

**TRANSFORMING  
THE EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP:  
steps for the Lifelong learning Society**

**TRASFORMARE  
LA RELAZIONE EDUCATIVA:  
passi per la costruzione della Società  
dell'apprendimento permanente**

a cura di / editors  
Umberto Margiotta, Juliana Raffaghelli

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# Referees' evaluation



The journal *Formazione & Insegnamento* started an evaluation system of the articles to be published in 2009, setting up a committee of referees. The Referees Committee's objective is to examine publications and research that may have an academic and scientific value.

In accordance with international guidelines, the journal adopted the following criteria:

- 1. Choice of referees:** the choice is made by the Editor among university teachers and researchers of national and / or international level. The referees' committee is updated annually. At least two members of the referees' committee are chosen among university teachers and researchers belonging to universities or research centers abroad.
- 2. Anonymity of the referees system (double-blind review):** to preserve process integrity of peer review, the authors of the papers do not know the identity of referees. Referees, instead, will know the identity of the authors.
- 3. Evaluation methods:** the Editor will collect the papers of the authors, ensuring that articles meet the technical requirements of the journal (requiring changes and / or additions in case these requirements have not been met). The Editor will, then, make the articles available to the referees using a reserved area within the website of the journal (<<http://www.univirtual.it/drupal/protect>>, "reserved area for referees"). An e-mail from the journal's administration will announce to referees the presence of the items in the reserved area, and which items should be assessed. Referees will read the assigned articles and provide their assessment through an evaluation grid, whose template is made available by the Editor within the restricted area. Referees will be able to fill out the template directly online within the reserved area (through the use of *lime survey* software) within the deadlines set by the Editor. The evaluation will remain anonymous and advice included in it may be communicated by the editorial board to the author of the paper.
- 4. Traceability of the assessment and electronic archive:** the reserved area, within the journal website, is planned and organized in order to have traceability of electronic exchanges between Editor and referees. In addition, evaluated papers and evaluation forms will be also included in an electronic archive within the restricted area. This it allows the Journal to maintain transparency in the procedures adopted, in case of assessments by external assessors and accredited institutions. The latter may require access to the private area to check the actual activation of the evaluation of the papers by the referees' committee.
- 5. Type of evaluation:** referees will express their assessments only through the evaluation template, previously placed in the restricted online area by the Editor of the Journal. Foreign referees will use an English version of the template. The evaluation board consists of a quantitative part (giving a score from 1 to 5 to a series of statements that meet criterias of originality, accuracy, methodology, relevance to readers, and structure of content) and a qualitative part (discursive and analytical judgments about strengths and weaknesses of the paper). In a third part, referees will express approval about the publication of the article, or advice about a publication after revision. In the latter case, referees will be able to provide guidance or suggestions to the author, in order to improve the paper. The evaluation template is available to authors, in order to have transparency of evaluation criteria.
- 6. Limitations of the evaluation:** the referees' power is advisory only: the editor may decide to publish the paper anyway, regardless of the assessment provided by referees (though still taking it into account).
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# La valutazione dei referee

La rivista *Formazione & Insegnamento* ha attivato, a partire dal 2009, un sistema di valutazione degli articoli in fase di pubblicazione, istituendo un comitato di *referee*.

Il Comitato dei *referee* si pone l'obiettivo di prendere in esame quelle pubblicazioni e ricerche che possono avere un valore scientifico ed accademico.

In linea con le indicazioni internazionali in materia, la rivista *Formazione&Insegnamento* ha adottato i seguenti criteri:

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- 2. Anonimia dei referee (sistema "doppio-cieco", double-blind review):** Per preservare l'integrità del processo di revisione dei pari (*peer review*), gli autori dei *paper* candidati non conoscono l'identità dei *referee*. L'identità degli autori sarà invece nota ai *referee*.
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- 4. Rintracciabilità delle valutazioni e archivio elettronico:** l'area riservata all'interno del sito della rivista *Formazione&Insegnamento* è stata pensata e organizzata al fine di avere rintracciabilità elettronica degli scambi avvenuti tra l'Editor e i *referee*. Inoltre, tutti i *paper* sottoposti a valutazione e le relative schede di valutazione verranno inseriti in un archivio elettronico, sempre all'interno dell'area riservata del sito della rivista. Ciò permette alla rivista *Formazione&Insegnamento* di mantenere la trasparenza nei procedimenti adottati, anche in vista della possibilità di essere valutata da enti e valutatori esterni accreditati. Questi ultimi potranno richiedere alla Direzione della rivista *Formazione & Insegnamento* la chiave di accesso all'area riservata e constatare l'effettiva attivazione del sistema di valutazione dei *paper* tramite il comitato dei *referee*.
- 5. Tipo di valutazione:** I *referee* dovranno esprimere la propria valutazione esclusivamente tramite la scheda di valutazione, il cui modello è stato disposto dall'Editor all'interno dell'area riservata del sito della rivista. La scheda di valutazione si compone di una parte quantitativa (attribuzione di un punteggio da 1-5 ad una serie di affermazioni che rispondono a criteri di originalità, di accuratezza metodologica, di rilevanza per i lettori, e di correttezza della forma e della buona strutturazione del contenuto) e di una parte qualitativa (giudizi analitici e discorsivi circa i punti di forza e di debolezza del *paper*). In una terza parte i *referee* esprimeranno un giudizio sintetico circa la pubblicabilità o meno dell'articolo o alla sua pubblicabilità con riserva. In quest'ultimo caso, i *referee* potranno infatti fornire indicazioni o suggerimenti all'autore, al fine di migliorare il *paper*. Il *format* di valutazione è accessibile da parte degli autori, allo scopo di rendere trasparenti i criteri di valutazione.
- 6. Limiti nella valutazione:** Il potere dei *referee* è in ogni caso esclusivamente consultivo: l'Editor può decidere di pubblicare o meno il *paper* indipendentemente dal giudizio espresso (anche se comunque ne terrà debitamente conto).
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### Introduction

This Special Issue is the result of a selection of best papers from the International Conference “*Transforming the educational relationship: intergenerational and family learning for the lifelong learning society*”, within the context of the EU project “*Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences*”<sup>1</sup>. The project has been promoted by six very different institutions, coming from five EU Member States. As such, the project encompassed the challenge of putting together, at the same time and within the same space of reflection, people that not only came from different cultural backgrounds, but that also expressed the diversity of disciplinary perspectives on such important topic as it is intergenerational learning: from art, from pedagogical research, from social and educational prac-

\* While the *Forewords* are the result of collaboration and agreement between the two authors, the specific contributions have been made as follows:

Umberto Margiotta supervised the whole article structure and rationale. Furthermore, he wrote the following paragraphs: § *Introduction*; § 2. *Transforming the educational relationship: toward the learnfare*.

Juliana Raffaghelli curated the final paper version and wrote the following paragraphs: §3. *Intergenerational and Family learning come into action* § 4 *A focus on Creative Languages: facilitating adult-child interplay*; § 5 *A focus on early childhood education and care (ECEC): building caring environments and the role of adults as educators*, §6. *Training the trainers: designing for effective intergenerational learning*; §7 *The questions addressing the debate*.

1 EU LLP GRUNDTVIG Project “*Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences*”. For more information, please visit the website: [www.alice-llp.eu](http://www.alice-llp.eu)

tices, from literature, from technologies; all of them believing that this diversity is the source of inspiration for everyone. Indeed, this was the *leit motiv* of ALICE project, from the very beginning. Put creative languages in action to reinforce one of the most important educational relationships, the one of adult and the child in the interplay of daily life, within family, across institutional spaces that let generations to come together.

The conference has been seen as an opportunity to expand the debate that addressed the project's practices and innovations, in a wide community of researchers and practitioners, and the papers hereby presented are representative of this enriched landscape. The conference proceedings showed indeed a wealth of perspectives that witnessed the evolution of key issues for the lifelong learning society, that is, intergenerational and family learning.

To understand this debate, we will start in this preface by recalling the key topics that were the base of intervention and conceptualization by ALICE partners as well as an inspirational source for the practitioners and researchers participating in the conference. We will hence introduce the papers selected and their importance to shape the complex picture of intergenerational and family learning for the lifelong learning society.

### 1. Transforming the educational relationship: toward the learnfare

When the project was merely dreamed of as a possibility, ALICE partners were convinced that bringing innovation at school and through formal learning processes was not enough to promote a Lifelong Learning strategy. As Margiotta puts, *people live in a society where citizenship, inclusion, and work depend on the ability to “learn to learn” and to build one’s own opportunities at every stage of one’s life. I call this learnfare* (Margiotta, 2011, p. 1)

The *learnfare* is based on the difference between the traditional design or conception of *welfare*, which was based on a “technocracy” of human life development. There use to be a linear sequence of life stages: birth, training, work, marriage, home, family, children, retirement, and death. Institutions to which the individual was referred supported every one of these stages: the School, the University, Family, and Work. As a matter of fact, each stage mentioned has become more fragile, and the sequence has become more contingent upon socioeconomic conditions, and perhaps more fragile or transient in the lives of members of society. The relationships between the composition of society, the perception of needs, the genesis of requests for social support and the consequent systems of protection have changed greatly. There was a gap between Family and School, and the former space was not recognized by the learning culture of the latter.

With all its ambiguities, the issue of the individual's right to learn is shifting active welfare away from a “workfare” and towards a “learnfare” perspective, which should ensure effective access on the individual's part to learning opportunities consistent with either the needs of the economy or his/her personal life projects. For the *learnfare*, the role of every space of learning, and every relationship becomes crucial to express the individual's agency and her creative potential. The family and the intergenerational relationships should become hence a privileged space (as they were once) for the promotion of key competences for lifelong learning.

However, we are still far from realize this big picture.

To take *learnfare* as a framework for social politics means interpreting the



space opened by the Lisbon strategy and more recently by the EU2020 (COM, 2010) strategy not in a submissive manner but with an orientation towards its own direction of development. Here the point is – as Amartya Sen underlines – to go beyond the human capital definition, after having recognised its relevance. A so-called “welfare of capabilities” should therefore be established, and should be considered more than just a welfare of competencies, being connected with the collective and individual opportunities to act on one’s own right to learn.

A profound change in the educational interventions and research is urgently required. It is not enough to intervene at the level of the school learning, but to reinforce all possible environments and relationships where the individual can find the place to cultivate creativity, self-expression, entrepreneurship, emotional and social intelligence, and so on.

## 2. Intergenerational and Family learning come into action

There is when intergenerational and family learning come into action. The educational relationship between the adult and the child encompasses a twofold process where the adult enacts the own knowledge and skills, learning at the same time from the child or the teen-ager as beholders of a difference that enrich. There are several nuances of learning within an intergenerational relationship if we consider who is the *educator* and who is the *learner*. The crucial thing, the beautiness of such an educational relationship is the dynamic interplay, the opportunity to change roles with flexibly, promoting informal learning that leads to the achievement – both by the adults and the children – of key competences for lifelong learning, like learning to learn, social and civic competence, entrepreneurship or cultural awareness. These can be considered “soft-skills” that lead the learner across different social spaces, easily transferrable to other lifelong learning situations. But above all, they are connected with the learners’ agency, that is, their personal (in the case of the family relationships) as well as civic and cultural (in the case of volunteering) opportunities of expression that shape the own identity as learner, citizen, human being. Beyond this outcome at the individual’s level, we have to take also into account the important result at a broader, collective level: intergenerational learning can be considered a mean and an end to fostering social cohesion, since the social spaces where it takes place (like the family or in volunteering institutions) are “germ-cells” of a healthy society.

Nevertheless, ensuring IL through the creation of adequate educational environments is a challenge both for researchers and practitioners. On one hand, formal education promotes mainly intra-generational experiences, structured in learning contexts where little or no contact between among generations (beyond the technical role of teachers/educators) occurs (Loewen, 1996; Miller et al. 2008). On the other hand, intergenerational learning also implies setting up adequate learning contexts for adults (Newman, 2008). More research is clearly needed in this field: in spite of the importance given nowadays to the lifelong learning perspective, adults’ informal learning, in the form of more frequent learning situations for adults with low educational attainment, has not been sufficiently explored, described and modelled. Such a research focus should accompany the modernisation of Higher Education, as well as recognition of vocational learning, achieved through working situations; lack of attention to this issue risks ending in low participation levels, from a lifelong learning perspective,

of a significant proportion of the adult population, as is emphasized by ET2020 indicators and strategy.

In line with the above mentioned research problem, it clearly emerges that educators of adults need new skills in order to intervene in uncommon situations such as cultural events, school projects, social activities, engaging adults and making them reflect on their learning processes without invading their sense of independence and protagonism in cultivating their own competences. This means providing adults with learning environments that are “free” of overly structured training situations. This regards a very specific topic: the role of adults as educators, a crucial form of participation in the learnfare society (Margiotta, 2011, op. cit.).

### 3. A focus on Creative Languages: facilitating adult-child interplay

As stated previously, intergenerational learning is an uncommon situation, which requires pedagogical innovation and *crossing boundaries* of practice (both personal and institutional). The key point is: how can we ensure IL? What environments and languages best promote connections between generations? Creative languages, i.e. moving beyond the languages traditionally adopted in educational settings, might provide one answer.

The role of arts education in forming competences for life among young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been widely recognised at the European level. (Jan Figel, 2009, European Year of Creativity and Innovation); in adult education, art (from themed film and art to literary evenings, graffiti and “performative” social media such as blogs or video repositories with own texts/images) and games are used as a focal point, as events/situations/objects that promote emotional engagement together with reflection on life values, relationships and identity. The kernel of effectiveness is the creative process, where emotional intelligence together with divergent cognitive processes is enacted. CL is therefore a powerful tool for facilitating dialogue with otherness (in this case, children). The key issue is the opportunity provided by CL of “being together” in non-traditional ways, sharing creative activity with a feeling of play, exploring, trying, expressing. Furthermore, all these activities are now naturally mediated by technologies; indeed, an exponential development in their accessibility and usability has been seen with the phenomenon of Web 2.0 and particularly of social media, which leads to these new types of media being adopted for everyday life activities of searching for information, self-expression, social connections and support, all these dimensions connected to informal learning and thus to participation in lifelong learning pathways. As Baschiera (2012) puts, the technologies are a new medium to promote intergenerational learning, connecting the young people skills in the use of technologies, with the adults’ memories and values. As a consequence, in the Open Learning era, the Creative Languages are to be (frequently, if not always) mediated or enriched by the power of technologies. Indeed, they should empower dialogue and expression, towards the achievement of new forms of literacies.

### 3.1. A focus on early childhood education and care (ECEC): building caring environments and the role of adults as educators

Early childhood education and care (ECEC), as well as later support for children in the education system, should go in parallel with adult education. In fact, adults are not only caregivers, but also educators, whose actions significantly impact the schooling system as well as future life, and the lifelong learning decisions of growing children. These assumptions emerge both from research and European policy priorities for the goals of the EU 2020 strategy. ECEC in Europe has been linked to efficiency and equity in education (Eurydice, 2009), being a means for achieving socio-cultural inclusion and preventing students from dropping out of education. This is so not only because pre-primary education facilitates later learning, but also because a substantial body of evidence shows that, especially for disadvantaged children, it can produce large socio-economic returns. For this reason, the Commission has identified pre-primary education as a priority theme for cooperation between Member States in 2009- particular to promote generalised equitable access (COM (2008) 865). It should also be pointed out that in most European countries (op. cit.) a conceptual distinction between the functions of care and education is commonly made, emphasising the role of formal education, and showing less concern with other forms of education, which are seen as “private”. As can be seen, adults play an important role as a “bridge” between informal and formal learning in childhood, through early caregiving, as an informal educational function that fosters lifelong learning in children. For example, the EURYDICE 2009 report on *“Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe”* points out that communication between schools and parents becomes crucial in supporting the effective engagement of children in school activities; very often the school has to tackle both the problem of integrating children at risk and educating adults to understand their children’s learning/social problem within the school. This vision is consistent with the importance of adult learning policy priorities in Europe (LLP 2011), where approaches to adults’ education which emphasise senior volunteering, senior citizen education and improvement of skills through family learning are a key to the creation of a more inclusive society. Indeed, as has been highlighted by the European Councils of Stockholm (2001) and Barcelona (2002), Europe will experience a demographic challenge in coming decades, and the Commission wishes to turn this key issue into an opportunity (COM (2006) 571). The Green Paper *“Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations”* and the Commission’s working document on the ageing of society (SEC (2008) 2911) as well as EU2020 and OMS recommendations, are all aimed at promoting a social model that ties together citizenship education and intergenerational learning, as a commitment that strengthens social and affective relations between senior citizens as volunteers and children. This entails a culture of awareness of rights and needs throughout life. Memory and recent history, and learning about social/technological innovations, are two sides of the same coin of reciprocity and learning to improve quality of life. With 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering and 2012 designated as the European Year for Active Ageing, the call for action is complete: educational intervention and research cannot longer wait.

### 3.2. *Training the trainers: designing for effective intergenerational learning*

Adults education is a key for our societies. However, it is also considered one of the less structured, ill-defined in terms of practices and competences of the professional operating in the field (Beleid & Plato, 2008). In some particular areas of adults education, even the fact that the intervention is part of the discipline of education, or falls into the area of health care and social development is object of discussion. The result is highly informal, fluid contexts of learning. For the educator this means that she has to feature the own context of work in every intervention. Instead, other types of professional profiles in education (like teachers at school or academic context, and even vocational educational trainers) work in formal environments, with well-defined tasks and activities (Przybylska, 2008).

Intergenerational learning (IL) as well as family learning play a crucial role in the field of adults education, and are one of the clearer examples of the problem introduced in the former paragraph. Events like parenting, cultural participation, support to the own kids schooling, social activities, engage adults and have the potential of taking them to reflect on their own condition as lifelong learners, from one side, and as *educators* of the future generations (Zambianchi, 2012; Raffaghelli, 2012). Accordingly, the need of intervening on adults' educators professionalism has been identified as a key factor (Buiskol et al. 2010). Adults' educators should be professionals with the ability to understand new contexts of learning, and to reinforce the adults' key competences for the lifelong learning society without invading the adults' sense of independence and protagonism in the social spheres of life. From the previous paragraphs it emerges that it is impossible to generate an educational project for adults' education without reflecting and planning carefully the phases, the resources, the roles and forms of communication between the trainer and the participant (Knowles, Holton, Swanson, 2005). This is where the ongoing debate about designing for learning comes in our help. The concept of *design* provides us support at this point: like in the field of architecture or engineering, the educators can design their interventions, that is, analysing the context, the available resources, the educational problem and the participant's motivations, in order to orchestrate *educational solutions* based on the theory of learning (Cross, 1982). These solutions will lead in time to a pedagogical reflection that can end up in further conceptualizations and refined schemes of action in line with a high level professionalism of adults' educators (Kali, Goodyear, & Markauskaite, 2011; Mor & Craft, 2012; Raffaghelli, 2012a).

### 3.3. *The questions addressing the debate*

The topics introduced above represent a general picture of the challenges addressed by the authors contributing to the Conference. The wealth of approaches, interventions and valuable research contributions made by the Key Note speakers put the basis to understand the ongoing trends of innovation, the scholarly debate as well as effective practices, that aim to the transformation of an ancient educational relationship, rediscovering its value for the lifelong learning society.

Across the several works integrating the proceedings, the reader will find in-depth and contextualized perspectives about the issues summarily introduced here. It is worth hence to introduce here the questions that lead, in general, the several contributions:

- Which is the current policy context, and within it, how a call for action to promote intergenerational learning could be addressed?
- Which are the critical issues emerging in the several EU societies with regard to the educational relationship between generations?
- Is intergenerational approach to learning sensitive to the socio-cultural context? What can we learn from comparative approaches to intergenerational learning?
- How does creative languages (including technologies) influence intergenerational learning? Are creative languages more effective in specific situations, depending from the age of children and adults, cultural background, adults' education, etc.?
- How can we support adults awareness on their role as educators? How can we intervene particularly in the case of parenting? How can we intervene particularly in the case of senior volunteering?
- How institutions are intervening in processes of intergenerational and family learning? Which is the role of the School, still at the center of the *educational network* ?
- Which are the new training needs of adults' educators, in order to promote intergenerational projects? How can we *design for intergenerational learning*?
- How can we analyze the effective impact of intergenerational and family learning? Which are the research designs, dimensions and indicators that we should take into account to better grasp the relationship between intergenerational/family learning and the achievement of key competences for lifelong learning?

These questions are not exhaustive at all. For sure, the works integrating these proceedings have more refined questions; and they have found answers that will lead to the generation of new research and design questions.

The issue is opened with the section "*Intergenerational Learning for Lifelong Learning: Pedagogical concepts and the EU Policy Context*". This section attempts to provide the reader with a big picture on the problem and opportunities generated by intergenerational learning. The first contribution of Umberto Margiotta discusses in fact, theoretical issues relating the form that learning takes in an intergenerational process, from implicit and informal learning, to enactive learning, which entails autonomy, sense-making, emergence, embodiment and experience. In fact, according to research in the field of intergenerational learning, a wide range of skills are enhanced when they are developed in an intergenerational study (teaching learning) context. Language, literacy and numeracy skills can all be supported and extended by intergenerational models if they are facilitated effectively. Finally the intergenerational learning provides a non-threatening, reassuring learning environment and creates learning opportunities and activities that are relevant to the learner. However, it is necessary to better focus the educational psychology of intergenerational learning, identifying the types of learning intervening, in order to promote them instrumentally when implementing intergenerational activities. The author closes with a valuable debate about the changes and challenges to be tackled in order to promote intergenerational learning for the future.

The following article, authored by Anca Peiu introduces an interdisciplinary perspective, from Literature, to the exploration of the problem of learning in the lifelong learning society. Building on her passion for teaching literature, Prof. Peiu's essay consists of three parts, devoted to three of the most outstanding and

best representative American writers, despite their professional and personal destinies, that were by no means “exemplary:” R. W. Emerson, Wallace Stevens, William Faulkner. Peiu emphasizes the outstanding contribution of these writers to the contemporary reflection on lifelong learning. In her words *“what their epigons have always failed to capture is their paradoxical insight into the tremendous power of (self)teaching over the vitality of the creative mind. Although voiced in three different stylistic tones, each one of which sounds unmistakably unique, it is this one ineffable vision that sends us readers the same message: the secret of a longer (and better) life is learning. At all ages...”*

Valeriu Frunzaru’s article offers yet another perspective from the field of sociology. His focus regards the role played by parents, teachers and form masters on the secondary school students’ attitudes towards school, level of grades and the intention to enroll in a higher education system in the Rumanian context. The research work introduces the findings on the impact of parents and teachers on the teenagers’ integration into the lifelong learning society, based on a national survey on Romanian secondary school students (n=2624) in 2011, conducted by the author. The results underline the importance of communication between teenagers, parents, teachers and form masters. Teenagers need united and supporting families and also teachers who are open to discuss their issues. Prof. Frunzaru concludes that parents and teachers have to transmit the importance of school and not of the materialistic values, fact that can help secondary school students to be happier and integrated into society.

