such unity must be constantly maintained. It should therefore be avoided to implement forms of separation which would lead to consider periods, in which is present only the formation of the intellect, followed by other periods, in which is present only the technical operational training. The immediacy of the operations is instead maintained during the period of training in all of its moments. The integral formation of man, before being a fact of content, is a profound methodological option. Along the same line of thinking must be considered the distinction between basic education and technical-professional training. (AA.VV. 2000)

Another element of this new training strategy regards the relationship between education, labour and "right of citizenship". Here should be recalled a fundamental constitutional assumption, that the republic is "founded on labour". This statement clearly expresses the link existing between labour and citizenship.

The constitution has intended to give labour a primary value as reported to the manner in which the subject, the person, is placed with his entire life in the productive and cultural environment. What the labour today requires, in pedagogical point of view, is to be correlated in a closer way to the reflexivity and therefore to be able to establish a different relationship with the traditional world of study. While at school and in different educational institutions is asked for more attention in the subject of labour and its relationship with the world of production, at work, today, one must be required to be open to reflection about the own operations and therefore to consider this new aspect as an essential element of the own qualitative development.

The right to citizenship passes through these very important moments: the subject acquires the right to work as his humanization through reflexivity. He must pass from the concept of labour as a means to that of labour as a significant object for his humanization. The first political citizenship of man addresses this need, to contribute to the social development through the humanisation of labour; it passes through reflection and awareness. This appears as the fundamental political option understood as participation in the social construction; for the subject that assumes and builds it, this is an essential and personal pedagogical option.

Recent data on schooling of workforce show a strong need to enhance and strengthen the area of basic skills. It is in fact difficult to deal with personal and professional life relying on a very small wealth of basic skills, with half of the employed population made up of workers deprived of title, with a certificate of primary school and up to a level of compulsory schooling. (Lodigiani, 1999)

The need to participate in educational activities at different moments of personal and working life is a right which must to be accessed by large numbers of populations, with particular development of reception measures for the strata at high risk of social exclusion and productive in relation to the necessities of restructuring their personal and working projects.

Another area of primary importance which could partly meet the school institutions is the offer of orientation moments and counselling services to facilitate the re-entering into training routes, to support learning outcomes and marketability, in collaboration with other local structures in charge of them.

"The most recent documents of the EU and UNESCO in the field of education and training indicate also an unstoppable evolution towards "a society of diffused learning", with learning playing a vital role in the function it takes in construction of knowledge structures, and it is on this basis that the European organisms have come to recognize as the main educational priority "the learning to learn", which is becoming a conscious and shared educational goal, requiring a deliberate improvement of learning capacity, modalities and strategies of each and everyone. (Smith, 1994).

Learning to learn, learning to know, are also the essential functions of the apprehension model that the *International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century* of UNESCO indicates as one of the founding pillars of education and training for the millennium to come.

It is a model not to be focused on the acquisition of structured knowledge, but is directed instead to the development of the *instruments to learn*, (Delors, 1997), highlighting the extreme importance of enhancing the individual "active potential of learning" through the "promotion of personal characteristics" functionality to future learning. The goal of any educational process becomes therefore the facilitation of construction and development of cognitive and affective-motivational structures that allow being able to learn more and better in the future. In this perspective, the apprehension comes to represent thus not only and not that much the condition of possibility of every educative intervention, but

rather an essential goal of such intervention: if it's true that every human being is naturally predisposed to learn, it's true also that the educative contexts must not recognize learning as the only way and potential to activate and stimulate, but also – in deweyan terms – as “end in sight”, together with constitutive dimensions and regulative orientations of training processes.

The focalization of international debate on the *process of apprehension* solicits thus the pedagogical reflection of “recalling” the apprehension in the complexity and variety of its forms, with the aim of building a more adequate and articulated theoretical and epistemological framework of reference through the confrontation with a plurality of contributions of research, from those developed in the ambit of cognitive sciences, to those proposed by psycho-pedagogy or andragogy. The studies in the ambit of cognitive sciences of psycho-pedagogy of apprehension have contributed to a deep redefinition of the concept in question.