In order to understand the intergenerational learning phenomenon not only from several disciplines, but also from different contexts, we bring here the contribution of Naoko Suzuki, whose work brings the Japanese case to us. Japan is one of many countries in the world facing the increasingly serious issues of an ageing population combined with a very low birth rate. The impact upon Japanese society of this situation is enormous in both the medium and long term, and a number of measures have been introduced, both by local and central governments, to try and cope. At the same time, over the past decade serious crimes against and by children have also caused grave concerns. In this context, intergenerational learning has been strongly encouraged in the hope that it may not only resolve communication breakdown among the different generations but may also create a wide range of spin-off effects. One of the conspicuous features in Japan is that intergenerational learning has the strong potential to work as a means of culture dissemination from the elderly to small children. Prof. Naoko’s study intends to clarify general trends in Japanese intergenerational learning by explaining why the latter is being focused upon in the present day, and above all, to demonstrate through analysis of papers and case studies how the dissemination of culture is of importance to this country. It is indicated that culture dissemination could serve as the driving force to promote intergenerational learning, to maintain and/or revitalize social solidarity and strengthen the community bond.

Gabriela Neagu follows, conducting us to reflect on how a series of cultural and educational activities undertaken by adults with their children, attitudes, behaviors, values exhibited by adults are taken by children and have a significant impact on the education of the latter. While emphasizing that adult education is a priority issue addressed in terms of personal and professional training to their integration of socio-profesional, Neagu’s study, given the context in which it is drawn, suggests a different perspective for the analysis of adult education. Based on statistical data from research carried out in either the entire adult population in Romania, either at certain segments of the population – the

population of school teacher, she finally claims that the education of adults, regardless of the forms of education that call, can favorably influence a new generation of educational path.

The first section is insightfully closed Chiara Urbani, who focuses the policies and context of pre-primary education, basing on the idea that lying behind changes there is a trend towards a new definition of learnfare framework, that promotes a New Welfare of active citizenship. According to Urbani, in pre-primary education this trend is expressed as a necessity to integrate what she has called “enlarged learning contexts”, or an integrated system of education. Her concern goes towards the implications for teachers’ professional development to get effectively involved in new approaches aligned with the changing context. For the author, nowadays, professional teachers’ development requires a conceptual change: it can’t longer be interpreted in terms of basic and strategic skills learning, but must necessarily include reflexive and transformative competences. She goes further explaining that these competences can be encouraged by the interaction with the parental, intergenerational and social contexts that are part of an integrated educational system. Through the implicit and/or latent resources arising from the enlarged contexts of learning, a teacher can activate a capability process on both his personal and professional training.

The second section relates the role of Creative Languages, as a springboard to enact adults’ reflection to transform the educational relationship.

Prof. Sofia Gavriilidis opens this section with her essay, based on the opinion that the intergenerational communication is a prerequisite for a harmonic and creative coexistence of all members of a society examines the potential utilization of children’s books, especially picturebooks, in the reinforcement of intergenerational relations. Graveriilidis also argues that children’s books not only constitute a suitable tool for the reinforcement of the adult-child relationship but also constitute an interesting reading experience for the adult while contributing in a variety of different ways to the lifelong education of both adults and children.

In line with Gravriilidis, the following research work of Prof. Meni Kanatsouli’s explores the way in which children’s books with children as protagonists can offer valuable insight to the inner world of children as well as entertainment to both children and adults alike. The problem addressed by Prof. Kanatsoulis regards the emotional world of childhood. In fact, children between the ages of four and six are overcome by strong emotions which can stem from feelings of insecurity, fear and inadequacy as they struggle to understand and become a part of the world that surrounds them. Children’s stories can be a valuable tool in helping parents and guardians understand and decode children’s behavior. Because children cannot yet verbally express themselves adults must be able to decode their ways of communicating. But the author goes a step beyond, underlining how these stories are intergenerational, and they not only help small listeners discover role models but also provide literary enjoyment to adults.

Amalia G. Sabiescu’s contribution introduces a reflection and practical insights for the design of intergenerational learning environments for community settings or spaces of border learning: spaces standing mid-way between the formal structures of scholarly institutions and the informal and fluid spaces of interaction characteristic of local communities. The paper is written from a theoretical standpoint informed by experiential education philosophy, drawing in particular on the insights of John Dewey and Paulo Freire. It focuses on the potential of cyclic models of inquiry for informing the design of socio-technical environ-

ments in which intergenerational groups are involved in bi-directional learning practices. A framework for the design of intergenerational learning environments is introduced, and its application is exemplified with data from a participatory content creation project involving two rural communities.

Silvia Ana Maria Patru and Maria Dinu close this second section. In their article, they explore the perspective of the teacher in the relationships with parents to support more effective children learning. As teachers, they experienced the importance of an interested and informed parent, who does not stop learning about the different stages her child goes through in order to support her all the way in becoming an independent and accomplished adult as well as a good future parent. Basing on this rich experience, Patru and Dinu introduce a project (Leadlab) regarding parental education. Basing on the research conducted within this project, conference participation and a study visit (“Adult education – validation of former learning and assessing progress and achievement”) the two teachers developed tools for parental education to be implemented at school.

The third and last section introduces the results of the ALICE (Adults Learning for Intergenerational Learning) project, addressing the issue of *Experiencing intergenerational learning with Creative Languages*.

In the first article’s section, Umberto Margiotta and Juliana E. Raffaghelli present the project approach, its main results and a reflection on its contribution to the EU policies. The project “profiling” should help the reader in understanding the pedagogical framework addressing the deeper reflections and results grouped in the third section. The ALICE project introduced the concept of creative languages (art, digital storytelling, social media) as instrument to build rich and caring environments for children to grow up. As an expected result, the adults’ reflection on their own role as educators through intergenerational learning could be stimulated, with impact on the achievement of adults key competences for lifelong learning 1, 4, 5, 7 and 8 (European Commission, 2007) for the participating adults. Children are not direct beneficiaries of the project’s approach: however, it can be expected that the adults’ improvement with regard to the above mentioned Key Competences, will encompass better life conditions for the children.

The first experience and research reflection within the ALICE project is that of Elena Zambianchi, based on her pioneering work in Italy. She emphasizes how, since the European Community promotes the role of parents as fundamental resource for the education of the “tomorrow’ citizens” and is claiming for better support and analysis of it. Her paper presents the results of the ALICE pilot project entirely implemented by the author, dedicated to the training of parents with children aged 0-3 and realized as a laboratory of reflection through creative and informal languages. It comes to a formative proposal relative to empowerment interventions, aimed at sustaining parent competences and its conscious use from an educational point of view. Each meeting was organised in two phases: (a) self-reflection as parent and then as son/daughter; (b) realization of creative activities to enhance the educational quality of the relationship with their children. The participation of parents has been constantly active. The feedback obtained through a survey and a questionnaire for self-evaluation to compare pre- and post- training has been very satisfactory.

Being one of the project’s creators, Barbara Baschiera’s work was of crucial value to address the pedagogical framework. Baschiera explains that the creation of intergenerational learning pathways can generate knowledge if it takes place



within the context of a reciprocal relationship. This context should not be self-referential, therefore the elderly and teens may learn, through the creative experiences (particularly creative writing, crafts and a movie discussion forum), to search for an authentic communication. This could foster intergenerational reciprocity, in an ever-changing reality, dominated by individualism and competitiveness. Baschiera's article underlines the necessity for the educational system to be reconsidered in a more creative way, based on the results of research of a relational approach as well as on the awareness of the interdependence between generations.

The following work by Luca Botturi and Isabella Rega introduce the creative language of Digital storytelling, in the context of their experience from Switzerland. Building on their significant professional experience, the authors highlight how digital storytelling has been slowly penetrating the world of education and social development. According to the authors, intergenerational learning seems a promising and somehow natural domain for digital storytelling, as it offers a perfect venue to bring together memory and wisdom with digital media skills and vibrant communication. Botturi and Rega's article presents the efforts made by Associazione Seed to transfer digital storytelling to intergenerational learning, based on its previous work with the Digital Storytelling for Development model in many fields.

Raluca Icleanu sharply illustrates in her work how the ALICE project was implemented in Romania by the Romanian Society for Lifelong Learning. Starting from the selection of trainers from different parts of the country to participate at the online training for trainers, and further adults' engagement, the approach aimed at instilling a greater interest in reading and storytelling and provide older adults with an educational alternative for how they can spend their leisure time with their children/grandchildren. Icleanu examined the problem of young people who express themselves very difficult and have serious problems in correctly speaking and writing; linked to the rupture between generations, as many young people do not communicate with parents, and parents spend less time with their children. She further reflected on the value of new technologies in making the gap between generations even bigger. To conclude, the experience undertaken by SREP in the context of ALICE project adopted the hypothesis and realized work of learning from each other through new technologies, addressing both parental education, and family learning as projects that have a real interest among adults and children.

The resourceful contribution of Marios Christoulakis, Andreas Pitsiladis, Petros Stergiopoulos, Nektarios Moumoutzis, Argiro Moraiti, Giannis Maragkoudakis and Stavros Christodoulakis gave support to the connections between storytelling, digital games, social media, and arts (music and theatre) as creative languages enacting intergenerational learning. In their research the authors present eShadow, a storytelling tool inspired by the Greek traditional shadow theater and how it has been used within the context of the ALICE project in Greece. In the piloted experiences, intra-family communication scenarios were investigated as well as scenarios related to enabling children develop their own digital stories using eShadow. Furthermore, eShadow was used in a live interactive performance event combining Music and Digital Shadow Theatre. The evidence gathered during the implementation of these ALPPs confirms that such kind of approaches can indeed enhance intergenerational bonding and create an engaging learning space for children to develop important key skills. Our findings illustrate that eShadow is very easy to use, attracts the interest of both

children and teachers and has a positive impact on the development of children's creativity.

Emine Çakır introduces an innovative perspective that added a new creative language to ALICE framework, that of cooking. Her paper presents the implementation and results of her experimental activity at St Luke's Community Centre in London, UK. It especially tries to justify which settings and language best promote the communication between generations and whether cooking together and personal storytelling can be used as creative languages to empower intergenerational communication and learning. Findings suggest that even though food and cooking together are fundamental parts of daily routines, they can create a positive, non-formal setting for parents, children and elderly people and bring people from different cultures together. Cooking together can serve as an 'ice breaker' to build dialogues while creating rapport and furthering the communication. Food and cooking together enabled the participants in Çakır's study not only to go back to their families of origin and value and tell their personal stories but also to listen and appreciate other real life stories.

The section is concluded with the work of Juliana E. Raffaghelli, whose work focuses the issue of adult educators' training in order to support appropriately their professional efforts to implement complex intergenerational learning experiences. As the author highlights, the interventions dealing with the ill-defined educational problems frequently found in the field of adults' education require high professionalism, and intergenerational learning is a case that illustrates particularly well this situation. Emerging strategies and technologies like Learning Design could support educators' professionalism, aiming to work in a more effective way. Therefore, in her article Raffaghelli explored the following research question: *Can the process of design for learning, intended as forward oriented and creative process, support the achievement of adult educators' professionalism?* The research was based on the European training programme, the "ALICE (Adults' Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences) training of trainers". The programme adopted several means, from more traditional residential and online training activities, to the deployment of an experimental idea based on the ALICE educational framework, the ALPP (Adult Learning Pilot Programme). Learning Design was introduced as concept entailing a set of tools along the whole process of implementation of the ALPP. The phases of this creative process (contextualizing, planning, implementing, evaluating and sharing) were analyzed through a holistic and mostly interpretivist (yet mixed methods) approach. The connections between learning design as forward oriented process and the adult educators' professionalism were observed, documented and discussed by the author.

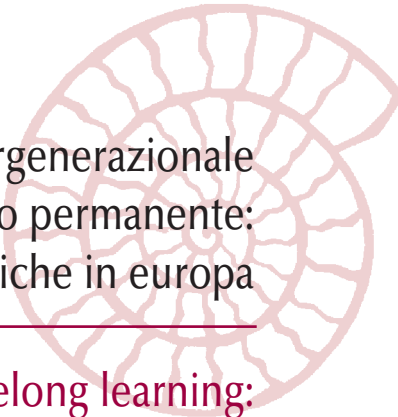
We hope you will enjoy and use all the above conceptual and empirical research outcomes.

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Apprendimento intergenerazionale  
per l'apprendimento permanente:  
concetti pedagogici e politiche in europa



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Intergenerational learning for lifelong learning:  
pedagogical concepts and the eu policy context





# Shaping the vision. Intergenerational Learning and Education Dare forma alla vision. Apprendimento intergenerazionale e formazione

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## ABSTRACT

According to the research in the field of intergenerational learning, a wide range of skills are enhanced when they are developed in an intergenerational teaching and learning context. Language, literacy and numeracy skills can all be supported and extended by intergenerational models if they are facilitated effectively. Moreover, the intergenerational learning provides a non-threatening, reassuring learning environment and creates learning opportunities and activities that are relevant to the learner. In this theoretical contribution, the author discusses the form that learning takes in an intergenerational process, from implicit and informal learning, to enactive learning, which entails autonomy, sense-making, emergence, embodiment and experience. Furthermore, the author envisages the changes and challenges to be tackled in order to promote intergenerational learning for the future.

La ricerca nel settore dell'apprendimento intergenerazionale indica che un'ampia rosa di competenze vengono migliorate attraverso contesti di apprendimento e insegnamento intergenerazionale. Le capacità linguistico-verbali e logico-matematiche sembrano essere supportate ed allargate da modelli intergenerazionali, se facilitate adeguatamente. Inoltre, l'apprendimento intergenerazionale fornisce un contesto rassicurante per i partecipanti, e crea opportunità di apprendimento significative. In questo contributo teorico l'autore discute i tipi di apprendimento alla base dell'apprendimento intergenerazionale, dall'apprendimento implicito all'apprendimento informale e l'apprendimento enattivo; queste forme di apprendimento implicano abilità e competenze come autonomia, processi di generazione di senso, apprendimento incarnato ed esperienza. Inoltre, l'autore considera i cambiamenti e sfide che dovranno essere affrontati in future con lo scopo di promuovere l'apprendimento intergenerazionale.

## KEYWORDS

Intergenerational learning, implicit learning, informal learning, enactive learning.

Apprendimento intergenerazionale, apprendimento implicito, apprendimento informale, apprendimento enattivo.

*In a single photograph, the horizon is a line from one side of the frame to the other. Do we really see our surroundings in this way? No, because we look around, we don't look at. In this way the horizon is a circle, and we are always at the centre of the circle. Even though we define a circle visually wherever we stand, we need not be conscious of ourselves doing the looking, so we define a circle with a hole in the middle. That is the human condition. As we look we also unconsciously magnify the horizon. With the discovery of perspective, a painter could convey distance by making objects on the horizon appear very small. But we see the horizon as bigger than that. A photograph never does justice to the 'grand view' to which we aspire because the hills in the distance are smaller than we remembered. The human mind is easily capable of imagining its surroundings from a vantage point above eye-level. Reality in this sense is more map-like. It makes more sense to imagine things from above because the brain needs less memory to make one useful picture – like a template – from which to infer necessary information as we move about. It may be the case that our perception and our cosmology are intimately bound together, and that discovering the meaning of lost cultures will require the simple question to be answered: How did they look at their surroundings?*

Mark Johnston 1997

### **Introduction: the culture of Intergenerational Learning**

Intergenerational learning is apparent in the parenting styles of adult children, with many choosing not to inflict upon their children the harsh parenting they experienced as children. However, we continue to say that the specific mechanism for intergenerational transmission and the actual effects of father involvement is difficult to determine. Children who grow up in healthy, happy families appear to assume their role as parents with positive attitudes. Despite the typical reference to parents and children in intergenerational studies, grandparents and often great grandparents are increasingly a source of support and may contribute to children's attitudes and beliefs as much as parents. Relationships between parents and adult children appear strongest for mothers and daughters, with mothers having more influence on daughters' perceptions of gender roles. Children whose fathers were present and involved in the home report the greatest comfort around issues of sexuality. Parents seemingly affect adult children's attitudes and behaviours most often in religious practices and beliefs, political activism, and educational values, with some differential effects appearing in mothers' influence on daughters' activism and fathers' influence on sons' religious practices. There is still no clear-cut evidence about the effects of divorce, although increasingly studies draw a connection between divorce and several negative behaviours and experiences such as single parenting in the next generation. The effect that is most harmful is a decline in a family's standard of living which may explain some of the different outcomes for children. A consistent finding, however, is that compared with children from most intact homes, children of divorce consider divorce a viable alternative to marital conflict. However, children in unhappy, conflictual homes also share this view. Our conclusion



is that children's behaviours reflect the beliefs and practices of their parents and families, sometimes in concordance and other times in reaction. But the question is: What information are parents transmitting to their children, and is this information transmitted intergenerationally?

The implications of the studies on intergenerational learning are not neatly packaged into research, practice, and policy, nor does the separation of the three domains serve our purposes well here. In general, research needs to expand the subject and informant pool in order to understand how learning occurs in different populations and across social classes. There seems to be some disjuncture between researchers' talk about a more diverse society and changing family forms and the research practices they use to focus disproportionately on middle-class families. In addition, research might consider the ways in which families of color are studied, presented, and represented. There is an impending urgency around adolescent parenting and the poverty within female-headed households, many of which are disproportionately African American and Latino. After, there is a theme throughout the existing literature that grandparents contribute in meaningful ways to their grandchildren's learning and that the natural impact of their contributions are affected by differences in cultural norms. With increases in the divorce rate and reliance on families of origin, the role of grandparents in intergenerational learning acknowledges the centrality of multiple generations in many families. The role of grandmothers, which has been the focus of most discussions, should continue to be the center of studies, particularly those addressing the changing roles of grandmothers.

The intergenerational effects of parenting are consistent with our intuitive sense that children in happy, generally non conflictual, intact families will experience fewer problems with parenting than those who grew up in homes where there were conflictual parent relationships. Although we should continue to examine the intergenerational effect of these "healthy" homes, substantial work—much of it painful—needs to focus on the negative consequences of homes in which there is abuse and the differential effects of father involvement and absence. That is, does a dysfunctional or abusive father have a greater impact than a dysfunctional or abusive mother? Other issues range from the impact of child and child-observed abuse to adolescent and adult children's imitation of behaviours around alcoholism, drug use, and psycho-emotional well-being.

The absence of a critical discourse on the intergenerational impact of fathers on children's educational beliefs and practices signals a need to transform the culture of fatherhood and fathering. The transition in gender roles over the past 20 years suggests that the responsibility for children's education as "women's work" is neither applicable nor advantageous. Here, the connections among research, policy, and practice are obvious. As research develops more intensive and expansive designs to identify parents' impact on children's educational choices and on their ability to persist, practice must construct effective ways to invite parents into children's educational experiences and sustain their participation in the learning process. Policies for the establishment of government supported intergenerational and parenting programs might build into grants incentives for grantees to include fathers over the course of the program (recognizing the evolutionary and difficult nature of recruitment) and increase support for research and evaluation components that encourage researchers and practitioners to work collaboratively in the development and implementation of the programs. The intergenerational impact of divorce is apparent in many of the studies. More basic studies and secondary analyses are needed, however, to support the sweeping generalizations that are made about the impact of father absence

from a relatively small core of data. In addition, the work on the effects of family instability should make distinctions between children of never married parents and divorced or separated parents. This work could be complemented by studies that examine the intergenerational effect of cooperative parenting, also. A special focus might address a subset of families, to which we refer to as *fragile families*. In addition, research needs to model, through more broadened conceptualizations, the impact of parents' behaviours on both sons and daughters. The current impetus in public campaigns often includes a subtle subtext that assigns more attention to sons than daughters. This, of course, is a complete reversal of earlier work that assumed that mothers influenced both daughters and sons more than fathers. We suggest that we minimize this imbalance and inequity in the literature and in public and private discourses.

Intergenerational learning occurs in all families, irrespective of class, race, or culture; and fathers contribute in many ways to how children think about their roles and abilities into adulthood. Families are biological and social structures, providing the first intersection between individual and society. No matter what the family pattern, intergenerational transmission seems to occur. How research, practice, and policy contribute to this intersection will affect not only environmental and social structures but also the life needs of individual members and the survival of family cultures and family organization within and across multiple generations—for fathers and mothers and, most important, the well-being of their children.

Intergenerational Learning is a learning partnership based on reciprocity involving people of different ages where the generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge. Activities are labelled as intergenerational learning when they fulfil three criteria: involve more than one generation, planned in purpose and progressive, mutually beneficial learning which promotes greater understanding and respect between generations and, consequently, community cohesion. The main issues addressed by intergenerational learning approaches throughout Europe reflect the challenges of today's European society: the digital divide between the young and the old, drop-out rates that are still worryingly high in some countries and literacy problems, risk of social exclusion for vulnerable groups such as senior citizens, migrants and young people at risk.

According to research in the field of intergenerational learning, a wide range of skills are enhanced when they are developed in an intergenerational study (teaching learning) context. Language, literacy and numeracy skills can all be supported and extended by intergenerational models if they are facilitated effectively. Finally the intergenerational learning provides a non-threatening, reassuring learning environment and creates learning opportunities and activities that are relevant to the learner. There is evidence that intergenerational learning provides a non-threatening first step to further learning for those who perceive learning to be irrelevant or who have had humiliating experiences in the past.

### 1. Wich is the form that learning takes in an intergenerational process?

Identify the generative structure of intergenerational learning is the focus of our inquiry, Our goal is to provide an overview of important aspects of human learning involved in intergenerational interaction between parents or adults and young people. So it represents an exciting but difficult challenge because human learning is a highly complex topic. Different theories have emerged as re-

searchers have focused on different kinds of learning. Making sense of these different perspectives, and giving each their just due, is a challenging task.<sup>1</sup>

For example, behaviourism views learning as the strengthening of associations between stimuli and responses. In contrast, learning from the constructivist/rationalist tradition is conceptualized in terms of the growth of conceptual structures and general cognitive abilities such as reasoning and problem solving. Finally, the enactive perspective, representative both of the pragmatist-socio-historical tradition and of phenomenological approach, views learning as being intricately bound up with social interactions and cultural tools.

We believe that the timing is right for targeted efforts toward synergy to become an explicit goal of educational researchers.

The three major areas of research that we explore include (1) Implicit learning, (2) Informal learning, and (3) Enactive or generative structure of intergenerational learning. These three areas have tended to operate relatively independent of one another. Researchers in each of these areas have attempted to apply their thinking and findings directly to education, and often the links between theory and “well grounded implications for practice” have been tenuous at best.

The goal of integrating insights from these strands in order to create an *enactive theory of intergenerational learning*. The fundamental reason for pursuing this goal rests on the assumption that successful efforts to understand and propel human learning require a simultaneous emphasis on informal and formal learning environments, and on the implicit ways in which people learn in whatever situations they find themselves.

## 2. Implicit Learning

Implicit learning refers to information that is acquired without conscious recollection of the learned information or having acquired it (Reber, 1967; Graf & Schacter, 1985). There are many types of implicit learning, but a common process may underlie all forms — the rapid, effortless, and untutored detection of patterns of co-variation among events in the world (Reber, 1993). We consider that the implicit learning reflects the view that: (a) it is implicated in many types of learning that take place in both informal and formal educational settings, (b) it encompasses skill learning which plays a vital role in many other types of learning, and (c) it plays a substantive role in learning about language and people

1 Some have focused on the acquisition of skills such as learning to type, write and read (e.g., Anderson, 1981; Bryan & Harter, 1897; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; NRC 2000). Others have focused on learning with understanding and its effects on schema formation and transfer (e.g., Anderson & Pearson, 1984, Judd, 1908; NRC, 2000; Wertheimer, 1959). Still others study the emergence of new ideas through interactions with other people and through “bumping up against the world” (e.g., Carey, 2000; Karmiloff-Smith & Inhelder, 1974; Papert, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978). Learning theorists have also explored different settings for learning—including, preschool, school, experimental laboratory, informal gathering spots and everyday, home and workplace settings—and they have used a variety of measurements of learning (e.g., neurobiological, behavioral, ethnographic). Furthermore, learning theorists work at time scales that range from milliseconds of processing time to lifespan and even intergenerational learning (e.g., Lemke, 2001; Newell, Liu, & Mayer-Kress, 2001).

across the lifespan<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, a substantial portion of learning from media and technology is implicit<sup>3</sup>. Across both live, face-to-face interactions and mediated interactions, the common conclusion is that people can learn patterned regularities without intending to do so and sometimes without being able to describe the patterns they have learned. Implicit learning has educational and even evolutionary value, as it enables organisms to adapt to new environments simply by *being in them* (Howard & Howard, 2001). So the label “implicit learning” is not meant to be an operationally defined category with necessary and sufficient conditions for inclusion and exclusion. We focus on two domains that are prototypical cases of implicit learning and which provide much food for thought – language learning (Kuhl, 2004; Kuhl et al., 2003) and learning about people, sometimes called “social cognition” (e.g., Ochsner & Lieberman, 2001; Flavell & Miller, 1998; Meltzoff & Decety, 2003; Taylor, 1996), with heavy emphasis on the former case. Our lifelong learning about language and people begins before kindergarten, and in some cases important foundations are established in the first year of life. In these domains parents are the first “teachers” and much is absorbed through spontaneous and unstructured play.

So recent studies explore many key hypotheses: (a) implicit learning plays an important role across the life span, starting very early in life, (b) research on language has discovered principles of learning that emphasize the importance of patterned variation and the brain’s coding of these patterns, and these findings may apply across other cognitive and social domains, and (c) principles uncovered through research in language and social learning raise questions about formal instruction and “oversimplified” curriculum design.

The 1990’s were dubbed “The Decade of the Brain” and produced advances in

- 2 Implicit learning occurs in many domains. For example, it influences social attitudes and stereotypes regarding gender and race (Greenwald et al., 2002), visual pattern learning (DeSchepper & Treisman, 1996), motor response time tasks (Nissen & Bullemer, 1987), syntactic language learning (Reber, 1976), phonetic language learning (Goodsitt, Morgan, & Kuhl, 1993; Saffran, 2002; Kuhl, 2004), and young children’s imitative learning of the tools/artifacts of their culture and the behaviors, customs, and rituals of their surrounding social group (Meltzoff, 1988b; Tomasello, 1999).
- 3 Only a minority of research about the effects of media and technology test purposive effects of messages, for example, formal classroom learning from instructional media (Mayer et al., 2004) or the ability of television news to teach citizens about how candidates stand on political issues (Krosnick & Branon, 1993; Schleuder et al., 1991). More commonly, media research examines effects that are indirect, involve automatic attentional processes, and are often beyond the conscious awareness of those processing the information. This includes the ability of media to determine the perceived importance of political issues (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Spiro & McCombs, 2004); learning about the appropriateness of social behavior in interpersonal relationships (Gluscock, 2001; Larson, 2001); the influence of media on perceptions of social reality, for example, what people learn about the prevalence of crime (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Sparks & Ogles, 1990); learning from persuasive consumer messages that occurs subliminally (Petty et al., 2002; Trappey, 1996) or through frequent and implicit associations between people, places and appeals (Chang, 2002; Invernizzi et al., 2003); learning about the personal qualities of prominent figures in politics and government based on how messages are framed (Benoit & Hansen, 2004; Iyengar & Simon, 1993) and on their visual structure (e.g., cuts, camera angles, use of motion sequences) used to present information (Mutz & Reeves, in press); and learning to control complex media such as computer games (Berry & Broadbent, 1988)

neurosciences. Modern neuroscience shows the impact of experiential learning *before it can be observed in behaviour*. The study of a live brain “at work” is the new perspective. The main question is following: “What are the advantages of knowing which brain regions are activated over time and how they are associated with behavioural and attitude changes?” The answer is not straightforward.

Brain studies link neural underpinnings to behavioural function; they will help us understand learning. Neurobiological studies do, however, provide crucial knowledge that cannot be obtained through behavioural studies and this provides at least three justifications for adding cognitive neuroscience to our arsenal of tools for developing a science of learning. First, a mature science of learning will involve understanding not only *when* learning occurs but also understanding *how* and *why* it occurs. Second, neural learning often precedes behavior (Tremblay, 1999), offering a chance for scientists and educators to reflect on what it means to “know” and “learn”. Third, behaviours that appear similar may involve different neural mechanisms that have different causes and consequences. Better categorization of learning, according to neural function instead of the appearance of behavioural similarity, should allow the educational strategies and policies that affect learning to be usefully grouped in ways not obvious absent the study of brain function.

It is a common misconception that each individual’s brain is entirely formed at birth. For educators, the idea of rapid brain organization during the early years of life is important but can also lead to serious misconceptions (as elegantly described by Bruer, 1999). For example, people often question whether children who spend their early years in under-stimulating environments, will jeopardize chances for future learning and development? The popular literature is filled with discussions of “critical periods” for learning, and the assumption persists that the ability to learn certain kinds of information shuts down if the critical period is missed and learning is affected forever.

Assumptions such as these sometimes cause teachers and parents to underestimate the abilities of students whose early years seemed less rich and more chaotic than others who come to school. Brain research shows that the timing of critical periods differ significantly depending on whether one is discussing the visual, auditory, or language systems. Even within different systems, there is emerging evidence that the brain is much more plastic than heretofore assumed, and that the idea of rigid “critical periods” does not hold<sup>4</sup>.

The concept related to the “critical period” is Kuhl’s claim that early learning both supports and constrains future learning. Neural commitment to learned patterns also constrains future learning; neural networks dedicated to native-language patterns do not detect non-native patterns, and in fact may interfere with their analysis (Iverson et al., 2003). The concept of neural commitment is linked

4 New studies by Kuhl and colleagues explored potential mechanisms underlying critical periods in early language development (e.g., Kuhl, 2004; Rivera-Gaxiola, Silva-Peryra, & Kuhl, 2005). The idea behind the studies relies on the concept of *neural commitment* to learn language patterns. Kuhl’s recent neuropsychological and brain imaging work suggests that language acquisition involves the development of attentional networks that focus on and code specific properties of the speech signals heard in early infancy, resulting in neural tissue that is dedicated to the analysis of these learned patterns. Early in development, learners commit the brain’s neural networks to patterns that reflect natural language input.

to the long-standing issue of a “critical” or “sensitive” period for language acquisition. If the initial coding of native-language patterns interferes with the learning of new patterns (such as those of a foreign language), because they do not conform to the established “mental filter,” then early learning promotes future learning and builds on the patterns already experienced, limiting (or making more difficult) future learning of patterns that do not conform to the ones already learned. The “critical period” thus depends on experience as much as time, and is a *process* rather than a window. Thus both maturation and learning determine the critical period. Maturation may “open” the period during which learning can occur, but learning itself may play a powerful role in “closing” the period (Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl, 1999a; Kuhl, 2004).

Broadening this discussion, the neural commitment concept can be thought of as a neural instantiation of “expertise” in any domain. Expertise in many areas may reflect these kinds of filters on experience — filters that focus attention, and structure perception and thought, so that we work more efficiently and thereby freeing up our attention and energies to thinking creatively in other domains, but also limiting an ability to think in novel ways within the area of expertise (e.g., Gopnik & Meltzoff, 1997). For example, learning algebraic principles or mastering the scientific method changes our filters (our concepts and theories), leading us to perceive the world in a new way. This learning alters the brain’s future processing of information.

Other studies by brain and developmental scientists are relevant to a science of learning. One example comes from children’s learning from watching other people. This is a skill that is important both for the transmission of culture from parents to children and in peer-group learning. The topic of imitative learning has undergone a revolution in the past decade, as studies have revealed the ubiquitous nature of imitation among humans across the lifespan (e.g., Meltzoff & Prinz, 2002). Research now shows that human beings are the most imitative creatures on the planet. Humans imitate from birth (Meltzoff & Moore, 1977) and the young child’s capacity to learn from imitation outstrips that found in other primates such as chimpanzees and gorillas (Povinelli, et al., 2000; Tomasello & Call, 1997; Whiten, 2002). Recently, the importance of imitative learning has been given a boost by the discovery of “mirror neurons” that are activated whether a subject sees an action performed by another or performs the action themselves (Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Fogassi, & Gallese, 2002; Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Gallese, & Fogassi, 1996). So imitative learning involves more than the presence of mirror neurons, and neuroscientists are trying to determine the special, perhaps uniquely human abilities, that support our proclivity for learning by observing others in the culture.

One possibility is that even a simple act of imitation is connected with perspective-taking and therefore is more of a social, collaborative activity than it first appears (Meltzoff, 2005). We must consider that the adult or parent and child rarely see the world from the same perspective. The child sees her own body and own actions from a “first person” perspective; but we see others from a “third-person” perspective. Imitation requires that the child watches the adult and is able to “transform” it across differences in points of view, size, and sensory modality. Even a simple act of imitation requires facility in identifying with others and being able to “take their perspective.” This capacity for perspective taking may be fundamental to humans and important to a wide range of learning activities. Indeed some have argued that the close neural coupling of self and other that under-girds imitation may also be implicated in such other distinctively human traits as social collaboration (Rogoff, 2003), the preservation of cultural prac-

tices involving implicit teaching and learning across generations (Meltzoff, 1988b, 2005; Tomasello, 1999), and empathy for others, where empathy is viewed as a kind of affective perspective taking that requires us to stand in another's shoes (Jackson, Meltzoff, & Decety, 2005).

Regardless of these theoretical views, ample research shows that young children learn a great deal about people and cultural artifacts through imitation, and children are influenced not just by their parents, but also by their peers and what they see on television. To prove that infants can learn from television it is not enough to know that young children are visually captured. They may simply be attracted to the visually changing mosaic of colors. But the Meltzoff (1988a) study went beyond assessing "visual interest." In that study, 2-year-olds watched an adult perform a novel action on TV. The children were not allowed to play with the object, but returned to the lab after a 1-day delay, and then were presented with the novel object for the first time. The results showed they duplicated from memory the specific act that they had seen on TV one day earlier.

### 3. Informal Learning

Some researchers use the phrase to refer to learning that happens in designed, non-school public settings like museums, zoos, and after-school clubs. Others use the phrase "informal learning" to focus attention on the largely emergent occasions of learning that occur in homes, on playgrounds, among peers, and in other situations where a designed and planned educational agenda is not authoritatively sustained over time. If we begin by looking outside of traditional schooling and focus our attention on children rather than adults, we note that 79% of a child's waking activities, during their school age years, are spent in non-school pursuits—interacting with family and friends, playing games, consuming commercial media, and so on (NRC, 2000). If we extend this calculation to the human lifespan, the percentage of time spent outside of school, and therefore a potential source of informal learning, would be over 90%. Turning to adults specifically, we note that a great deal of what an adult learns in a lifetime is not "covered" in school (e.g., raising a child, saving and investing money wisely). And even with regard to what is "covered", it remains an open question to ask in what ways school-based learning substantively transfers to non-school life both in occupational and every day contexts.

On one hand, informal learning has been championed as a romantic alternative to schools, where productive proto-forms of disciplinary knowledge and other forms of productive knowledge develop with minimal effort. A contrasting perspective argues that informal learning leads people to form naïve and misperceived ideas at odds with disciplinary knowledge (e.g., Driver, Guesne, & Tiberghien; 1985, McCloskey, 1983), and that these everyday "naïve" ideas that need to overcome to develop normative knowledge. Another pair of contrasting perspectives on informal learning concerns the quality of the thinking and practices in which informal situations engage people. On one hand, some view informal learning situations as wellsprings of new knowledge and cultural production, especially among young people (e.g., Gee, 2003(a)(b)). On the other hand, some view informal situations as characterized by a lack of thinking and the consumption of a degraded popular culture (Healy, 1991).

The origins of the informal learning tradition are diverse and are most readily understood as an affiliated set of approaches and ideas that can be contrasted

with mainstream psychology and educational psychology. For example, informal learning research typically takes an ecological conceptual stance and an ethnographic methodological approach, seeking to study how people learn in “their” informal settings with sustained attention paid to “indigenous meanings and local phenomena” (Emerson, 2001, p. 136). Research on learning and cognition outside of laboratory settings often has been critiqued by mainstream educational psychology as lacking experimental control and internal validity. Informal learning research has typically placed its emphasis on *ecological validity* and has made the counterargument; laboratory research is very often lacking in this type of external validity. The research tradition on informal learning has its origins mostly outside of mainstream educational psychology. Ethnographic work in anthropology established the perspective in the first half of the twentieth century, by showing that while many non-Western societies lack formal schooling they do not lack meaningful, everyday learning. This poses the problem of how people learn without teaching, curricula, and schooling as conventionally understood in Western industrialized societies. An informal learning perspective is clearly present in Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and is developed further in Mead’s continuing work with Gregory Bateson. As McDermott notes, Mead did not write much about learning theory, at least not directly; but it would be easy to reshape her ethnographies into accounts of what the people studied were learning from each other about how to behave, be it about adolescence in Samoa; gender among the Arapesh, awayness among the Balinese. Her version of the social actor, that is, the unit of analysis in her ethnographies, was in constant need for guidance from others (McDermott, 2001, p. 855).

A second line of work that provides theoretical roots for an informal learning perspective comes out of the sociological ethnography of Howard Becker and his colleagues. Beginning in the late 1950s and finding full expression in the 1960s and early 1970s, Becker and colleagues explored questions of how and what people learned, mostly in occupations, but also in clearly informal situations for which no curricula or schooling exists. Characteristic of the latter was Becker’s influential article *Becoming a Marijuana User* (1953). In this paper Becker argued against an exclusively skill-based notion of learning that has been characteristic of both behaviorism (physical skills) and cognitivism (mental skills). Becker’s critical addition was to show that learning also involved the development of particular *meanings* for a skill, which were learned among other community members. What’s important about this argument is that it focused on a type of learning that is often understood in terms of bio-physical effects and the skills needed to produce these effects. These studies brought significant attention to the peer-maintained informal cultures that arose among students in formal institutions—what might be called the informal properties of formal settings. These were among the earliest studies to locate the development of identity as a dimension of learning (e.g., Becker & Carper, 1956). And the concept of identity has become central to understanding informal learning. When one is learning outside of school, it is as much about who one wants *to be* as what one demonstrably comes *to know*. Becker’s provocation was that school, despite its labeled purpose, is often a “lousy place to learn anything in.” Becker argued that it was the specific structural properties of how school is *typically* organized (cf. Tyack & Tobin (1984) on the “grammar of schooling”) when compared to other learning situations, like on-the-job training, that made it lousy.

At about the same time Becker and his colleagues were conducting their studies on informal learning, a movement among some psychologists began to



establish a “comparative psychology of cognition” (Cole & Bruner, 1971). In practice, this programmatic goal led to many studies of informal learning, both within non-Western cultures and within non-schooled activities in Western societies. The two most prominent contributors to this line of work at the time were Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner that looked to the work of Russian scientists on human learning and cognition for inspiration (Leont’ev, 1978; Luria, 1976; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978, 1987). One foundational study that influenced the comparative tradition was *The Logic of Non-standard English* by sociolinguist William Labov (1969). This study sought to challenge what Labov called a deprivation view and what has come to known as the “the deficit hypothesis.”<sup>5</sup> What Labov’s study showed was two-fold: (1) that while different, African American speech practices obeyed just as strict a “logic” as middle-class European American speech, and (2) that seemingly small changes in the context of eliciting speech, used to make research generalization about categories of people, can have a decisive impact on the kinds of performance displayed by research subjects *to research scientists*.<sup>6</sup>

A well-elaborated program of research that combined fieldwork and experimentation was led by Sylvia Scribner. This approach is exemplified in Scribner’s studies of learning and cognition among dairy workers (Scribner & Fahrmeir, 1982; Scribner, 1997a, 1997b). Scribner argued that controlled experimentation—in the form of posed simulation tasks closely based on field observations—was valuable in exploring specific hypotheses about human cognition and activity, but that these claims still needed to be tested *again* in various fields of naturally occurring activity. She showed how physical and mental labor were both elements of what people learned as part of everyday work and that demands of the work environment substantially explained the distribution of these types of labor in daily work practice.

In addition to the research on informal learning associated with Cole & Scribner’s research laboratories (see Cole, Engeström & Vasquez (1997) for an overview; also, Tobach, Falmagne, Parlee, Martin, & Kapelman (1997)), the early 1980s brought work by anthropologists, sociolinguists, and small subset of psychologists into closer conversation, both theoretically and methodologically. An important early volume that recognized the shared interdisciplinary space developing around informal learning was *Everyday Cognition* (Rogoff & Lave, 1984). A decade later, a similar volume entitled *Ethnography & Human Development* (Jes-

5 “[This view] rests on the assumption that a community under conditions of poverty [e.g., most ethnic minority communities]...is a disorganized community, and this disorganization expresses itself in various forms of deficit.” (Cole & Bruner, 1971, p. 867).

6 To make this point, Labov presented the case of an African-American boy named Leon who when interviewed at school by a skilled African American interviewer was taciturn and “non-verbal” in response to questions. Upon review of the recordings made, Labov and his colleagues decided to use this data as “a test of [their] own knowledge of the sociolinguistic factors which control speech” (Labov, 1972, p. 160). When the same interviewer spoke again with Leon, the interview was held in Leon’s room at home, with Leon’s best friend and a bag of potato chips as part of the conversational scene. In comparison with the first interview at school, there was a “striking difference in the volume and style of speech” (Labov, 1969). In this situation, Leon had a lot to say, competed for the floor, and spoke as much to his friend as to the interviewer—all strong contrasts with the first interview situation.

sor, Colby, & Schweder, 1996) showed how far this interdisciplinary conversation had proceeded<sup>7</sup>.

Typically, informal learning studies have found that the practices and knowledge of compared settings differ in important and consequential ways, thus leading to the view that what is important or necessary to learn in each setting differs accordingly. An early influential study of this kind was Philips' (1983) study that compared the participation structures and speech practices of Native American children in school and in their cultural community contexts. Philips found that the adults in the respective contexts—the elders of the community and the teachers at school—differed in their expectations for children's speech and that these differences manifested themselves at the level of how turns at talk were allocated. This had the effect of leading the children's teachers, of a different cultural background, to misunderstand their abilities<sup>8</sup>. Although studies of informal learning have been used to cast a critical eye on the traditional practices of schooling and to provide ideas for formulating alternative educational practices.

Nearly all studies of informal learning highlight that learning happens without most of the apparatus of schooling such as intentional teaching, designed and sequenced curricula, and regular individualized knowledge assessments. This leads researchers to try to describe the means, pathways, and practices by which learning happens in non-school settings. Many of the alternative formulations of how people learn play off concepts of apprenticeship (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff et al., 1996). Specific constructs include Lave & Wenger's idea of *legitimate peripheral participation*, which highlights the practices by which newcomers are gradually enculturated into participation in existing "communities of practice"; and Rogoff et al.'s related notion of *intent participation* in which learning is described as happening "through keen observation and listening, in anticipation of participation...[children] observe and listen with intent concentration and initiative, and their collaborative participation is expected when they are ready to help in shared endeavors" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 176). Understanding learning in this way attends to how individuals can learn without explicit teaching but through participation in a community's ongoing activities.

Informal learning researchers have described other, though not necessarily incompatible, dimensions of change when people learn. For example, a number

7 A history of informal learning research can also be told through the places where it has been at least partially institutionalized as a going research concern and in this regard, two "centers" warrant special mention. The first is the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC), led by Michael Cole from its inception in 1972. The second was the Institute for Research on Learning (1986-1999), a private research institute whose interdisciplinary research staff included anthropologists, sociolinguists, educators, and cognitive and computer scientists. IRL is perhaps best known as the home of the influential volume *Situated Learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), but it, like the LCHC, has a rich and varied history of research and practical educational work related to informal learning. Three more recent organizational settings are worth mentioning as ones where the details of informal learning are being further studied. These are the Center for Informal Learning and Schools (CILS), and the Learning in Informal and Formal Environments (LIFE), both funded by the National Science Foundation, and the Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELF), funded by the Sloan Foundation.

8 Other informal learning studies that have compared contexts for learning include Saxe (1982), Carraher, Carraher, and Schliemann (1985), Heath (1983, 2001), deAbreu (1995), Hall & Stevens (1995), Stevens (2000a).

of informal learning researchers have described learning in terms of changing forms of *participation* in ongoing cultural activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff et al., 1996). Other researchers have highlighted that learning involves changes in people's *identities*—who they understand themselves to be and who others position them to be (Becker, 1953; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir, 2002; Wenger, 1999). Others have highlighted that learning, even in activities typically understood as academic or theoretical, involves changes in *tool-mediated, embodied skills* (Goodwin, 2000; Rose, 2004; Stevens & Hall, 1997, 1998; Wertsch, 1998). Though no single definition of learning unites studies of informal learning, Hutchins' definition of learning as "adaptive reorganization in a complex system" (Hutchins, 1995) is a reasonable placeholder for a working consensus view and one that links it to other contemporary views on "adaptive expertise" described in the next section.

A good proportion of research in the everyday cognition and informal learning traditions documents adult activities within specific settings. In terms of settings where this research has been conducted, these studies range from what is conventionally viewed as "low brow" work (Scribner, 1997b; Beach, 1993; Rose, 2004) to "highbrow" professional work (Hall & Stevens, 1995; Hall, Stevens, and Torralba, 2002; Hutchins, 1995; Jacoby & Gonzalez, 1991; Latour, 1995; Ochs et al., 1992; Stevens & Hall, 1998). Taken together, these studies expose the limitations of assumed hierarchies (i.e., low to high or concrete to abstract) and entrenched binary distinctions like "mind/body", "expert/novice", and "theoretical/practical". A similarly extensive program of research on children's informal activities may hold the possibility of additional theoretical reframings of how we understand the basic categories of children's activities and development, such as, for example, the unexamined distinction between "play" and "work". At a more basic level, these studies can help us understand how the demands, problems, constraints, and affordances of particular contexts organize stable forms of learning and development within these contexts for children and how children organize their own learning in contexts. Even in anthropology, ethnographic description "of children and their agency" has been "sparse" (Das, 1998). We have just described the ways that within context studies have challenged a variety of common distinctions.