## 6. Conclusions

On the one hand was recognized the importance of individual differences in the configuration of the “different learning styles”, and on the other hand, it has highlighted the essential role and incorporation of socio-cultural learning processes that present themselves as actually “situated”, “mediated” and constructed intersubjectively through “socio-cognitive” procedures. It is recognized therefore the centrality of the subject, understood as “epistemic agent” and identified as active, autonomous and self-regulating manager of the learning processes he is involved in, but it highlights also the need to consider the environmental and socio-cultural contexts as equally important factors in determining the learning processes. The apprehension is thus understood as both individual and social process, peculiarly connoted by the cognitive configuration of the subject and the bio-cultural conditions having produced, and also substantially modulated and solicited him by the characteristics of the respective contexts and social relations. The development and dissemination of a “unified theory of adult learning” or “andragogy” determines also the possibility of declining the “*lifelong learning*” in different ways, depending on the different stages of life and the characteristics of individuals who learn. (Knowles, 1997)

The adult learning is configured as unique and peculiar compared to that of childhood or adolescence. In the adult, the cultural ego is more structured, and the previous experiences of training are more settled both in cognitive and affective terms. They mutate the necessities of knowledge in self-concept, the role of lived experiences, willingness to learn, guidance and motivation. The cognitive procedures and structures of knowledge brought into play are also very different. At the base of apprehension processes in adult age exists in fact a particular need to know, of which it is important to become fully aware. The subjects see themselves as responsible for their own choices and cognitive apprehensive choices and are therefore deeply implicated in “learning projects” undertaken by them. The personal experiences of life and training, previous learning and educational experiences constitute a solid *background*, which represents an important and significant resource to recognize and use. The willingness to apprehend is strongly oriented to the satisfaction of specific and particular needs and the cognitive orientation to learning is strongly centred in real life and focused on specific tasks. The reasons, finally, are primarily internal, and learning is seen as an opportunity for personal growth, expansion and improvement. In this perspective, the adult is recognized as being able to personally manage his apprehension processes depending on the individual choices and training needs.

It becomes thus possible to hypothesize experiences of *self directed learning*, built on basis of demands for change and growth that should be identified and recognized in order to be transformed into viable projects for self-training, through mediation interventions facilitating the clarification and promoting awareness of their needs and ways of learning. The very close relationship between *learning and changing* is highlighted by all the authors that – in a pedagogical perspective – have proposed hypothesis of definition and analysis of complex mechanisms by which man is adapted to the environment and, together, assimilate him to his own cognitive structures and patterns of action.

In some cases, the change is seen as an intrinsic condition to learning; in others, the change is understood rather as an indicator of learning; and in still others, learning and change are even identified with each-other. In any case, regardless of the different emphasis placed on the role and function of learning in relation to change, it is evident that the pedagogical intervention becomes possible precisely in virtue.

To learn means to implement a complex process of “assimilation” and “accommodation” that puts us in a position to change the structures of knowledge through which we enter in relation to the world to interpret and understand it. (Piaget, 1970)

It means to deeply modify the own epistemological and existential asset. It means giving new and different meanings to the own experiences. It means changing attitudes and habits. Learning represents therefore an instance of change, which deeply affects the processes of formation and constitutes the condition for the possibility of educational intervention, built by its nature in function of change. “Education and change” are in fact “Siamese ideas” and it is their relationship that determines the ability to recognize and evaluate the learning experiences in educational function. The concept of “change” – together with those of “conditioning” and “communication” – can therefore be assumed as “ordering concept” of the pedagogical discourse, in particular regarding the adult condition. (Demetrio, 1997)

Learning, change, education are therefore the elements of a *continuum* that enriches and modifies the process of human formation, determining in it continuous occasions for growth, in terms of a positive transformation.

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