The distinction between "informal" and "formal" serves as an entry point into our discussion of different traditions for studying learning and marks some trough differences between self-organized, emergent learning and learning occasioned by organized instruction and designed curricula. Nevertheless, the distinction is limiting because, as argued from many perspectives, a setting-based notion of context makes too many assumptions about the homogeneity of settings (i.e. that all activities in places called "schools" or "homes" are similar) and the homogeneity of experience within these settings for individual learners (Becker, 1972; Rogoff et al., 2003; Schegloff 1992). In addition, emergent learning may be as present in some school contexts as in out-of-school ones (Stevens, 2000a, 2000b). If we set aside the firm distinction between "informal" and "formal" the foundational issue becomes *the structuring properties of contexts for learning and development*, with the very nature of what constitutes a "context" remaining an open theoretical question (Goodwin, 1992). One particular direction for further research is to identify and study *exceptional informal contexts* in which young people are in control of advancing their own learning, with the goal of understanding *how people advance their own learning* by assembling and coordinating heterogeneous resources (Barron, review; Becker, 1972; Crowley & Ja-

cobs, 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991). As with any field-based scientific discipline, we need to better understand the distribution of “ecological niches” in which children are most actively engaged, and study how the problems that emerge in these non-school settings make new knowledge necessary and certain kinds of thinking and action adaptive. We also have strong reason to believe that descriptions of mean tendencies are insufficient, because distributions of resources and practices vary widely by gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, an issue of importance for translating findings from basic research to the educational goal of developing more equitable learning environments.

#### 4. Enactive Learning: the magic circle of intergenerational process

There is a small but growing community of researchers spanning a spectrum of disciplines which are united in rejecting the still dominant computationalist paradigm in favor of the *enactive approach* (e.g., Stewart et al. 2011; Torrance 2005, 2007). The framework of this approach is focused on a core set of ideas, such as autonomy, sense-making, emergence, embodiment, and experience. These concepts are finding novel applications in a diverse range of areas. One hot topic has been the establishment of an enactive approach to social interaction. We suggest that this revised conception of ‘socio-cognitive interaction’ may provide the necessary middle ground from which to understand the inner structure of intergenerational learning. In contrast to the mainstream this account of sociality begins with an emphasis of biological autonomy and mutually coordinated interaction. It is recognized that the interaction process itself forms an irreducible domain of dynamics which can be constitutive of individual agency (De Jaegher and Froese 2009) and social cognition (De Jaegher et al. 2010).

The enactive approach was initially conceived as an embodied and phenomenologically informed alternative to mainstream cognitive science (Varela et al. 1991). Since then it has begun to establish itself as a wide-ranging research program with the potential to provide a new perspective on an extremely diverse variety of phenomena, reaching all the way from the single cell organism to human society (Thompson 2007). Moreover, the ongoing search for novel theoretical and methodological foundations has led to a series of systematic confrontations with some of the hardest questions known to philosophy and science: What defines cognition? What is the relationship between life and mind? What defines agency? What is special about social forms of interaction? What is the role of culture for human learning? The research framework of this approach is inherently trans-disciplinary and driven by fundamental questions that are organized around the core ideas of autonomy, sense-making, emergence, embodiment, and experience (Di Paolo et al. 2011). The advantage of this conceptual coherence is a discourse that can integrate a diverse set of observations which are otherwise separated by disciplinary discontinuities. This trans-disciplinary integration has to proceed along a delicate middle way: neither an eliminative reductionism nor a mysterious dualism will do. Observations drawn from distinct regions of phenomena must retain a relative independence with respect to each other.

Through the studies of Francisco Varela on the fundamental role played by the sensory-motor coordination in cognition, we can show recurring patterns in the learning process of the person, focusing on interdependent relationships among perception, emotion and action, which define a self-organizing system

that allows the emergence of coherent meanings for all persons involved in intergenerational process. These relationships are based on the activity of the entire body, allowing the emergence of both the „inner world of the person and what she considers her „outer world, in a process of generating interrelated and consistent meanings. Starting from Francisco Varela's studies on enaction, our aim is to outline the meanings that parents and sons give to everyday experiences and to reality, as emergent phenomena from the sensory-motor couplings with the context, rather than ready-made information that they extract from a pre-given world. Through the theory of complexity, we place at the center of our investigation the person as the source of her knowledge. Knowledge is her embodied know-how that they learn to recognize and observe through the help of others. So, we must be obliged to consider learning as a process of cooperation and mutual coordination in which the relational aspect becomes the foundation of all knowledge, rather than an adaptive ability to a given context. Through the personal perception of the world in which parents and sons or adults and young take part by acting in it, they enter the context that changes while they transform themselves. Therefore we are obliged to define the personal learning as the process that occurs between the person and her context when they relate to each other, through which the person changes herself – not only at a purely cognitive level, but in every part of her body – changing her context: it is a form of embodiment of experience and cognition.

We may differentiate the intergenerational learning process of a living being and, in general, its cognition, in two main ways: the first considers the learning process as an adaptive necessity of the individual to its environment, the second considers the learning process as a *co-generative modality* between the individual and the environment: the enactive approach to cognition and experience. Traditionally, the environment is considered dominant over the living beings; they have to conform to it to survive. Under this approach, subject and environment are separated and the only relationship that binds them is the direct causal link input / output from one to another, without any form of interdependence. The relationship between them is therefore an instructive one-way. The frame of reference is the traditional cause and effect relationship, the behaviour of living being appears to be appropriate only if it is able to adapt as best possible to a given context, according to a classical approach of „problem solving skills of the nervous system. Learning becomes a process that finds its „raison d'être outside the person: it is the environment, both natural and social – the external reality – that defines and specifies a process of adaptation for the subject. This view implies a sort of „cognitive realism :cognition is grounded in the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given subject.

But the learning process can not only be understood as a process that embodies a causal relationship with the environment; it can also be understood as a phenomenon that may have its origin in the inter-relationship established between the subject and its environment. In this case, learning can be considered as an *emerging phenomenon* that occurs when subject and environment come into relationship in a dynamic and recursive process. The learning that emerges from this connection is a *generative phenomenon* that influences both the subject and its context.

Francisco Varela has repeatedly stressed in his studies that the process of cognition is strongly related to the possibility that we, as living beings, have to cope with our milieu through our bodies. The context in which we interact is something we take part in: touching, seeing, tasting, moving in it. The term enaction

emphasizes precisely this possibility of emergence: to make active, to bring forth something that through our manipulation appears real in itself. According to enaction, essential elements of cognition are the dynamic sensory-motor skills of the person: it is through the ability to perceive and act in one's own context that can trigger a process of learning, a close relationship between agent and environment in the cognitive process. By environment we mean broadly any external „disturbances to the person, including other people who are part of that context. Maturana and Varela write in this sense of *structural couplings* between living beings and their milieu to emphasize reciprocity and consistency that is established between one another, without any prevalence of one over the other. Each of them – living being and environment – is only a trigger for the other that can give rise to reciprocal structural changes, in their material manifestation. Once those changes occur, we can speak of structural coupling between a living being and its environment and viceversa. It is through these repeated structural couplings that one can speak of cognitive process, since every action becomes in itself a cognitive act, an experience that is embodied in the person. The body becomes a central tool – an ontological machine – to take part in one's own reality by defining the boundaries and possibilities of understanding. According to enaction, it is therefore relevant to study how the human being acts in its local situations and how these local situations change constantly as a result of its activity. There is a fundamental circularity between action and experience that allows both the embodiment of these changes in the living being, and the emergence, through these actions, of the context within it operates. Intelligence is no longer the ability to solve problems already given, but rather the ability to access a common world. The living system is able to maintain its identity through a circular process of interaction with the environment and of self-reproduction; all interactions operating within the network of cognitive acts are coordinated between perceiver and perceived. The cognitive process becomes the evolution of living organisms along a path chosen by them in the course of time in their structural couplings. Time thus becomes a key aspect in the analysis of cognition and learning, in which the personal history of a being becomes an embodied know-how: skills learned and experiences are full of all those aspects that make its history unique, defining it as a specific identity.

The closed circular organization of the lived body defines a field of dynamic interactions in intergenerational process, creating a boundary which defines the unit system as a specific identity, according to the principles of self-organization. The focus is therefore on the nexus among the components that define the organization of the intergenerational interaction system, and not on individual, material components, which define the structure instead. While the structure actually occurs while changing, the underlying network organizational structure and its dynamics seem more diaphanous, having no substantial and material existence. However, it is the continuity of these connections that allows the life and the sense-making process of intergenerational learning.

The key point is that such systems do not operate by representation. Instead of representing an independent world, they enact a world as a domain of distinctions that is inseparable from the structure embodied by the cognitive system. '*I see if I act, I act if I see*'. The intergenerational process's actors comes into contact with the surrounding environment through structural couplings which generate its own inner world related to the environment, as a dynamic process of mutual co-definition. Perception, unlike what we are led to believe, is accomplished with the body and through the body, becoming a global experience that

involves the whole person together with her context. The brain participates in the process of perception as an active configuration of interactions between the environment and the body: the structure of the perceiver is closely interrelated with the perceived reality. *Perception, into intergenerational process, is an active process involving not only our senses but also our nervous system, including the brain, our body in general and the environment in which we are immersed.* Enactive learning emphasizes two fundamental and interrelated aspects: first, that cognition consists of perceptually guided actions. This aspect shifts attention from the signals coming from the outer world to the way the person guides her actions in her local situation, through her sensory-motor system. Second, that cognitive structures emerge from recurrent sensory-motor patterns that enable perceptually guided actions. It is no longer the outer world that specifies a perception, but rather the inner world, the embodied sensory-motor patterns, that guides actions while changing the external environment as a result of its activity. This is what is meant by the inseparability of the perceiver from its reality. This is also the relevance of repeated interactions as an evolutionary path of the system over time, and the importance of complex dynamic systems studies to understand the evolution of intergenerational process. There is therefore a strong interdependence between what we call culture of intergenerational process and the deep structure of intergenerational learning of a person. There is thus a visual control of action, and viceversa; objects become “hypotheses of action” for our body, transforming them into a life experience. This intergenerational experience is embodied in us as a habit of which we are unaware: perception is a phenomenon that can be determined only if there is a relationship between what we usually call subject – the perceiver – and what we commonly call the object – what is perceived through action. So the intergenerational patterns are recursive and capable of self-organizing and self-generating, according to a circuit that generates not only itself but also the meaning of action and the reality with which it interferes.

Emotions are the immediate meaning of intergenerational experience. She is given to what is experienced and that exceeds and precedes the rational-logical meaning, representing the feedback loops of the cognitive system. Every cognitive act is modulated by emotions; they function as a system of self-regulation, defining the cognitive process as a self-organized system. In this process emotions become the feedback loops that amplify and reinforce (positive feedbacks) or that self-regulate (negative feedbacks) the belief system and the thought patterns through which we perceive the external reality and the whole experience. In the intergenerational experience the basic emotional systems may act as “strange attractors”, that show recurring patterns in the learning process of the person, focusing on interdependent relationships among perception, emotion and action, which define a self-organizing system that allows the emergence of coherent meanings for the person. These relationships are based on the activity of the entire body, allowing the emergence of both the “inner” world of the person and what she considers her “outer” world, in a process of generating interrelated and consistent meanings. This circular process defines the evolutionary history of one’s cognitive system, defining a unique memory in a process that determines the historical memory itself as irreversible. The cognitive process involves continuous changes of the system: perception, emotion, and behavior, in a continuous transformation and generation of the self, without ever returning to previous states. This process is what we call personal learning circle a long an evolutionary path that is quite unique. Each time there is a different experience

that is stratified, as if this model is theoretically infinite, while maintaining the same type of movement, represented schematically as a strange attractor. The experience is stratified, becoming a long-term memory by changing the structure of the attractor and continuously transformed into embodied knowledge. This double loop determines within it a coherent world, with a sense and meaning, whose boundary becomes its own cognitive domain: the system itself produces its own world, according to a recursive process constantly changing, just like a fractal or a strange attractor. It is a pattern that represents the principle of self-organization of intergenerational cognitive processes, closed with respect to its surroundings. The cognitive process is therefore the individual learning process, in the context of its evolutionary process. So the enactive learning is a pattern representing a double-closed circle of learning when the person enters into a relationship with her own environment, highlighting how the recurrence of interrelationships between perceptions, emotions and actions become incarnate in her personal experience. This pattern takes the form of a strange attractor, in which the emotional aspect is the central point of activity, the diaphragm, between perceiving and acting, between the emergence of the inner world and the emergence of contextual outer world, between the self and the other, along a circle that repeats itself endlessly, and yet is finished, closing the space of possibilities. The enactive learning structures a knowledge embodied in the person that is expressed in her behavior, her language, her emotions, her perceptions, and that defines her history and memory. The recurrent experience becomes a know-how of the person, which manifests itself in the naturalness of everyday life. It is a dynamic and evolving process, a real learning process: the process of learning is a process of signification, in which any action, any interaction, has a meaning within a coherent network of meanings. It is this body of skills ready to be activated automatically without the need to think up that we can define, together with Francisco Varela, as the know-how embodied in the person: it is the ability to immediately cope with the surrounding world, that readiness for action that allows the emergence of micro-worlds within which a person can easily move. Therefore, the structure of the intergenerational experience embodies the history of its continual changes; this process of ongoing structural changes keeps firm the identity of the subject. Through this enactive learning process we define our own identity, with reference to our environment, as a form of differentiation of ourselves from the environment. The emergence of our inner world, according to this analysis, is something intangible and not concretely defined. This is in fact a process that can emerge from the intertwined elements and their iteration, namely the continuous repetition of similar phenomena, although never identical, giving rise to a seemingly constant reality, as something stable, although always in motion and always co-determining in a seamless flow. In this generative process, named as enactive learning, cognition is represented as a process of transformation of the person, both inside and outside herself, changing her internal world and, simultaneously, changing her own context. This process is generative only if we acknowledge the other with whom we dependently co-generate. It becomes an infinite and indefinite iteration at the same time, that does not begin and end anywhere, with the emergence of coherent meanings in a common cognitive domain. Learning can thus be seen as a process of cooperation and mutual coordination, in which the relational aspect becomes the foundation of all knowledge. Through the personal perception of the world in which we take part with an action, the domains of self and other are intertwined making it impossible to remain outside.



## 5. The future: changes and challenges in intergenerational learning

We can look into the future in different ways. At one level the predicted patterns of ageing might not surprise us. People will live longer and healthier lives and assuming the reduction in fertility rates continues. Although there will be transient effects such as the 'age wave' resulting from the high fertility rates, there will continue to be a large representation of older people and different generations of families with relatively few offspring co-existing. We may also be unsurprised about the forecast that with continuing rates of migration, ethnic diversity will also become more widespread in Europe. We might also make a reasonable guess at the career involvement and the prevalence of working mothers as well as fathers increasing within the system with the consequent reduction of availability of within-family childcare. We might also be quite comfortable predicting that technology may not only change but become more available. What may be more difficult to predict, however, is how the different trends might interact. For example, while there is more scope for ethnic diversity within families, the cultural effects are not certain. It is not certain, for example, to what extent immigrant groups will become assimilated, nor how acculturation will take effect, so that the values, the culture and the customs merge with the majority population with time. Conversely, some communities might retain a strong heritage and cultural identity. There may be further tensions in retaining identity if family members are dispersed geographically because of economic demand and globalisation. While information and communication technologies have the power to enable younger family members to become independent and lose their cultural identity they can also, at the same time, facilitate cultural contact within and across national boundaries. It is likely that the continued weakening of horizontal household ties through divorce and other instabilities in relationships will mean that vertical intergenerational links and influences will become more important (Owen et al, 2004). However, this will also be in a context where an increased active lifespan together with employment rights for the elderly may mean that those family members who in the past have played this role may become more likely to take on the pivotal role of working and supporting those both younger and older than themselves (Dench and Ogg, 2002). We do not know how family members will continue to balance these demands and whether families can remain as coherent cohesive units. We do not know whether grandparents will continue to have the time for childcare and that special bond and, for that matter, whether grandfathers rather than grandmothers will have to play a greater role.

The challenge for some minority communities could be in terms of maintaining a heritage identity. Even if there are collective communal initiatives that support this, the role of the family could be crucial in this respect. While grandparents have been an active source of cultural knowledge and practice in the past, how this role might be picked up by future generations is less certain. In addition, particular occupations and the associated skills are less likely to remain stable within a given family and so learning needs could become less predictable. In turn this could affect the status of older generations as authoritative sources of information and skills. We are also living at a time when information is not only much more readily accessible but also is there in greater variety, quantity, detail and abundance.

Work patterns will affect what goes on within families. Apart from the possibility of a longer active life which has career implications, the demands of the labour market in response to shortages of particular skills will mean that patterns

in work, training and education will change when viewed from a life-long perspective. The blurring of boundaries between living, working and learning currently experienced may continue to progress; particularly as new technologies, mobile communications, and global business practices can keep people electronically connected at all times of the day and night regardless of whether they are at a place of work, at home, or on holiday. Perhaps the biggest challenge to families in relation to this context is managing the balance between work and leisure – or, indeed, a new order of family life. Although flexible working patterns could assist this process there is also the possibility that the more traditional opportunities for family and intergenerational interaction, such as in the evenings and at weekends, may disappear.

In addition we know that a majority of people in the Europe may be at risk of digital exclusion in 2040. While in the past a 'digital divide' has been framed in terms of a lack of availability of digital resources, more sophisticated notions of digital inclusion or exclusion also consider broader problems of social inclusion and engagement. Selwyn (2002), for example, argues that access to technology in itself is insufficient in promoting a digitally inclusive society and results from an adult continuing education survey carried out with his co-workers (Gorard et al, 2000) support his contention that access should be meaningful, functional, and of perceived relevance. In terms of social capital this also presents a challenge that belongs as much to the family as in the public domain. The use of ICT in the home can reduce the time that families interact as a whole. Sanger et al's (1997) work suggests that, in contrast to a family watching the same programmes on the one and only television receiver in the house, the increased availability of technology such as video games has segregated families; parents, for example, know very little about what their children are doing when they are each in their own rooms in different parts of the home. We are, perhaps, living at a time when families could be encouraged to negotiate rules around the use of new technologies. On this basis there is a need for parents to talk to children about the dangers of the internet and encourage them to look critically at the information they find on the internet and other media. Similarly, as more mobile phones become available, it is timely to address questions on how such technology is shaping family life and how families are shaping the use of technology.

So, the intergenerational learning is the real and evolutionary space of more complex relationships involving different generations including parents and children. What we regard as enactive learning today may take on a more tangible coherent and connected life of its own as we are able, through communication technologies, to maintain, sustain and develop relationships. The space in which we live and learn may no longer be defined by four walls and a roof. In this context the challenge for intergenerational learning 'actors may be one of identifying and contributing to a group identity, even if this identity is dynamic in nature. The syncretic processes could have a role to play here. The implications arising from the possible blurring of chronological divisions of education for intergenerational learning are widespread. Segmentation of education may be less distinct. For example, the role of the university could become a more continuous one where people remain connected as part of a lifelong learning community. With regard to children's learning and development, another challenge is for teachers to know more about the learning that goes on within families so that they can learn from this as well as allow their own institutional approaches (which will be different) to interface in a sensitive way. This is still an under-researched area. While studies such as the Teaching and Learning Research Pro-

gramme's Learning Lives (Hodkinson, Biesta, & James, 2008) have begun to contribute to the literature on the kind of learning going on throughout people live both formally and informally, further attention will still be needed in understanding the different kinds of learning, cultural practices and development taking place in a variety of out-of-school settings including the family.

Older people, of course, are not fixed entities. The older people of 2050 will have been the younger people of today who will have taken with them not only the practices we associate with young people today but also some of the attitudes to change and flexibility that we may consider a hallmark of our time. Assuming the infants of today will be the elders of the future then, to survive as a responsive and flexible community in a changing world, what they will take with them into that future will not just be the transferred remnants of yesterday but also the ability to play their part in creating the culture of tomorrow.

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# Lifelong Learning: Between Modern Strategies and Romantic Ideals. Our Post-Moral Society and Its Cultural Models

## Apprendimento permanente: Tra strategie contemporanee e ideali romantici. La nostra società post-morale e i suoi modelli culturali

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching literature has been for me one of the highest spiritual missions. American literature has offered me the best examples of non-conformist literary texts, which can only convey between the lines the ultimate truth about human existence and its meaning. My essay consists of three parts, devoted to three of the most outstanding and best representative American writers, despite their professional and personal destinies, that were by no means “exemplary:” R. W. Emerson, Wallace Stevens, William Faulkner. What their epigons have always failed to capture is their paradoxical insight into the tremendous power of (self)teaching over the vitality of the creative mind. Although voiced in three different stylistic tones, each one of which sounds unmistakably unique, it is this one ineffable vision that sends us readers the same message: the secret of a longer (and better) life is learning. At all ages...

L'insegnamento della letteratura è stata per me una delle più alte missioni spirituali. La letteratura americana mi ha offerto i migliori esempi di testi letterari non conformisti, che riconducono alla verità ultima dell'esistenza umana e il suo significato. Il mio saggio consiste in tre parti, dedicate ai tre più eminenti e representative scrittori americani, nonostante i loro destini personali, che non potrebbero essere considerati in nessun caso “esemplari”: R. W. Emerson, Wallace Stevens, William Faulkner. Ciò che i loro epigoni non sono stati in grado di catturare è stata la loro capacità di “insight” paradossale sul tremendo potere dell'autoformazione sulla vitalità della mente creativa. Nonostante essere portavoce di tre “toni” stilistici molto diversi, ogni uno di loro “suona” in un modo inconfondibilmente unico, ed è la loro visione ineffabile quella che manda ai lettori uno stesso messaggio: il segreto di una lunga (e migliore) vita è la formazione. A tutte le età...

### KEYWORDS

Self-teaching, knowledge-&-creative curiosity, poetic paradox, the artist's mind and mission, endurance, evanescence, spiritual survival.  
Auto-didattica, conoscenza e curiosità creative, paradosso poetico, mente e missione dell'artista, resilienza, evanescenza, sopravvivenza dello spirito.

Motto: "It can never be satisfied, the mind, never."  
Wallace Stevens

## Introduction

Lifelong education has always been more than just an ideal: it is a surviving necessity. It is the wisest strategy we can adopt to keep our minds sane, along with our sense of humor. Longevity itself is often the gift of such creative minds, used to reading and writing as the best of (serious) hobbies.

The minds I have best admired all my life (so far) are writers' minds. Teaching literature is more than just a job to me: I regard it as a mission. Particularly today, when reading literature tends to lose more and more of its main target audience: the young readers.

It is difficult to plead for one's belief and escape didacticism. Yet books have kept me good company for more than half of my life: this remains my best argument in any debate *on lifelong education*.

The writers we are going to consider here today have distinguished themselves individually by their successful (often double) careers. They are American writers of various generations and outlooks. One of them is R. W. Emerson (1803-1882): a romantic essayist; another one is Wallace Stevens (1879-1955): a modern poet; while the third of them is William Faulkner (1897-1962): a story-teller with an inexhaustible availability for stylistic experiment.

My choice is exquisite: each one of these writers earned his rank in *the universal literary canon*. Yet the unique ways by which every one of them has asserted his professionalism single them out.

Emerson was apparently meant for a *clerical career*. His option for a secular type of discourse instead expressed his vocation. His free-lancer's essay writing was the job of an artist; whereas the minister's sermon he had left behind him depended on a dogma both rigid and outdated. It was *teaching* that he believed in, rather than *preaching* from the pulpit. And moreover, he liked to call himself "rather a learner than a teacher." Therefore, *learning is the better (necessary) part of teaching*.

This amounts to my first argument to support the idea that *lifelong education* has been the ultimate aim of thinkers long before our time. Many of his conventional contemporaries suspected Emerson of being "a youth-corrupter," precisely because of his insistent encouraging their *self-reliance*. His plea for *individualism* and *self-assumed responsibility* is first and foremost a plea for *lifelong education*. An echo of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" will also prove us now that *lifelong education* belongs with a sound *nonconformist* attitude:

*What I must do is what concerns me, not what other people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after your own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.* (Emerson, p. 136; my emphasis)

Wallace Stevens was apparently meant for a (financially successful) *lawyer's career*. That he actually did accomplish – not so much for the sake of *conformity*,

as rather to earn his right to practise his true calling: poetry. This he could never part with. He lost his well-deserved Nobel Prize for Literature to Hermann Hesse in 1946. “Success is counted sweetest by those who ne’er succeed” – as Emily Dickinson said in a witty poem of hers.

Still William Faulkner did get his Nobel Prize for Literature a couple of years later. Although few were those who had appreciated his work at the beginning of his literary career in his homeland, and though his own town-folk would nickname him “Count-No-Count,” Faulkner made important and sophisticated professional French readers like Jean Paul Sartre admire and champion him without reserves.

I should like to talk about these three writers here in terms of their most profound messages, conveying the same notion: that *human life, no matter how long, is worth nothing without our/their books.*

### 1. R. W. Emerson and Our Quest for Truth

In self-knowledge we are interested as in a quest for truth. Lifelong education has the same aim – to search for an ultimate meaning, necessarily double: the meaning of *human existence* and that of *human nature*.

We tend to take our great thinkers for granted. Though in 1900 a building of Harvard University was named Emerson Hall in glorious memory of the romantic American writer, few readers care to consider now the irony of the fact: as an undergraduate student, Ralph Waldo Emerson did hardly anticipate *the American Scholar* he was meant to become. He graduated as an average student, by the middle of his class. Therefore it would be most unfair of us now to ascribe him to any conventional pattern of diligence and hard academic work – while still a very young intellectual. R. W. Emerson gave his tutors no promise of maturing into the essential author we know him to be.

In 1841, when he first published “Self-Reliance,” his most often quoted essay all around the world, Emerson had just overcome a crisis of conscience himself. He could have cherished the dull routine of mediocrity and monotonous security of his successful career as a young minister of Boston’s Second (Unitarian) Church, whose associate pastor he had become in 1829, following his father’s family tradition. Yet this was not his destiny: he chose instead *intellectual honesty*.

Few readers still care to remember today that Emerson’s 1832 crisis of conscience is related to a bitter revelation both professional and personal, which accounts for his change of mind. Doubts about the religious dogma he had stood for (“corpse-cold Unitarianism” as he called it) he had started having long before that time.

But what made Emerson quit his comfortable job and social position was the distinction he made one early morning, from his pulpit, between the *metaphorical meaning* and the parishioners’ erroneous *ad literam* interpretation of the Eucharist. This happened after the young minister had opened the coffin of his young wife, Ellen Tucker, whom he had lost to the fatal romantic disease: tuberculosis of the lungs.

Thus, having the evidence before his eyes that Nature spares no (physical) body of its ritual of decay, Emerson had the shock that his mission was elsewhere. So he left for Europe and especially England, where he made the acquaintance of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and befriended Thomas Carlyle. As the latter had just translated the works of Immanuel Kant into English, Emerson had a lot to learn from him.

Therefore what we call today *auto-didacticism* shaped Emerson's fertile mind for a work that took him a remarkably long life (for those times) to accomplish. *Self-teaching* is the basic condition of *self-discovery*, hence of *self-education*. And it has to be carried out for life.

Emerson believed that *social reform* had to start from *the reform of the individual*. This is his own definition of our theme here today: *lifelong education*. *Self-improvement* depends on *self-reliance*: the one spiritual resource to nurture any lucid mind.

The Concord Sage, inspiring by his writings the entire romantic American movement of Transcendentalism, remains to this day a gifted stylist. Reading his essays now is rather an intellectual pleasure than a sermonizing lesson of wisdom. And indeed who needs the latter? Have we not all had enough of moralizing lecturing? Emerson's rebellious mind contradicts itself shamelessly, since he knows that *lifelong education* is a *matter of change*: for the better (hopefully). Thus Emerson anticipates William James's notion of *Pragmatism*, which dwells on the concept of *truth in the making*.

Emerson had enthusiastic disciples among whom were the most creative mid-19<sup>th</sup> century American minds: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Walt Whitman (1819-1892). This is because he was himself rather a *poet in his essays*. Emerson never failed to win over his audience by his witty way with words. These essays can still provide us with some food for thought today, even if scholars may seem to have exhausted the possibilities of commenting upon Emerson's astute turns of phrase; they can still surprise us with the freshness of an exceptionally talented mind:

*Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm.*

The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and *the soul is subject to dollars*. The priest becomes a *form*; the attorney a statute-book; *the mechanic a machine*; the sailor a rope for the ship.

In this distribution of functions the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state he is *Man Thinking* [sic]. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a *mere thinker*, or still worse, *the parrot of other men's thinking*. (Emerson, p. 44; my emphasis)

This is a fragment from Emerson's earlier essay, "The American Scholar," originally a successful address delivered by him at Harvard in 1837. The nuances carefully marking distinctions here gather into a protest against reification of the human being in any one of its aleatory hypostases.

Emerson had renounced his Unitarian minister career lest he should "*become a form*," as the allegorical priest referred to in the text above quoted. Confinement to clichés was what he had rejected, for the sake of spiritual independence.

As for "*the tradesman*" whose "*soul is subject to dollars*" – is this image so safely far away from us in time? Is not our world, likewise, populated by such allegorical characters: "*the attorney a statute-book, the mechanic a machine*"?

Without our belief in lifelong education and self-teaching, what else could we be but "*mere thinkers, or still worse the parrots of other men's thinking*"? Is the

21<sup>st</sup> century so emancipated as to have established the Emersonian standards for the ideal “*Man Thinking*” for us all who work within the field of education? Or rather what he means here is that it still depends on ourselves exclusively to make sure that *freedom of mind* can only be accomplished by *lifelong learning*?

Yet this achievement of a mind enriched by continuous studying is a pleasure – not a must; a privilege – not a duty. Learning is fun: we do not submit to it as to some compulsory task. This is the spirit in which we should win over our disciples. Therefore 19<sup>th</sup> century Emerson can still speak our language of today:

«Hence, *instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm*. Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul. Hence the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees. *Books are the best things, well used; abused, among the worst*. What is the one end which all means go to effect? *They are for nothing but to inspire*. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is *the active soul*. This every man is entitled to; *this every man contains within him*, although in almost all men obstructed and yet unborn. *The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates.*» (Emerson, p. 47; my emphasis)

*Lifelong education* can only make sense to *creative minds*: it is our privilege as teachers to discover and encourage these creative minds as early as possible. No matter how smart, computers and other devices cannot replace human teachers. A teacher is an older friend who has had some more time for reading. But such a dialog can only be of help if it leads to the younger mind's self-discovery and its own self-reliance:

The world, – this shadow of the soul, or *other me*,– lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me *acquainted with myself*. I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next to me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; *I dissipate its fear*; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or *so far have I extended my being*, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls and rubies to his discourse. *Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructors in eloquence and wisdom*. The true scholar grudges *every opportunity of action* past by, as a loss of power. It is *the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products*. (Emerson, p. 49-50; my emphasis)

Emerson often contradicts himself – yet never in his plea for *an active intellectual life*. What he says in the above quoted fragment on “The American Scholar” resounds in his essay on “Self Reliance,” when he states that “Life only avails, not the having lived.” Human mind is sharpened by the challenges encountered at every step. The world as “*the other me*” is a romantic projection of *the creative self*. It is the intellect that benefits from this reflection and form any activity occasioned by it.

As an attentive reader of Emerson and also as a teacher of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, I believe that *lifelong education is a deeply creative job* – whether performed on *one's own mind* or on *the minds of the others*. In tune with Emerson's line of thought, Wallace Stevens – a major American poet – put it much better: “*It can never be satisfied, the mind, never.*” (Stevens, 224)

## 2. Wallace Stevens: Poetry as Lifelong Education

Lifelong education is no orthodox pursuit. It is not confined to institutionalized activities. It cannot be carried out perfunctorily. “*It Must Be Abstract,*” “*It Must Change,*” “*It Must Give Pleasure*” – as the same great poet claimed in his “*Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*” (329) of his own lifelong poetic craft. Hence, like poetry itself, lifelong education is not just the whim/employment of teenagers. It is at once the task of professionals and amateurs. It is performed according to one's tastes and inclinations. It tells the (life)story of one's personality.

Like R. W. Emerson, Wallace Stevens also went to Harvard University, where, as a special three-year student<sup>1</sup>, he took up courses in literature: English, French, German. There he met George Santayana, who was teaching philosophy. Stevens published some poems in Harvard literary magazines. He obviously went to Harvard for the sake of his love for literature. In choosing literature as his first domain of study, Wallace Stevens asserted his option for *his own lifelong line of self-education*: poetry meant that much to him. Self-teaching is completed by self-expression when the creative mind is exceptionally gifted.

As a second stage in his schooling, Stevens chose law. In the autumn of 1901 he entered New York Law School. This second professional orientation was a particularly wise one: it would bring the poet lifelong financial security. As a most capable lawyer, Wallace Stevens started working in 1916 for Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company in Connecticut. Here he became vice-president of Hartford Livestock Insurance Company. He would hold this privileged position for the rest of his life.

It is due to this pragmatic double choice of a career that Wallace Stevens could emit such paradoxes as “*Money is a kind of poetry*” – as if in an echo of Emerson's “*Money is as beautiful as roses.*” Paradoxically, too, due to his lawyer's job, he could write a new poem every morning, just as he put on a fresh clean shirt to go to his office – as he remarks in a letter to a friend. For Stevens believed that “*we live in the mind.*” And yet he was as modest as to assess himself in a letter to his wife, like this: “*I know I am far from being a genius – and must rely on hard and faithful work.*”

This would help him carry on with writing his poems; likewise, with his passion for painting (especially French), that would materialize in a valuable personal collection. He was also in love with music for as long as he lived: both classical and jazz. These were the delightful provinces his imagination would take him to: he hardly cared for traveling.

Though a passionate connoisseur of European high culture – especially French, again – and though he did have the right money to afford the luxury of any journey, Wallace Stevens never crossed the Atlantic Ocean. His curiosity

1 Like Robert Frost (1874-1963), another canonical modern American poet.

found other means of exploring the world. Or perhaps he knew intuitively that Emerson (though no shy traveler himself) was right in his paradox:

*Travelling is a fool's paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. At home I dream at Naples, at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from. I seek the Vatican and the palaces. I affect to be intoxicated with sights and suggestions, but I am not intoxicated. My giant goes with me wherever I go. (Emerson, 150; my emphasis)*

If Emerson still allowed for an exception from the home-truth of his paradoxical view against traveling gratuitously, this great exception (and “excuse,” as it were) for wandering around the world is exactly *the traveling for studying purposes*. “The intellect is vagabond, and our system of education fosters restlessness. Our minds travel when our bodies are forced to stay at home” – says Emerson further. And yet he confesses:

*I have no churlish objection to the circumnavigation of the globe for the purposes of art, of study, and benevolence, so that the man is first domesticated, or does not go abroad with the hope of finding somewhat greater than he knows. He who travels to be amused, or to get somewhat which he does not carry, travels away from himself, and grows old even in youth among old things. In Thebes, in Palmyra, his will and mind have become old and dilapidated as they. He carries ruins to ruins. (149; my emphasis)*

Wallace Stevens never “traveled away from himself” – and yet his poems are full of *fun* and the *joy of living*. This implies in the first place *living within one's mind*; finding there *the main source of vital energy and innermost freedom*. Stevens's poems may seem to plead for a solipsistic understanding of the world; yet there is so much more to discover in them. The essential *hope* his poetry stands for springs out of the lucid mind of a true *poet of reality*. And it is this *hope* that keeps us readers alive and curious in our search for more things to learn in our precious evanescent lives:

«*The Well Dressed Man with a Beard*

*After the final no there comes a yes  
And on that yes the future world depends.  
No was the night. Yes is this present sun.  
If the rejected things, the things denied,  
Slid over the western cataract, yet one,  
One only, one thing that was firm, even  
No greater than a cricket's horn, no more  
Than a thought to be rehearsed all day, a speech  
Of the self that must sustain itself on speech,  
One thing remaining, infallible, would be  
Enough. Ah! douce campagna of that thing!  
Ah! douce campagna, honey in the heart,  
Green in the body, out of a petty phrase,  
Out of a thing believed, a thing affirmed:*

The form on the pillow humming while one sleeps,  
The aureole above the humming house...

*It can never be satisfied, the mind, never.»*

(Stevens, p. 224; my emphasis)

The persona in the poem's title, "The Well Dressed Man with a Beard," looks funny and pedantic; yet all too human in this concise stream-of-consciousness monologue about (the need for) *hope*. This mask seems so full of self-esteem and at the same time, of self-consciousness: the nameless lyrical (silent) speaker reveals himself in the poem's trend of his thoughts, encouraging himself, presumably after some *crisis moment* (as in a possible echo to Emily Dickinson's poem 341 "After great pain a formal feeling comes," since even the musicality of rhythm and rhyme suggests this affinity).

Stevens's title persona may be a demanding *aesthete* himself: a knowledgeable critic of either *painting* or *poetry*. Or he may be *the poet* himself, "well dressed" to go to his work again, in his secret modern impersonation of the romantic Doppelgänger. It is presumably early in the morning when he is thinking of all that: "No was the night. Yes is *this present sun*."

Anyway, this speaker is lucid and hopeful, ready to make the most of the classic saying *carpe diem*. He is living in/for the present moment, since: "After the *final* no there comes a yes/ And on that yes the future world depends." No matter how "*final*," "no" can be still overcome by the immanent impulse of "*this present sun*," rising for "the *future world*."

"The western cataract" over which "the things denied" may slide somehow evokes some pre-Columbian mappemond representation of a flat world, whose terminus brink to the ultimate abyss could dishearten any traveler, no matter how audacious.

And yet, the bearded dreamer impeccably dressed (i.e. observing certain rules of social conformity; or rather putting on "his clean white shirt" for his daily poem?) can make us see the one exceptional thing, "even no greater than a cricket's horn," so exquisite that it defies the fatal fathomless chasm. This fragile yet enduring little thing "no more than a *thought* to be rehearsed all day" is proof "enough" of mortals' infallibility. "*Out of a thing believed a thing affirmed*" is the *creed of a poet* who knows he holds the key to *all human hope*.

And this *hope*, beyond all "*final noes*," no less fragile and vulnerable than any one of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, is the *thought*, the awareness that: "*It can never be satisfied, the mind, never.*" (Q. e. d.).

### 3. William Faulkner's Message to Young Writers (and to Us, His Universal Readers)

Unlike the American writers previously evoked here, William Faulkner is no New Englander. Of this he never tired to make a point: the virtuoso experimentalist in the most intricate stylistic challenges of *narrative modernism* also provides a specifically nuanced illustration of *local color fiction of the Old South*.

William Faulkner defies any didactic effort at categorization. He is definitely no good as a conventional "*cultural model*" – if we only consider his educational background. He obviously did not trust school as an institution. Faulkner is a *self-taught* writer in the most aristocratic sense of this compound word. His college days ended before they began. He only went to the University of Mississip-



pi for one year<sup>2</sup>, since 1919 till 1920, as a special student, to study French, and rather mind his own writing. Apparently there is nothing of the “cultural model” here, let alone the righteous example of commendable bourgeois behavior.

Yet he illustrates best to my mind our theme today of *lifelong (self-)education* by his unflinching artistic perfectionism and voracious reading. As a mature writer, Faulkner was generous to his younger fellow-writers in disclosing his professional “secrets:”

*Read, read, read. Read everything – trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You’ll absorb it. Then write. If it is good, you’ll find out. If it’s not, throw it out of the window. (Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!; back cover; my emphasis)*

An ambitious writer’s job of reading lasts for a lifetime: *learning one’s trade takes one one’s entire life-span*. Faulkner’s *Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature*, delivered in Stockholm, on December 10<sup>th</sup>, in 1950, conveys a rather romantic message directed to whom it may concern – that is, to his younger colleagues, and ourselves, his anonymous readers:

Our tragedy today is a general and universal *physical fear* so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. *There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up?* Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the *problems of the human heart in conflict with itself* which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat. He must learn them again. *He must teach himself that the basest thing of all things is to be afraid;* and teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and *truths of the heart*, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed – love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. *He writes not of love but of lust*, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. *He writes not of the heart but of the glands.* (Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize, 723-724; my emphasis)

Faulkner had vision: he anticipated as early as 1950 our present waste land, after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, when “*there are no longer problems of the spirit*,” “*there is only the question: When will I be blown up?*”

His Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize is itself a plea for *lifelong education*: we must (all) learn *again* that “*the basest thing is to be afraid.*”

Coming from a writer of the Old South, whose literary heritage contains some baroque imagery of extreme cruelty and violence, and wickedness, and

2 This is just one aspect of William Faulkner’s striking resemblance to E. A. Poe (1809-1849) in terms of literary development. Poe himself went as a special student, likewise, to the University of Virginia in 1826, only for one term, whence he had to withdraw because of heavy (gambling) debts and drinking.

cynicism – how refreshing this message still reads, pleading for a (writer’s) return to “*the truths of the heart*,” such as: “*love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice*.” This catalog reminds us readers of the chivalric code of virtues in lost romances. Recovering that heroic code is the mission of the young *writer and reader* – since one is nothing without the other.

The *poet laureate* speaking here borrows much of his solemn speech from the Faulknerian persona of Gavin Stevens, the idealist lawyer in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), and formerly in *Light in August* (1932). It seems that such *times of crisis* – like Faulkner’s, like ours – require the return of the idealist. Is *lifelong education* anything but an *idealistic goal*? Quite in tune with Faulkner’s (Old South) code of honor, our aim today should spring from our *hope* that *fear* can be done away with.

Faulkner’s 1950 conclusion echoes Gavin Stevens again – his own character, his own *wishful-thinking self-projection*, so much *unlike the writer himself*. Gavin Stevens had earned his BA at Harvard and his Ph D at Heidelberg (Hamlet’s university in Shakespeare’s most successful tragedy); and above all, he had returned to his Old Southern small town from a world war in Europe, both decadent and glorious, so much like *the hero* the writer himself had failed to become:

*I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure. [...] I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet’s, the writer’s, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet’s voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail. (724; my emphasis)*

This is William Faulkner’s *ars poetica*: in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, the great novelist proves himself to be a true believer in *the poet’s/writer’s mission to help his readers out of (moral) crisis*. Thus Faulkner asserts his belonging to a traditional trend of thought: the American one, the same as R. W. Emerson’s, Wallace Stevens’s. This is perhaps the most remarkable and obvious discovery for us now, i.e. that, despite the (apparent) differences between them: of vision, of style – all these three writers share this *one belief in their privileged artistic mission*. This is the best evidence that aesthetic excellence may coincide with a profound ethic attitude – all the more convincing since it remains effaced in the shadow of the writers’ works, instead of declaring itself in shrill tones of didactic propaganda.

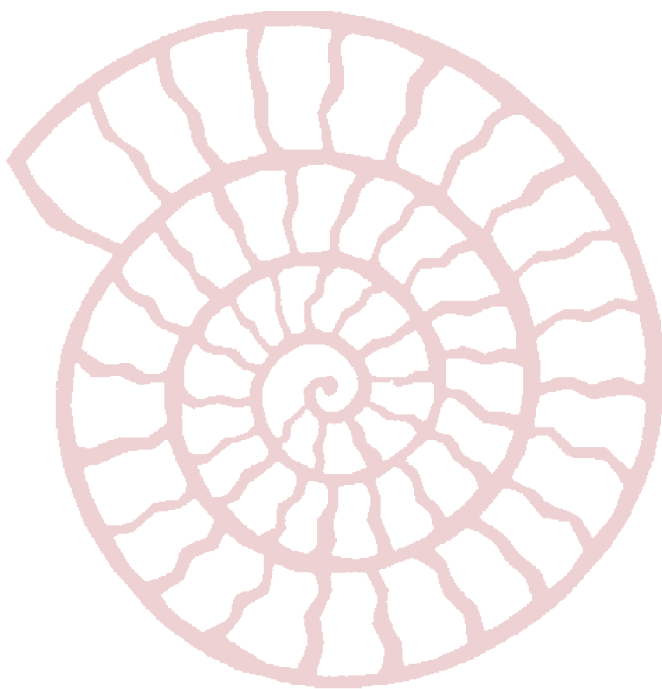
As a teacher of literature, I have often wondered about this paradox: what we are doing here, with these writers’ works, is use them for our educational purposes. When they have actually faced their destinies without the least intention of becoming anyone’s (*cultural*) *models*. They took the risks (and their chances) of creating the “*Supreme Fiction*” we all depend on – and profit from. Is it fair of me to just play the *safe* role of the *intermediary* between the self-sacrificing creators and their ever younger readership, in need of *guidance*?

And yet, what is there left for us to do, teachers of literature, but to turn back gratefully to our world classics, and learn again their (slant) lesson of professional dignity and self-effacement? And then teach it to our students – the best of who in their turn will one day become great teachers.

Or even better than (ordinary) great teachers: the great writers (and actually the only true teachers) to follow all our acknowledged masters, after having thoroughly read them. First.

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# Romanian secondary school students, parents and teachers. Intergenerational relationship and lifelong learning society

## Studenti, genitori e docenti della Scuola secondaria rumena. Relazioni intergenerazionali e società dell'apprendimento permanente

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### ABSTRACT

There is little known in Romania about the role played by parents, teachers and form masters on the secondary school students' attitudes towards school, level of grades and the intention to enroll in a higher education system. In order to find out the impact of parents and teachers on the teenagers' integration into the lifelong learning society, I conducted, together with my colleagues<sup>1</sup>, a national survey on Romanian secondary school students (n=2624) in 2011. The survey findings underline the importance of communication between teenagers, parents, teachers and form masters. Teenagers need united and supporting families and also teachers who are open to discuss their issues. Parents and teachers have to transmit the importance of school and not of the materialistic values, fact that can help secondary school students to be happier and integrated into society.

Si sa molto poco in Romania sul ruolo svolto dai genitori, docent e dirigenti scolastici relativamente alle attitudini degli studenti verso la scuola, il rendimento scolastico e l'intenzione di proseguire gli studi a livello universitario. Con lo scopo di analizzare l'impatto di genitori e docent sulla partecipazione degli adolescenti alla società dell'apprendimento, ho è stata condotta un'indagine nazionale a livello delle scuole secondarie in Romania (n=2624) nel 2011. I risultati sottolineano l'importanza della comunicazione tra adolescenti, genitori e docenti e dirigenti scolastici. Gli adolescenti hanno bisogno del support familiar e dei docent che sono aperti a trattare tematiche di rilevanza per gli studenti. Genitori e docent hanno una fondamentale importanza nel trasmettere i valori dell'istruzione anziché valori materialistici, aspetto che potrebbe collocarsi alla base della soddisfazione ed integrazione degli adolescenti alla società.

### KEYWORDS

Secondary School Students, Parents, Teachers, Intergenerational Relationship

Studenti della scuola secondaria, genitori, docenti, relazione intergenerazionale.

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## Introduction

In knowledge based economy, having a higher level of education, adapted to the technological and cultural challenges of the globalised world, is a *sine qua non* condition for a person to be integrated in the labour market and generally to be socially included. A positive attitude to school, high academic performances and intention to attend a higher education system have to be present in the children and teenagers' life for the new generations to integrate into the future society.

According to Eurostat, in Romania, in 2012, the share of early school leavers was 17,4%, and only 21,8% of the younger generation (population aged 30-34 years) had a tertiary degree. Taking into consideration that the European Union target for 2020 is that the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree, we can realize that political actors, educational institutions, families, NGOs have to do a common effort that future adult generations to be ready to adapt to economical and social challenges.

What is / should be the parents and teachers' role in socializing the importance of school in life to the new generations? What are the family characteristics that make children have higher school performances? What is the parents and teachers' role when secondary school students choose a college to enroll? To sum up, we want to know how important the intergenerational relationship between secondary school students is, parents and teachers so that actual teenagers to be ready to be future active adults in a globalised and a competitive labour market.

### 1. Family, teachers and secondary school students – intergenerational relationship

Many studies have approached the importance of family for children and teenagers' school performance, the latter attitude to school and their intention to enroll in a higher education institution. Intelligence correlates with the length of school career, and explains about 25% of school performance (Hatos, 2011, 618). Beyond native capacity to resolve problems, students' performance is explained by socio-economical factors, such as those related to family, teachers, or their relationships with children / students. The findings of a research realized in 2006 show that, in SUA, 10-15% of the school performance gap can be tackled by school-level actions or policies and 30-50% of the gap is determined by "uncontrollable factors", such as income, racial composition, disability and English proficiency (Hoerander & Lemke, 2006, 11). The relationship between controllable and uncontrollable gap makes that the controllable gap to be 11% for blacks, 26% for Hispanics, 9% for disabled students, and 11% for low-income students (Hoerander & Lemke, 2006, 12). Therefore, there are variables that are related to the possibility of school, local and central government intervention, where family characteristics (such as income, parents' education, and family unity) are central in the explanation of school performance.

Socialization of the children within the family, especially in the first years of childhood, consists in the transmission of the norms, values, behavior patterns and language. Basil Bernstein (1971/2003), based on a research in the field of sociology of education, considers that in the middle class families children are taught to use an elaborated code and restricted code of language, when the parents from the working class can transmit only the restricted code. The last one is characterized by a simpler structure, shorter sentences, vocabulary drawn from a narrow

range, a higher probability of the usage of nonverbal communication (gestures and mimic), and by the demand of the confirmation that the message was understood. If the elaborated code supposes complex and large sentences, with implicit and explicit messages, the restricted code “becomes a facility for transmitting and receiving concrete, global, descriptive, narrative statements, involving a relatively low level of conceptualization” (Bernstein, 1964, 65-66). Therefore, children that have access only to the restricted code are disadvantaged in school, where the elaborated code is used and valorized more. Much more, beyond the advantages that are related to the possibility of a complex and nuanced communication, children from the middle class, that can use the elaborated code, “grows up in an ordered, rational structure in which his total experience is organized from an early age. Within middle-class and associative levels direct expression of feeling, in particular feelings of hostility, are discouraged” (Bernstein, 1971/2003, 19). Thus the access to the elaborated code, associated with the organized experience and verbalization of feeling, represents an advantage for the middle class children because school and universities use it and recompense the students that have this code (Hatos, 2011, 625).

Another characteristic of the family that has an impact on students' school performance is the level of cohesion of their family. This fact has to be addressed in Romania where the divorce rate has increased very much after the fall of the communist regime, and because of the parents' migration to work in the wealthier Western European countries, especially in Italy and Spain. In the '1990 and at the beginning of the '2000, mainly men left Romania to work abroad and women afterwards (Sandu, 2006, 31). Consequently, the number of children from dismantled families increased because of divorce, separation or migration of one or both parents abroad.

This phenomenon cannot have a negative emotional impact and affects the school performance. According to a study realized by Suet-Ling Pong and Dong-Beom Ju (2000) in SUA, children from families that changed the structure had three times higher risk of dropping out school than their peers whose families did not change. Authors underline that the change from two-parent to mother-only family increases the risk of dropping out not only because of divorce or separation, but largely because such families change is associated with a worse economical situation, as well. Similar findings were found by Yongmin Sun and Yuanzhang Li (2009) that focused on the post-divorce families and the impact of this situation on school performance. The findings confirm the fact that stable and cohesive families have a positive impact on school performance, and children who underwent additional family transitions during late adolescence make less progress in their math and social studies performance over time. Moreover, girls are more affected than boys by unstable postdivorce families, and have less academic progress over time.

A particular case that proves that conflict and instability are difficult for children is when children live with cohabiting mothers. According to a study realized by Raley et al. (2005), children who lived with cohabiting mothers have lower school performances than children who lived with divorced or remarried mothers. Based on their study and on the scientific literature, authors underline that “compared to children who live with both parents until adulthood, children from divorced families have lower educational expectations, poorer school attendance, and lower grades. They are also less likely to graduate from high school or to attend college” (Raley et al. (2005, 144). In summary, we can assume that Romanian teenagers have been negatively influenced by the phenomenon of increasing divorciality and migration.

The divorce and migration can be associated with the change of the school where children study. Smith et al. (1992, 83) found out that in SUA students who have changed schools three times or more because of family moves are almost three times more likely to drop out than students who have never moved. Moreover, if they are not members of church organizations too, they are almost four times more likely to drop out school compared to the others. Therefore, when the community social capitals together with family social capital are high then the risk of dropping out school is low.

A study realized in Romania confirms the importance of cohesive family and the negative impact of migration on children school performance. Nicoleta Laura Popa (2012), using average grade of a school semester as an indicator for school performance, found out that children with migrant parents have the lowest average school grades. On the other hand, Romanian children with migrant parents tend to internalize their psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem (Sava, 2010). A similar situation can be found in Ukraine and Republic of Moldavia, where children whose parents, especially mothers, work abroad face higher risk of dropping out rate, low school performances, lack of discipline or aggressiveness (Molodikova, 2008, 25). Therefore we can expect than Romanian secondary school students to face a higher risk of dropping out school and lower school performance compared to their peers' whose parents remained home.

The role of the family in children's school activity confirms the importance of communication and the need "to develop strong parent and child relationship and a sense of family connectedness and belonging" (Hamilton & Wilson, 2009, 346). Therefore, these authors consider that one solution for a better child-parents' relationship is family mealtimes that, beyond the fact that develop healthy eating patterns in children, can positively determine literacy and school performance. A better relationship and an intrafamilial communication is associated with higher school performance and with the decrease of children's levels of school-based aggressive behaviour (Lambert & Cashwell, 2004; Erginoz et al., 2013) or alcohol use (King & Vidourek, 2010).

The importance of parent-teacher communication and student-teacher communication stresses the educators' role and especially the form teacher's. A better parent-teacher communication can help teachers to understand better "parent's perception of his or her child and the parent's impressions and expectations for the program, and can help to build a working relationship that can support strong home-program collaboration" (McNaughton et. al., 2008, 223). Therefore, the author study underlines that the use of active listening skills between parent and teacher is necessary for a supportive communication between home and school, with a powerful positive impact on the children's development. Nevertheless, Annette Lareau and Vanessa Lopes Muñoz (2012) show that very high level of parents involvement can lead to many conflicts. Parents can demand a warmer and friendly relationship in school, when the principal favors orderly, safe and bureaucratic environment. Thus, authors sustain the need to reconceptualize the model of family involvement in schools.

The communication between teacher and children has the particularity that combines instruction and communication, thus academics use the concept of instructional communication (Nussbaum & Friedrich, 2005). Credibility, clarity, humor, immediacy, affinity seeking, and relational power in instructional communication are qualities that teachers have to dispose in order to have a strong and positive influence over students school activity (Steven & Mottet, 2009). Humor,



immediacy, and affinity seeking are ways for teacher to create a positive emotional relationships with students in the context of the instructional communication. As Lei et al. (2010, 326) mention, “humor has the power to make instructors more likable, approachable, facilitate comprehension, increase attentiveness, improve creativity, and promote social relationships”. But even if it is recognized that humor is beneficial for student learning, studies show that there are appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor. For example, humor on the expense of a student, sexual humor, swearing or based on sexual or racial stereotypes, beyond the fact that can be illegal or immoral, they have a negative influence on children school activity. For a bigger psychological closeness and to express affinity, teachers can use the pronouns “we,” “us,” and “our”, can call students by name, listen to them without interrupting, express in general optimism, dynamism, altruism, sensitivity and that are conformable with themselves (Steven & Mottet, 2009).

Another factor that influences the school performance is the values shared by students. Based on a study realized in Finland, Holm et al. (2009) show that students that have higher intercultural sensitivity, high moral judgment scores, and get earlier than their chronological peers high stage of moral and ethical reasoning have higher grades. Richins and Dawson (1992) built a scale of consumer values orientation for materialism with three subscales focused on acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success. Materialistic persons are less oriented to (emotional) interpersonal relationship and value more financial security. Moreover, materialistic persons are less satisfied with their life in general, as it was underline in a study realized on the secondary school students from Hungary (Piko, 2006).

Taking into consideration of Holm et al. (2009) findings and the fact that materialistic persons are less oriented to warm relationship with others, we can consider that students that share materialistic values have lower school performances. Richard Prince (1960) showed that there is a positive correlation between values expressed by secondary school students and school performance or option regarding professional career. Published before the phenomenon called by Roland Inglehart (1971) “silent revolution”, the study of Richard Prince (1960) showed that students who share “traditional values” have higher grades than their peers who share “emergent pattern”. If the first ones are more individualistic, focus on success and orient to the future, the latter ones have relativistic moral attitudes, conformity, sociability and present-time orientation. Thus, American researcher considered that “high-school teachers and counselors must emphasize the work-success ethic achievement, and individualism and de-emphasize the importance of sociability and conformity.” (Prince, 1960, 383). The change of the values, phenomenon underlined by Inglehart in 1971 and by other later researcher, such as Ray and Anderson (2000), makes more people to be oriented to interpersonal relationship, self expression, spiritual development, or xenophile behaviors. Therefore we can question if the materialistic values, developed in the process of socialization, especially within the family and school, are positively or negatively linked with school performance.

In summary, we can emphasize that intergenerational relationship, mainly the communication between students, parents and teachers have an impact on school performances, and on the intention to enroll in a college. Having higher school performances and longer participation in the educational system are part of the lifelong learning process. Based on the theoretical background, with the final goal to offer solutions for a lower share of early school leavers and a higher share of younger generation, I will present the findings of a study that looked to respond to the next research questions:

*According to secondary school students' opinion, how important is school and family cohesion that a person to have success in life?  
How do secondary school students see their relationship with teachers?  
What is the role of families for students' school performance?  
What are the of families and teachers' roles when secondary school students choose a college to enroll?*

Family characteristic, communication between teachers and students and the share of materialistic values are not the only variables that can explain students' activity. We can take into consideration as well the type of enrollment (daily or evening courses), overall students' attendance, time to get to school, the number of inhabitants where the high school is, gender, etc. (Frunzaru et al., 2013). Nevertheless, in this paper we focus only on the intergenerational relationship and socialization of values, as ones of the key elements that positively influence life-long learning process.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Sample

This study is based on a national survey (N=2642) of Romanian high school students using a probabilistic, stratified, multistage sample, with a cluster extraction in the last stage of sampling. We included 119 classes in the final sample, representing 2624 secondary school students, with a mean of 22 students in one class. The questionnaires were self administered, with the assistance of a survey operator, between 9-18 of May, 2011. Because the questionnaires were collectively administrated to all students who were found in classrooms, the sample is only representative for those respondents who had not dropped out school or did not use to skip classes.

### 2.2 Measurements

To measure the materialistic values we have used the scale developed by Marsha L. Richins (1987), where four items measure personal materialism and two measure general materialism. Secondary school students expressed on a Likert type scale with seven categories if they agree with affirmations like: "It is important to me to have really nice things" and "I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things", for the first factor, and "People place too much emphasis on material things", "It's really true that money can buy happiness" for the second factor. The scale was translated and adapted into Romanian, and the reliability of the scale was acceptable (0.67). The internal consistency could be good (0.73) if we dropped out the item "People place too much emphasis on material things". A possible explanation for this fact is that this is the only one reverse item and that can create confusion within respondents, and because agreeing with this affirmation, even by the materialistic persons, is socially desirable. Nevertheless, we created with all six items an index of materialism whose values are higher for higher level of materialism. The index took values from 1 to 7, with a slightly skewed part of the distribution of responses to the left (mean=4,4, S.D.=0.98 skewness=-.489).

School performance was measured with an interval scale; secondary school

students should mention in what interval their average grade from last school year was. The scale had 12 categories, with two categories for every point of grades from 4 to 10. The skewed part of the distribution of responses was to the left (skewness=-.531), only 15,8% of the students mentioned that their average grade from the previous school year was in one of the first six categories (with the average grade between 4 and 6.99).

We used Likert type scale with five steps to measure the importance accorded by secondary school students to education and family cohesion, to consultation with parents and teachers when choosing a college to enroll, and the satisfaction regarding communication with teachers.

### 2.3 Findings

1. Regarding the first research question, we can say that the majority of the Romanian secondary school students consider that family cohesion and education is important and very important to have success in life (Fig. 1). In the opinion of the respondents, the most important qualities are personality qualities, such as ambition and intelligence. Contrary to the expectations, personal relations are seen only by a minority as needed to succeed in life. Therefore we can say that respondents appreciated first personality qualities as ambition and intelligence, afterwards education and family cohesion and finally luck and personal relations. Faith in God is considered very important by about a half of the Romanian secondary school students.

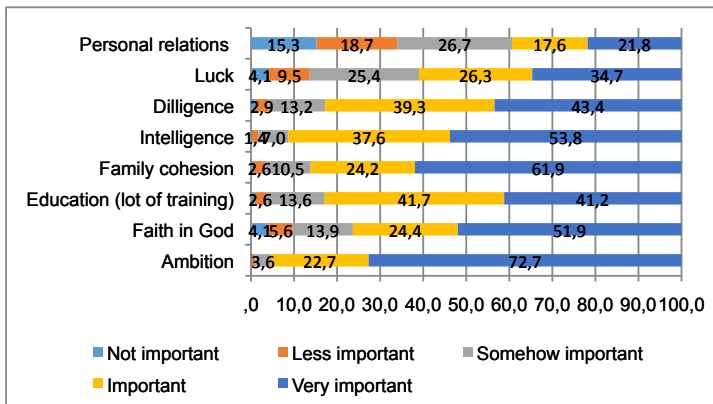


Fig. 1 - To succeed in life, how important it is for a person to have...?

There are not any relationships between the importance accorded to family cohesion or education on the one hand, and school performance or materialism, on the other hand. But students who share materialistic values consider the luck ( $\rho=.22, p<.00$ ) and to have personal relations ( $\rho=.29, p<.00$ ) important at a higher level. and to have personal relations ( $\rho=.29, p<.00$ ). Moreover, the lower the school performances are the more valued luck ( $\rho=-.13, p<.00$ ) and having personal relations ( $\rho=-.13, p<.00$ ) are. These significant relationships are explained in the context where materialistic persons students have lower school performances ( $\rho=-.13, p<.00$ ). The students who consider that faith in God is very important in life have lower grades ( $\rho=-.13, p<.00$ ), think that luck is very

important in life ( $\rho = -.13, p < .00$ ) and their mothers and fathers have lower level of education ( $\rho = -.22, p < .00$ ;  $\rho = -.21, p < .00$ ).

Respondents who were more supported by parents to have higher school performance during the high school consider more that family cohesion ( $\rho = .13, p < .00$ ) and education ( $\rho = .16, p < .00$ ) as important to succeed in life. Therefore the importance accorded to family unity and education can be determined by the support received by the teenagers from their parents.

In summary, we can say that there is room for improving performances in the higher secondary schools, taking into consideration that students appreciate education as important and consider luck, having personal relations and faith in God to have success in life less important to have success in life. Family support is very important in order to inoculate the value that education is outstanding and to make teenagers consider that cohesion of the family is necessary to succeed in life. The fact that respondents consider ambition, intelligence and diligence very important shows that beyond family, they rely on their individual qualities in a competitive world. The students who rely on external factors of success, such as personal relations, luck and belief in God have lower school performance, thus parents and teachers have to transmit more the fact they have to rely more on internal factors and education.

2. The respondents were less happy with the openness of teachers to discussing students issue and with the classrooms, and happier with chances of enrolling in a college based on what they learned in their secondary school (Fig. 2). These findings can be explained by the fact that there is a generous offer of the Romanian colleges and if one respondent passes the *baccalaureate* it is quite easy to become a student. Classrooms were not very well evaluated by fewer students because of the poor material conditions in some of the Romanian secondary schools.

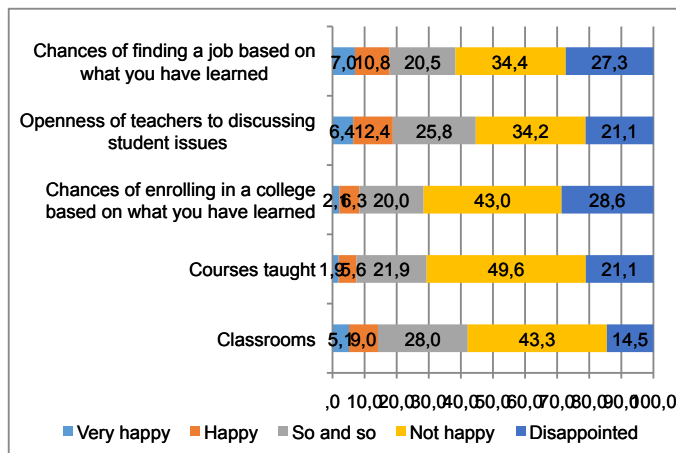


Fig. 2 - Think about your secondary school, how happy are you with the [...]

Only 54.3% of the students said that they are happy and very happy with the openness of teachers to discussing their issues. A possible explanation for this finding is that they are in general teenagers and consequently they are sensitive and build their identity usually in opposition with the adults (Schifirne , 2002, 94). One argument for this explanation is that students at evening courses that usu-

ally are over 18 years, compared with their colleagues from daily courses, are happier regarding the communication with their teachers (chi square=10.37, df=10, p<.05). Moreover, secondary school students from the higher grade are more satisfied with the teacher's openness (rho=.14, p<.00).

There is a small but a significant negative relationship between school performance and the appreciation of the courses (rho=-.09, p<.00) and of the communication with the teachers (rho=-.07, p<.00). Even if these are low correlations, we have to stress the fact that students with high school performances are more critical than students with low school performances. For example, if 24.4% of the students with average grade from the previous school year less than 7.50 are very happy with openness of teachers to discussing their issues, only 19,1% of the students with the average grade between 9.00 and 10 gave the same answer.

In conclusion, we can say that teenagers, especially from the lower grade, are less satisfied regarding the communication with their teachers, and consequently they need more openness of the latter ones to discuss their issues.

3. To see the relationship between school performance and other variables using chi square statistic, we recoded the 12 school grades categories in three categories: students with the average grades from the last school year less than 7.50, between 7.50 and 9.00, and between 9.00 and 10. Because there is a high level of correlation between father's level of education and mother's level of education (rho=.63, p<.00), we created a new variable "parents' education". This new variable has only two values: at least one of the parents has higher education and none of the parents had graduated a college.

School performance is higher for students that have at least one parent with higher education, neither of whom work abroad, and are supported by family to have higher grades.

	School performance
Parents education	137.79*** (df=6)
If parents work abroad	16.19* (df=12)
Supported by family	22.93** (df=15)

**Table 1 - Relationship between school performance and parents characteristics (chi square)**

\*\*\* significant for p<.001

\*\* significant for p<.01

\* significant for p<.05

As expected, family characteristics are very important to explain children's school performance. Because migration is a widespread phenomenon that can be found in Romania in the last decade, we have to express a special attention to the effect of the parents living abroad over the children school activity. Findings show that children are affected especially if both parents or only mother work abroad. A possible explanation is that it is difficult for children when they are cared by a relative or only by the father that cannot manage to take over the role of the mother. Because there is not any significant relationship between the fact that at least one parent works abroad and the family income (chi square=10.37, df=12, p=.58), we can say that migration has a negative impact on children school performance because of emotional and not financial reasons.

4. The majority of students (57.3%) had decided to enroll in a college in Romania or abroad. When secondary school students choose a college to enroll, respondents consider that they have to take into account family's opinion and in a much smaller percent the teachers' and form master's opinion (Fig. 3). Secondary school students, regardless their school performance, consider that choosing a college to enroll in is more a private issue, and consequently has to be discussed within family.

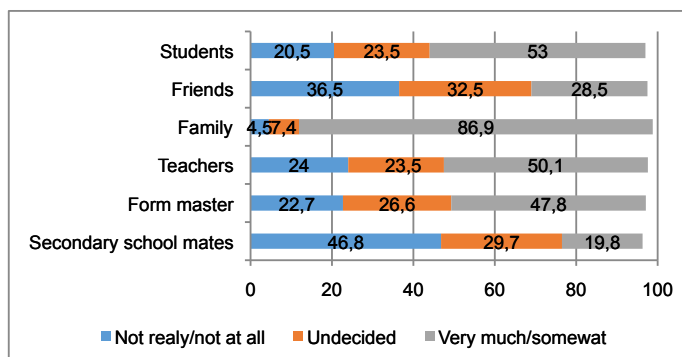


Fig. 3 - In choosing college/university to what extent a young person have to take into account the opinion of... ?

Students who consider their families' opinion when they choose in what college to enroll were encouraged by family to have high school performance ( $\rho=0.12$ ,  $p<0.00$ ) and believe that the cohesion of the family is important to succeed in life ( $\rho=0.25$ ,  $p<0.00$ ). Moreover, when parents want that their children to enroll in a college, the latter ones decide to continue to study at a higher education level, as well ( $\chi^2=260.37$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.00$ ). Thus, parents are important both for the decision to enroll in and to choose what college to attend.

To sum up, students who receive support from their families during school compared to their peers who are not encouraged by parents to have higher school performances value education more and take into consideration to a higher extent their parents desire to enroll in a college. Family becomes more important for teenagers when the latter one feel the support of their parents.

## Conclusion

Intergenerational relationship between teachers, parents and secondary school students is very important in order that the latter ones to integrate into lifelong learning society. Secondary school students that are mainly teenagers, instead of their need of independence and to build their identity in opposition with the adults, need the parents and teachers' support. If they are encouraged by parents to have higher grades and find openness of teachers to discussing their issues, secondary school students appreciate more the importance of education in life, have higher grades and intend in a higher number to enroll in a college. Parents and teachers, showing openness to talk teenagers' issues and encouraging them to have higher school performances, can help the new generations to be integrated into a competitive knowledge economy.

The family cohesion, considered by respondents as important to succeed in life, proved to be very important when we analyzed the school performance in relationship with the fact that one or both parents are working abroad. Especially if both parents and only mother work abroad, students have lower grades, fact that proves the importance of the satisfaction of the emotional needs beyond material needs.

Families and teachers are the main factors that contribute to the socialization of the new generations. They have to transmit to the secondary school students the importance of education, family unit and interpersonal relationships that have positive impact on teenagers school activity. Because within teenagers peer pressure is high, in a world of consumption, to have a gadget or some commodities is a must. Therefore, acquisition and possession of some material things perceived as a source of success and happiness have to be counterbalanced by the importance accorded to family and education. Materialistic students have lower grades and expect more to have success in life based on luck and personal relations, so not on their own effort. Beyond economical problems, migration, and temptations of the materialism, parents and teachers have to have a better communication with children, to support and to transmit them values that can help them be integrated into society and happier.

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# The meaning of culture dissemination in Japanese intergenerational learning

## Il senso della disseminazione culturale per l'apprendimento intergenerazionale in Giappone

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### ABSTRACT

Japan is one of many countries in the world facing the increasingly serious issues of an ageing population combined with a very low birth rate. The impact upon Japanese society of this situation is enormous in both the medium and long term, and a number of measures have been introduced, both by local and central governments, to try and cope. At the same time, over the past decade serious crimes against and by children have also caused grave concerns. In this context, intergenerational learning has been strongly encouraged in the hope that it may not only resolve communication breakdown among the different generations but may also create a wide range of spin-off effects. One of the conspicuous features in Japan is that intergenerational learning has the strong potential to work as a means of culture dissemination from the elderly to small children. This study intends to clarify general trends in Japanese intergenerational learning by explaining why the latter is being focused upon in the present day, and above all, to demonstrate through analysis of papers and case studies how the dissemination of culture is of importance to this country. It is indicated that culture dissemination could serve as the driving force to promote intergenerational learning, to maintain and/or revitalize social solidarity and strengthen the community bond.

Il Giappone è uno dei tanti paesi al mondo che si trova attualmente ad affrontare un crescente e preoccupante invecchiamento della popolazione con un basso tasso di nascite. L'impatto sulla società giapponese di tale situazione è enorme sia nel medio e lungo termine; un certo numero di misure sono state introdotte sia a livello del governo locale sia a livello centrale, per tentare di far fronte a tale situazione. Nel contempo, negli ultimi dieci anni gravi reati contro i bambini hanno causato gravi preoccupazioni. In questo contesto, l'apprendimento intergenerazionale è stato fortemente incoraggiato nella speranza che possa risolvere non solo la comunicazione tra le diverse generazioni, ma che esso possa diventare motore di una vasta gamma di effetti socio-culturali emergenti. Una delle caratteristiche evidenti in Giappone è che l'apprendimento intergenerazionale ha un forte potenziale per fungere da mezzo di diffusione della cultura dagli anziani ai bambini. Questo studio si propone di chiarire le tendenze generali in materia di apprendimento intergenerazionale nel panorama giapponese, dimostrando attraverso l'analisi di documenti e studi di casi come la diffusione della cultura sia un'importante risorsa per il Giappone. Più specificamente, la disseminazione della cultura potrebbe costituire la forza trainante per mantenere e / o rivitalizzare la solidarietà sociale e rafforzare il legame della comunità.

### KEYWORDS

Intergenerational Learning, Culture Dissemination, Social Solidarity, Community Bond.

Apprendimento intergenerazionale, disseminazione culturale, solidarietà, legami comunitari.

\* The materials written by Japanese ministries and authors listed above are originally written in Japanese and if the English title is not specified in their original materials, it is translated by the author.

## Introduction

In 2012 the longevity rate in Japan had reached 83.18 for men and 86.41 for women (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013). In one sense this is a favourable phenomenon, as it ensures that society can make use of the resources of a large number of people who have retired yet are still full of energy. However, the most serious problem in this country is that the ageing population coincides with a serious decline in the number of children, owing to a low birth rate and a low level of immigration. It is estimated that the median age in Japan will reach 45.8 as of 2013 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013) and that the total population – 127 million as of 2012 – will be reduced to 86.7 million by 2060 (Rachman, 2013). Facing this demographic trend, Japanese society has to consider better management of its human resources so that it may cope with unexpected challenges in the near future.

In terms of education, the actual number of children per classroom in Japan has diminished over the last decade, reducing from 25.0 in 2000 to 18.7 in 2011 (the OECD average was from 19.2 in 2000 to 16.1 in 2011; OECD, 2013). At a glance, it can be predicted that the educational environment for children in general has been improving, since more attention has been given to individuals. However, from time to time, serious crimes against and by children (including theft, abduction, sexual assault, murder and suicide) and a lack of proper home education owing to the increase in nuclear families and single households have been reported in governmental policy documents, especially since 2000 (Yamamoto, 2004). It is indicated that this is due to a lack of social solidarity and the decrease in the power of the community for taking care of each other.

Bearing all these factors in mind, the central government has since 2000 launched interesting projects to promote intergenerational learning, although activities of a similar kind started long before, conducted not only by local governments but also non-profit organisations/NPOs and volunteer groups etc. Currently, a variety of different activities for intergenerational learning have been taking place across the country, generating a wide range of spin-off effects. One conspicuous feature is that, in most parts of the country, either in big cities or in rural areas, practical activities have been implemented demonstrating the importance of the role of cultural dissemination, as it can promote the wider potential of each of the local communities. This ongoing study intends to illustrate general trends in Japanese intergenerational learning in recent years, in order to clarify the meanings of culture dissemination in Japanese society by employing analysis of papers and case studies.

### 1. Backgrounds to Japanese intergenerational learning

During the years of steep economic growth in the 1960s, Japanese society encountered industrial structure change, which deeply impacted upon relationships among family members (Kanamori, 2012). In the old days, it was natural to see up to three generations living under one roof, and various aspects of tangible and intangible culture, including many practical aspects of daily life, were passed down from the old to the young. However, as Japanese society experienced the rapid migration of rural populations to urban centres and the rise of women's social advancement, family configurations became diversified, resulting in a sharp increase in nuclear families and single households. This eventual-

ly led to the deterioration of social solidarity and of traditional roles which were undertaken by three-generation families in the old days.

It is from this context that an idea of intergenerational learning was initiated, and therefore in most cases, intergenerational learning in Japan refers to learning passed from the elderly to children and vice versa, rather than between parents and children. Since the 1970s, though not on a large scale, activities for intergenerational learning have been implemented by local governments and volunteer groups, and this trend was sustained until the 1990s (*Ibid.*, p.70). In 1997, while the central government started to discuss education for the 21st century, it was suggested by the Central Education Committee that intergenerational learning should be more focused within society, in view of the deterioration of home education (Central Education Committee within the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 1997). At the same time, facing the increase in the number of crimes against and by children, the question of how to protect children and secure their environment received extensive attention both from central government and from parents. For example, according to a questionnaire survey conducted by the *Dai-ichi* Research Institute (Matoba, 2007), approximately 80% of parents confessed that they feel insecure if their children go out on their own, and that there are few social spaces where children can play without fear. By 2000 it became a prime concern of central government, in response to the anxieties of parents, to protect children and secure their time after school hours so that they can spend it without fear. It was concluded that the problems could not be addressed only by family members, but should be considered as a community issue; therefore the issue had to be resolved by all available members of the local communities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013).

Having this in mind, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) launched measures to work out these issues surrounding children. One step was to strengthen the ties among schools, families and communities. 'Headquarters' were created in each of the local communities in order to support children after school hours, and they invited a variety of people from local governments and from among the public to participate. The number of headquarters of this kind reached 3527 across the country, and they adopted the role of discussing issues and finding solutions for problems surrounding children (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013). Another step was to initiate a three-year (2004-2007) pilot project called 'the project for extra-curricular classroom activities for children outside school hours/PEC'<sup>1</sup>. Since then, intergenerational learning has become more popular across the nation. Some schools have introduced PECs funded by the central government, while others have introduced similar projects by themselves in cooperation with local government and citizens in the local communities.

1 Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2013). Projects for After School Activities. Retrieved September 10, 2013, from <<http://manabimirai.mext.go.jp/houkago/about.html>>. Also, this English abbreviation, PEC was created by the author for the convenience of this paper and it is not used in Japan.

## 2. Project of intergenerational learning by the central government (PECs)

The idea of PECs is to utilize classrooms left empty due to the decrease in the number of children in recent years, and to invite local people of various ages and backgrounds outside school hours to the classrooms and ask them to provide local children with their knowledge and expertise through face-to-face communication and/or instructional courses based on their specialty knowledge, on a voluntary basis. This may take place both after school hours and at weekends, and the content is left to the discretion of each of the local communities. Several different roles are proposed for local people in this three-year project. Coordinators are assigned within each PEC in order to organise actual/practical learning as well as liaise with local government. In the actual school setting, learning consultants, instructors, security guards and volunteers are assigned to look after children from different perspectives. The backgrounds of adult participants greatly vary (Systems Research & Development Institute of Japan, 2008), but those working as pure volunteers are mostly housewives and elderly people. On the other hand, co-ordinators, instructors, security guards and consultants are gathered, having diverse backgrounds, mainly aged from their 40s to 60s. In middle-sized cities, people aged over 70 years tend to be involved; while in rural areas it is the younger generation. The underlying principle in PEC's is that it is necessary for children to have a 'rich' relationship with people of different ages if their parents want them to stay calm, relaxed and to feel safe (Saruwatari, & Sato, 2011, p.53).

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) had been introducing a different day-care project, called 'Club for children after school-hours' to support children aged under 10 whose parents are not at home after school hours, and to provide living space throughout the year. This club activity has existed for more than 40 years and has long been regarded as having an important role in society (Morishita & Matsuura, 2011). Facing the new trends in intergenerational learning, the MHLW has shown a deep understanding of the MEXT's three-year project, and has agreed with the cooperation on PECs for the following years. Since 2007, co-funded by both of the ministries, the MEXT's original project has been extensively proposed as 'the extra-curricular classroom plan for children outside school hours'. Under this new project, it was expected that existing PECs by MEXT, and long-standing day-care projects by MHLW should be 'integrated' by combining their managements to secure all the children in the community, no matter to what extent their parents could look after them (*Ibid.*p.136). However in most parts of the country, a blind eye was turned to future trouble. In most of the communities PECs did not blend in harmoniously, or rather, the role of PECs tended to be confined only to providing educational activities after school hours, while the role of activities promoted by MHLW was intended, from the perspective of welfare, to protect children by operating throughout the year while their parents were working. Therefore, it is in most cases regarded that both services are essentially different, and therefore they are still provided separately today in many parts of the country (Morishita & Matsuura, *op. cit.*, p.139).

## 3. General features and effects of intergenerational learning

As of 2009, the percentage of schools participating in PECs had reached 38.5% (88.6% in urbanised areas) (Nishimura, 2013). The length of learning was 118.8 days per year at average. Some 10376 of PECs were held all over the country as of 2013,

and about 80% of the PECs were held within school buildings. The project thus eventually generated a large number of positive effects upon all those involved (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013). For children, aside from providing secure space, it facilitated understanding and respect for people of different ages, efficient use of time and space, helped them become more patient, increased their willingness to look after smaller children, helped them become calmer and brighter and to do homework and housework spontaneously, encouraged playing outside, and reduced interest in playing games inside etc. For parents, it fostered raised awareness of the local community, the need to give children more time to experience something new and to communicate with people of different ages, helped them in finding unexplored talents of children through the eyes of others, and reducing anxieties about children, etc. For volunteers, the experience of socialising with local children has ultimately led to their lifelong learning through the preparation and practice of their instructions. For the whole community, it more or less contributed to improving networking between different stakeholders and organisations, utilizing human resources and enhancing the skills required for educating children as a whole.

In terms of content, a wide variety of creative activities were produced. According to the statistics of a nationwide survey (Systems Research & Development Institute of Japan, Op.cit., pp.23-230.), the most popular activities included: sports (90.7%), making things (87.3%), free activities (75.8%), old games (74.3%), supplementary learning for school education (63.2%), reading (59.1%), cooking and/or housekeeping (47.3%), nature experience (43.9%), preparing and participating in traditional events (31.4%), scientific experiments (25.7%), ICT (19.3%), agriculture and/or vocational experience (19.1%), cleaning (12%), having rest (11.1%), volunteering activities (8%), eating together (5.7%) and playing with infants (4.1%). Among these activities, one of the conspicuous features is that intergenerational learning has the strong potential for working as 'culture dissemination' from the elderly to small children. In fact, most activities such as making things, traditional games, cooking, preparing and participating in traditional events etc. obviously contain this element, and in fact, some of these activities can be traced back more than 400 years.

#### 4. Reasons for stressing 'culture dissemination' in Japan

Originally, aside from basic education in the school curriculum, local tradition and culture have been naturally handed down over the generations at home and outside in each of the local communities through people's daily lives throughout the nation's 2000-year history without the interference of the central government. In a way it is a quite recent phenomenon that central government has realized that local tradition can no longer be inherited by the next generation without intentionally making policies for preserving it and introducing nation-led programmes for maintaining and further developing it with appropriate funding. This is due to change of lifestyles, urbanisation and a decrease in the number of heirs of local tradition, especially in rural areas.

In January 2008, the central government therefore proposed the improvement of education by nourishing the nation's long-standing tradition and cultural activities, in the Policy Report of the Central Education Committee (Central Education Committee within the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008, p.57). In March of the same year, the government revised

the guidelines of the school curriculum so that each school could put more emphasis on preserving traditions and culture through introducing the content of traditional elements in some school subjects. This political focus has been widely welcomed across the nation, as it promotes the existing activities of PECs while generating a number of spin-off effects as follows (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2013):

First, it has started to be taken as essential that young people understand their own values, culture and traditions when communicating with people from different countries, thus gaining trust from them. Second, although most of the local communities have strong and precious local traditions which have been rooted in particular areas for more than 300-400 years, many of them have not been able to find appropriate heirs of local tradition, especially in rural areas – and there has been a breakdown of communications between the generations. Consequently it was anticipated that fostering this project could solve these extended problems. Third, it is regarded as essential to revitalise local communities and to bring out love for the local community. Fourth, it has begun to be considered that local tradition can also take a role in protecting and maintaining land as well as preserving the original landscape. Fifth, community bonds have been strengthened by improving social solidarity while exposing the community's identity. Sixth, the sharing of many activities among people of different ages has had the effect of training the next generation, through whom traditions can be handed over again to the next generation. Seventh, the policy has also worked to develop relationships between different communities. Eighth, the policy could also create new technology which could promote the circulation of resources, especially in the fields of agriculture, forestry and fishery. Last, the retaining of traditional culture could be a precious resource for making local special products, as well as conserving local techniques and maintaining local environments. Thus, culture dissemination could serve as the driving force to promote inter-generational learning, and for maintaining and/or revitalizing social solidarity and strengthening community bonds.

## 5. Good Examples

A large number of good practices have been reported in many different parts of the country, and in most cases culture dissemination has been treated as a core principle in order to maintain, arrange and revitalize the traditions rooted in each of the communities. In other words, dissemination of culture is regarded as something which restores the centripetal force of local communities.

One example can be found at *Nishi* primary school in *Miyoshi-City, Tokushima Prefecture*, in South-Western Japan (Education Board of Miyoshi City, Tokushima Prefecture, 2011). Since PECs began, the school has been very active in conducting different kinds of programmes, especially in terms of preserving local traditions, including the performance of traditional plays, arrangement of local flowers in locally made traditional wooden boxes, cooking traditional foods, etc., and through inviting professionals in many fields who live in the local community. The school also promotes activities to visit every single household of elderly people living in the local areas. All the activities were highly acclaimed and the school was awarded a prize by the MEXT in 2010 as one of the most brilliant schools to have introduced several interesting activities through utilizing PEC.

Another example is called '*Bansyu Kabuki*' which is rooted in *Taka* town in *Bansyu* area, in the south-western part of *Hyogo* Prefecture in western Japan, with 300 years of history (Education Board of Taka Town, Hyogo Prefecture, 2013). Generally, *Kabuki* is a widely known traditional drama performed by male actors, which can be traced back 400 years. In the case of '*Bansyu Kabuki*', it had a feature which played in agricultural villages, not in big cities. In recent years there had been a lack of heirs and its tradition was about to disappear. A local primary school focused attention on this and set up a club to retain this tradition. At the beginning, it was just a club to enable school children to practice '*Bansyu Kabuki*', having been trained by professional *Kabuki* actors, but latter the club invited various people who had an interest in preserving this tradition, including graduates of that school. Nowadays, club members of various ages practice it for their shows while studying or working during the daytime. Through these activities, local people from different backgrounds have developed trusting relationships and regained their self-esteem.

## 6. Future challenges

In promoting intergenerational learning, the main educational problems have been addressed and at the same time future challenges have been pointed out.

First, the most serious problem lies in personnel acquisition and the need for appropriate training (Matoba, *Op. cit.*, p.41). According to a nationwide survey, most PECs confess they are suffering from chronic staffing shortages, due to the unpredictable number of children participating, unstable working days, uncertain mobility of participants, etc. Lack of sufficient guidelines for ensuring the quality of coordinators, consultants, guardians and instructors is another problem surrounding PECs. Due to this, all those involved in activities tend to lack proper understanding of each participant. Above all, deficient knowledge about children who are in need of special attention has caused serious problems in most cases. As a result, some children pay no attention to these activities, while others express that although they enjoy the atmosphere of sharing their time with the elderly, they would prefer to communicate with someone closer to their age. In other words, knowledge deficiency in terms of psychology, pedagogy, sociology, architecture, management etc., has confined the scope and potential of this project. Due to this, the purpose of PECs can be easily blurred.

Second, the problem of how to set aside a space for children after school hours is often pointed out (Saruwatari & Sato *Op. cit.*, pp.58-60). Owing to the lack of consideration of this, programs of this kind just tend to be taken as somewhere for children to feel safe and to learn about something. However, these programs can be a space in which children can broaden their viewpoints while communicating with different kinds of people in the local community. They could also be a space for children to develop their knowledge about where they live, improve their communication skills and build their physical strength, aside from the school curriculum. Thus, although the programs by nature contain many precious elements for children, this aspect has not received serious consideration. Moreover, they could be a hub of local human resources, by sharing the idea of raising children from different backgrounds by all available community members. Therefore, more attention should be paid to this opportunity, both in theoretical and practical terms.

Third, the fact that a proper network has not been developed among differ-

ent stakeholders could cause serious problems (Nishimura, *Op. cit.*, p.218). In fact, since the mobility of participants has been promoted (especially after 2007 when the MHLW agreed to cooperate in implementing the MEXT's idea of PECs) it in some cases has become difficult to estimate the number of children and local volunteers who participate each day. It then eventually became difficult for some children to feel safe and to hold a sense of belonging in such an unstable space. Thus, inadequate relationships between those involved sometimes caused mistrust, which could hinder further development. In such cases, lack of understanding and cooperation by parents often occur. It could also be the case that there has not been enough discussion between those involved in PECs and those involved in similar programs conducted by local governments, NPOs, volunteer groups etc.

## Conclusions

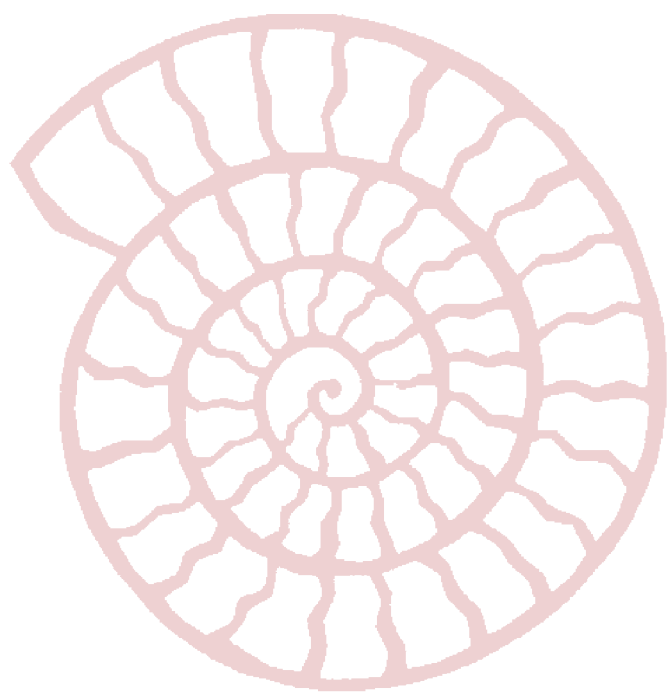
Japan currently features as one of the countries facing the most serious concerns of rapid aging and very low birth rate. Facing this serious demographic trend, its society has to consider better management of its human resources in order that it can cope with unexpected challenges in the near future. At the same time, it has been pointed out that serious crimes against and by children have caused grave concerns over the last decade, due to a lack of solidarity in the local community. In this context, intergenerational learning has been strongly encouraged, which produces a wide range of spin-off effects on all those involved. Among these different effects, it is suggested in this country that intergenerational learning could work as a means of culture dissemination from the elderly to small children. The main reason for this is that it could generate positive attitudes among the young, allowing them to understand their own values, culture and traditions. It could thus be a good opportunity to find heirs of local tradition, and could give clues to overcoming the breakdown of communication between the generations. It could bring out love for locality; it could expose community identity; it could work to enhance relationships between different communities; it could create new technology which promotes resource circulation, etc. Thus, cultural dissemination holds "meaning" in many senses, serving as the driving force to promote intergenerational learning, to maintain and/or revitalize social solidarity and strengthen the community bonds etc. However, looking at the situation of an ageing population with fewer children, the current policy might not lead to the resolution of the most serious issues of the nation from a long-term viewpoint. Therefore, more fundamental and theoretical discussions on this issue, from wider perspectives, will be required, inviting all kinds of stakeholders both from inside and outside the nation.


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# Adult Education determinant of children's education

## La formazione degli adulti, determinante dell'educazione dei bambini

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### ABSTRACT

Adult education is a priority issue addressed in terms of personal and professional training to promote socio-cultural integration. This paper, given the context in which it is drawn, suggests a perspective for the analysis of adult education, namely, that the education of adults, regardless of the forms it takes, can favorably influence a new generation of lifelong learners. Based on statistical data from a research carried out in either with the entire adult population in Romania and with specific segments of the population – the population of school teachers – we reveal how a series of cultural and educational activities undertaken by adults together with their children, has impact on attitudes, behaviors, values exhibited by adults; moreover, these values are taken by children and have a significant impact on the education of the latter.

La formazione degli adulti è una questione prioritaria che va affrontata sia in termini di formazione personale sia professionale per favorire l'integrazione socio-culturale. Il presente lavoro, tenuto conto del contesto in cui è stato disegnato, suggerisce una prospettiva per l'analisi della formazione degli adulti, vale a dire, che la formazione degli adulti, a prescindere dalle forme che può prendere può influenzare favorevolmente le nuove generazioni di lifelong learners.. Sulla base dei dati statistici provenienti da una ricerca svolta per l'intera popolazione adulta in Romania, e per specifici segmenti della stessa – la popolazione degli insegnanti della scuola – si rivelano come una serie di attività culturali ed educative intraprese dagli adulti insieme con i loro figli, ha un impatto sugli atteggiamenti, comportamenti, valori degli adulti, che hanno un significativo impatto sulla formazione dei bambini.

### KEYWORDS

Adult Education, Cultural And Educational Activities, Parenting Practices, Educational Success  
Formazione degli adulti, attività culturali e educative, Pratiche di genitorialità, successo formativo.

## Introduction

One of the main objectives of most education systems in the world is that to attract and maintain for a longer period of time in school, all school-age population. For that goal has proved – at least until now – impossible attention of sociologists, psychologists, economists, specialists in educational sciences etc. focused on identifying those factors likely to influence the course of public education. A long time dominated the belief that increasing the living standards of the population, progressively extending the duration of compulsory schooling, its massification of education at all levels will be able to bring a large number of children in a position to complete the high levels of education.

Highly developed countries but experience shows that educational success is not only related to the level of living standards or mandatory schooling period. Studies and research conducted mainly in the second half of the twentieth century revealed that adults' attitude towards education, the perception that they have on the role and place of education in their children's lives proves at least as important as and living conditions and the learning environment provided by the school. The conclusion of these studies was that prior to educate school-age population must be educated adults have a favorable attitude to school.

Attitude, behavior of adults towards children's education is reflected best in action, educational and cultural activities they undertake together. This type of activity can take many forms: from child support to perform homework, until the discussions that parents bear their own children on various subjects, from leisure with them in enrolling your child in circles clubs to develop his particular inclinations, talents etc. This type of action, activities by parents begin to manifest in the early days of the child's life and continues at least until the child leaves the educational system.

Preoccupied with solving situations considered crucial for the progress of education – improving learning conditions in schools in Romania, attracting and retaining qualified teachers in all institutions of education, increasing educational performance of pupils and students – we tend to lose sight of a number of issues. One of them is that the family is the important factor in the evolution of educational youth as adults' level of involvement in their children's education and success depends largely on the activities carried out by the school. The basic idea of this paper is that adults – parents of children in the training – play a significant role in the evolution of educational younger generation.

### 1. Literature review

In the scientific literature there are many theories, which focus their current attitudes and behavior vis-a-vis adult education and how they are reflected in children's schooling. Among these theories we will refer only to those who serve best objective that we have set.

*"Equality of Educational Opportunity"* is considered one of the most relevant studies on the equality/inequality of opportunity in the face of education. American sociologist J. Coleman – coordinator of the study conducted in the U.S in 1964 – highlighted the research underlying this study that more than characteristics of educational institutions, issues such as parental interest in their children education, their level of aspirations inspired children confidence in the school as a source of personal fulfillment and socio-occupational influences a greater extent children's educational path (Forquin, 1979).

In the same period – the 60s – in the UK have developed a series of research at the request of the government in order to identify the determinants of children's educational success: Report Robbins, *Higher Education* (1963), Report Plowdown, *Children and Their Primary Schools* (1967). The conclusions reached are that the access and success in education of children are better explained by "attitude variables" (parents' attitudes toward school, to the future of children's education, parental involvement in school and extra-curricular activities, etc.) than the "object variables"- living conditions, living standards, employment status and so on. (Forquin, 1979)

One of the best known and most respected sociologists, R. Boudon (1973) describes the education system as marked by numerous *points of bifurcation*: exams, tests that support individual must be to enter the education system either frequency of a particular branch, specialization, or to obtain a diploma level to accredit completion opportunities. Every time you meet with such bifurcation points, individuals – parents where children are minors – must make a choice: leave the education system or decide to continue their studies, opting for school closest to home or one which, although it is located at a greater distance, offer some type of specialization, some extra-curricular education opting to attend public or private table etc. R. Boudon argues that to make the best choice for themselves and their children, the family needs an *educational strategy*. In general terms, the strategy is defined as "the art of using all available means to ensure success in an activity" (Marcu, 2002:827). The educational strategy means not only achieving a simple cost-benefit calculation – how much education one or more family members and the benefits it expects to derive family through education of its members – but also anticipate changes in the education system, labor market, harnessing all resources (financial, social, cultural) development of a set of activities, actions to ensure the child/children a positive learning pathways. Decisions on the future of adult education their children are strongly influenced by their level of education. Only adults who in turn invested in education – have reached the highest level of education – and have used this investment, by filling a better paid job, which offers better working conditions, offers greater secure from unemployment – build educational strategies for their children.

R. Boudon points out in his study that in families where adults have low levels of education rarely have a strategy and long-term educational environment for their children and, more importantly, is aware of the importance of such a strategy.

One of the best known theories in sociology of education is made by P. Bourdieu and J.C. Passeron (1975) – *theory of social reproduction*. At the heart of this theory are two defining concepts that facilitate understanding how "*the court for emancipation and progress (mobility-knowledge), education (school) is par excellence court symbolic control and social reproduction*" (Dandurand, et al. 1987: 14): **habitus and capital**.

The concept of habitus is defined as "*acquired system of preferences, principles of vision and division (which is usually called taste) lasting cognitive structures (which are essentially the product incorporating the object structure) and the scheme of action oriented situation awareness and response adopted.*" (Bourdieu, 1999:32, cited Hatos, 2006, p. 212). First principles, perceptions, cognitive structures are formed in the family. Parents are the ones who are building the future adult personality building with these principles, norms, values, etc. child enters the school system will contribute to their finalization and what will be learned in the family and in school will help then to integrate into social and professional life.

The difference between those who have a favorable educational journey and those who fail in education is given, says Bourdieu, the distance between culture circulated in school – *school culture* – and the socio-circulated in the child's family of origin. In social and family environments in which adults have a high level of education is the vehicle of a culture identical or very close to the school circulated which facilitates educational success of children of these families. Culture circulated socioeconomic disadvantaged family – adults with low education, manual occupations or unemployed – is no less rich or less important than the school circulated but is very far from it. Hence the lower educational performance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

To ensure that the child or children access to the best educational institutions in additional training (private tutoring, intensive language courses etc.) Family will enable all forms of capital available: *material and financial, cultural, relational*.

Thus, in order to enroll their children in after-school classes (classes of language, learning and IT courses) parents will have to cover additional costs (*financial capital*) to attend the educational institution that it considers best for their child will turn to advice, information within the education system on preparedness and interest in teacher education, learning about the conditions that will enable *relational/sociale capital*. Referring to the cultural capital Bourdieu says: "*Le capital culturel peut exister sous trois formes: à l'état objectivé, sous la forme de biens culturels, tableaux, livres, dictionnaires, instruments, machines, qui sont la trace ou la réalisation de théories ou se critiques de ces théories, de problématiques etc.; et enfin à l'état institutionnalisé, forme d'objectivation qu'il faut mettre à part parce que, comme on le voit avec le titre scolaire, elle conféré au capital culturel qu'elle est censé garantir des propriétés tout à fait originales*" (Bourdieu, 1979, cited Fayfant, 2011, p. 3)

Thus to be able to properly assess this information and to anticipate the educational needs of their children and future needs of the labor market, parents will have themselves a high level of education and be familiar with education – *cultural capital*.

The two French sociologists thus demonstrates that children's educational path is influenced both by economic factors (income, standard of living), relational factors (within the family, circle of friends, coworkers of persons who have information, knowledge about the quality of schools, the conditions of admission to these institutions on labor market developments etc.) and the cultural factors (early familiarizing children with a particular set of skills, social skills, language, cultural).

The two theories – that of unequal opportunities for access to education by Boudon and that of social reproduction and Passeron and Bourdieu enroll in macro-sociological type approach. There are also theories that put micro-sociologic type in their heart that they have impact on behaviors, attitudes, values the educational pathways of young adults generations.

B. Charlot and colleagues (Jigau, 1998, p. 39) are educational youth parry that evolution depends on the meaning that they give him the knowledge that understands a young man by learning what motivation underlies learning activity. Adults are the ones that help young people to find the answer to those questions. If a child's family will notice in respect to education when education will see a way to get success in life. If his parents will have reached a high level of education and have a favorable socio-professional position is expected that children follow the same route. On the contrary, an attitude of indifference towards

education of the adults who live in the company, difficulties encountered by adults to integrate professional will result in a low involvement of the youth in their own learning process.

Young personality is formed through interactions that they have with adults: teachers, parents, members of the community to which they belong, or school classmates, etc. Supporters of the current interactionist (Grisay, Perrenoud, Bloom) points out that communication means interactions, exchange of opinions, expressing verbal and/or written opinions and arguments etc. activities which are in the process of training young accumulates knowledge, what information will be useful in school and beyond. The frequency with which young children in contact with adults, the quality of communication between them and the child, the richness of information conveyed in the interaction will evolve depends on how young people. For this reason not only attending school programs, school attendance is required, but the development of extra-curricular activities such as attendance at theaters, museums, further reading, trips, school clubs, etc. It is expected that adults who have a high level of education to be more willing to investesca in cultural activities such as attending museums, theater, travel to dispose of resources, achizitonarii a book of fiction or who specialitate. Youth who have parents with a high level of education are more likely to be involved in such activities end compared with children whose parents have a low level of education.

## 2. Objective and hypotheses of the study

In this paper we propose that the main objective of the analysis relationship between the level of education of adults in Romania and extra-curricular school activities and held by them along with their children to improve access to education and success of the latter. The premise is that we leave, frequency, type of activities performed by adults or children along their perception of such activities depends largely on the level of education of the former.

In other words, the higher the level of education of adults is higher the more we expect the frequency of extra-curricular school activities and held together or for their children to be more intense, diverse activities, the perception of the importance of this type of activity to be one positive.

### 2.1 Data Analysis

The theme of this paper adopted both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. Given the data that we have available we opted for a quantitative approach. The statistics adopted were taken from national research conducted with the entire adult population of Romania – *Diagnosis quality of life*, research conducted by the Research Institute for Quality of Life (Romania public institution with responsibilities in the fields of social research) in 1990-1998, 2003, 2006, 2010 – and the research that took into account certain segments of the population (school children, teachers in secondary education) – *Quality research students from pre-university education*, research conducted in 2007 by Metro Media Transilvania (Romania private institution with responsibilities in the fields of social research).

All data from this research was processed using SPSS 17.

## 2.2 Results and discussions

Population of a country, regardless of the particular socio-economic, cultural, educational, etc. engage in development activities, actions unless trusts utility actions and social system in which to invest. In these circumstances we felt that this analysis must begin with an assessment of the sentiment of the people in the education system. For this we took into account two elements of any education system: the accessibility and quality of education. We consider that a positive perception of the population on the accessibility of education in Romania and forms its quality education leads to positive action to include the school in strategies, plans and long-term population.

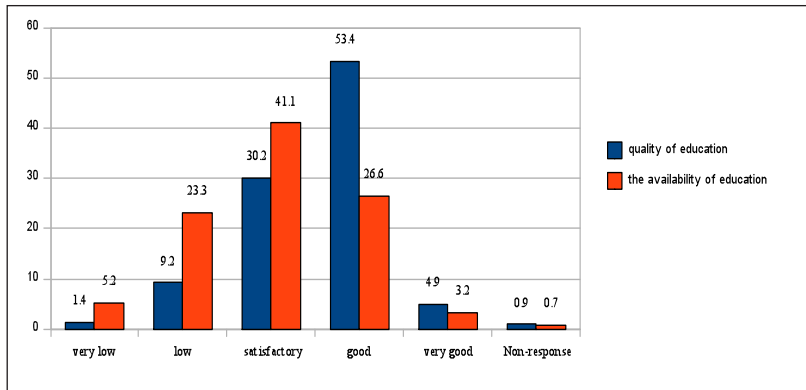


Fig. 1 - Perceptible population on education quality and accessibility of education in Romania (%)  
Source: *Diagnosis of quality of life*, ICCV 2010

The survey data show that most of the adult population in Romania has a favorable perception of the education system: the quality of education and availability of education are seen as the least satisfactory. (Fig.1) In these conditions we expect in terms of investments adults deployment of the cultural and educational activities in the educational future of their children, to be at least the same level and the school to participate in educational strategies families in Romania. Another aspect revealed by the data in Fig.1 aims and how people will deal with the bifurcation points of the system: if people perceive the education system as having a high degree of accessibility and quality when it is expected to decide in favor of maintaining the school children for a longer period of time.

An a thorough analysis of the perception of the accessibility and quality of education by gender, residence of respondents, their education level led us to the following observations: the accessibility of our system of education is perceived favorably in greater measure the population of the urban, female population and those with at least medium education. Regarding the quality of education, urban population, men and people with a higher education are more critical than the rural population, women and those with low education. But the differences are not significant. Moreover, at any study that includes questions about adult intentions vis-a-vis supporting children in school, most people in Romania are in favor of children remaining in school for a longer period of time. Beyond intentions but most important are actions taken to putting them into practice.

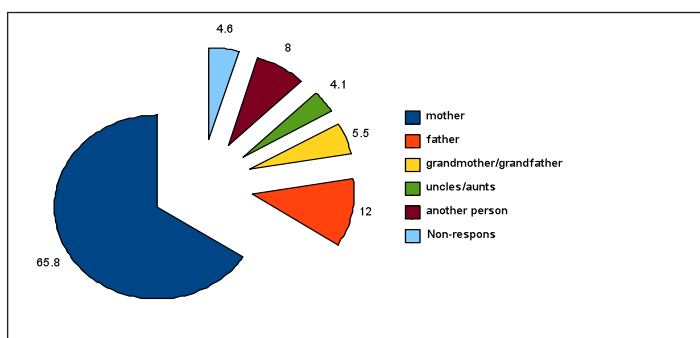
Educational strategies include cultural and educational activities undertaken



by adults – usually parents – along with their children. Conducting such activities demonstrates a greater extent that adults are concerned about their children’s educational future. Unlike who attend school up to a certain level binding cultural-educational activities outside school are optional.

Positive perception of the education system is an important factor in determining the population to invest in children’s education. Because this investment be translated effectively into practice requires more than the existence of “good thoughts.” Income, job offer, the social value of school diplomas on the labor market, family life, living conditions, etc. are just some of the factors that influence population investments in education, school and extra-curricular activities.

In any household responsibilities, including those related to the conduct of cultural and educational activities are distributed more or less evenly the members that compose it. Some activities are performed more often by women, others by men. One of the most important responsibilities incumbent upon adults in the household consists of raising and educating children. It is very important that both parents are equally present in children’s lives.



**Fig. 2 - Person in the company of the child spends the most time**

Source: *Quality research students from pre-university education*, Metro Media Transilvania, 2007

As evidenced by the survey data, the majority of children in Romania spends most of his time with his mother (65.8%) which is likely to favorably influence over the education of children (Fig.2). At a great distance – 12% of children say they spend more time with dad – is positioned men. Even worse is that a large number of children spending time with people who are not family members (8%) and about one child (4.6%) did not know the company whose people spend their time.

	Not	Rare	Frequently
male	52,2	65,0	34,2
female	47,8	35,0	65,8

**Table 1 - Who takes care of the children (and) in your spare time? (%)**

Source: *Diagnosis of quality of life*, ICCV 2010

Interestingly, by another research – *Diagnosis of quality of life* – a significant part of the respondents claimed that free time and leisure or work with children (8.9% of respondents said they rarely occupy children and 23.4 % children often dealing leisure). And in this case women who devote more time to raising and educating children. (Table 1)

Opinions adults and children confirms what support: it is the mother who spends most of his time with them, whether it is leisure or another part of his time.

Education level person in the company that the child spends most of the time is very important. Research on the involvement of parents – especially the mother – in children’s education showed that “les mères les plus instruites organisent, quant à elles, la vie quotidienne de leur enfant autour de visées éducatives, en incluant des activités parascolaires, sportives et artistiques et orchestrent le tout, travail scolaire inclus, de manière quasi professionnelle.” (Durru-Bellat, 2003, p. 40)

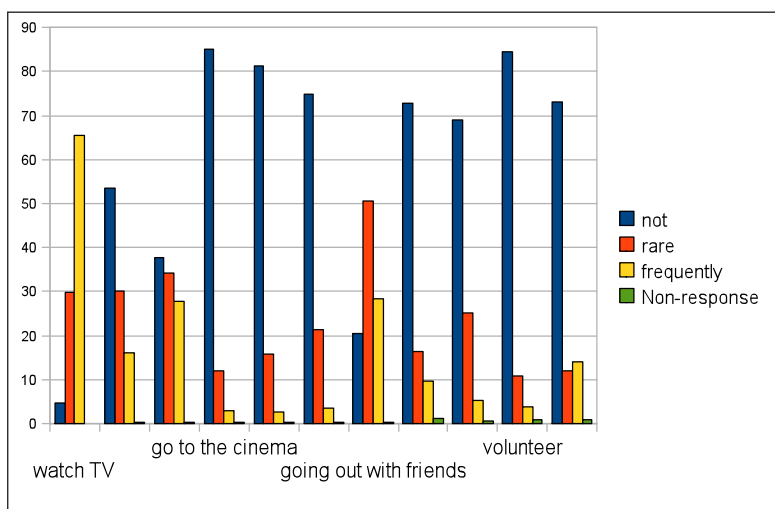
Currently, in Romania, the level of education of women is higher than that of men but in the medium and long term this situation is likely to change. Statistical data published annually by the Ministry of Education show that girls, especially those living in rural areas, socio-economic backgrounds and families tend to leave school in a higher proportion than boys. Thus, for all levels and for all indicators considered (school participation rate, enrollment rate in education, national assessment results, etc.) differences between rural and urban elevated by – over 20% – in favor urban environment.(Report on the state of school education in Romania in 2011)

The level of education of adults in a family – especially parents – make their mark on their relationship.

Children, especially at young ages, they tend to take the behaviors, attitudes in the company of adults who spend most of the time. It is a fact that women returning in greater responsibilities for the upbringing and education of children. But the situation of women in Romania is less favorable because they have no responsibility for these tasks, but because most of them return to their domestic responsibilities. Thus, recent studies on the situation of children and families in Romania, reveals that the responsibilities of women in Romania are larger and more difficult compared with other European countries: household activities hampered by lack of equipment of the household or its precarious, poorly paid jobs even with the same level of training and education like men etc. At other recent research conducted in Romania is confirmed children’s opinion: most of the child rearing of families responsibility lies mainly women, participation of spouses are quite limited. Although the duties and responsibilities of women in Romania are more numerous than those of men their authority, especially outside the home, is, according to the same research, limited. Men who are characterized by a higher authority in public. (Popescu, 2007)

Restricting women’s private space authority may have negative effects on future adult training and the relationship between children and parents, the family and its external institutions. Children may perceive the lack of authority of the mother as a lack of trust of other members of the household and her decisions in the future, their families, can reproduce the same kind of distribution of responsibilities. Working in the family, in which all members are involved, the child must note and understand that everyone has to fulfill a number of responsibilities but did not like about that person. Success or failure in execution of responsibilities should be taken with seriousness, competence, consistency in her performance and not gender or other psycho-physical features, socio-economic etc.

The manner in which the child has the opportunity to experience different roles and responsibilities is where certain activities with family to which it belongs. Leisure carrying out some joint family is the most accessible way of knowledge between children and adults. Offer leisure in Romania is quite large and is addressed equally to adults and children. In general, people rely on free time to rest, to relax – *passive leisure* – either to do those things, activities that make them happy, help personal development – *active leisure*. Of the two ways of spending leisure time, only the latter offers greater opportunities for parents and children to interact. We considered it important to analyze how adults spend their leisure time in Romania because thus we can predict what kind of activities will involve children.



**Fig. 3 - Leisure activities carried out by the adult population in Romania (%)**  
 Source: *Diagnosis of quality of life, ICCV 2010*

The data in the chart above reveals that most adults in Romania chooses the passive leisure: watching television shows, read newspapers or magazines, and meet with friends or relatives. (Fig. 3).

How adults spend their leisure time is very important for children’s education. Involving children in leisure activities means their contact with different patterns of thought and behavior, the possibility that the less experienced to clarify on issues related to culture, history of places, people (by trips, visits to museums) etc. Parents also have the opportunity to identify their children possible talents, inclinations while growing activities can bring success, satisfaction.

Moreover, all activities by adults with their children helps to achieve at least two important goals for psycho-intellectual development of the latter: on the one hand strengthen relations between adults and children, generate feelings of trust and respect and on the other hand contribute to the development of children’s knowledge horizon. A part of television broadcasts, as well as some magazines provide important cultural information but do not allow interaction. Maintaining close relationships with extended family and friends can be relational capital, social capital, however limited. Leisure activities may also serve to reduce significant endorsement differences between people from different socio-economic backgrounds precisely because they are free and require passions

rather than specific skills. Extended family and friends of the family are certainly the same values, norms, principles as the child's family of origin so that even contact classmates from other socioeconomic backgrounds, family, culture of which he can create problems accommodation.

In 2007, how often...?	At all	Once a year	Once every 6 months	Once every 3 months	Monthly	Non-respons
You went with your family or someone in your family on a trip	17,8	32,6	19,0	19,1	9,1	2,5
Did you visit any museum	39,1	31,8	13,1	10,8	2,7	2,5
You went to the theater, the opera or the philharmonic	67,4	18,0	5,4	3,4	2,1	3,6
You went to town	6,5	8,5	10,7	20,0	52,2	2,0

**Table 2 - Educational and cultural activities carried out in the family (%)**

Source: *Quality research students from pre-university education, Metro Media Transilvania, 2007*

Children confirmed statistics on adults dominant mode of leisure time is passive. Besides watching TV and reading newspapers and magazines, most often adults and our children go to the city whether it means going shopping or a walk. (Table 2) Because it is a relaxing activity this way of spending leisure can facilitate discussion between child and parent and a better understanding between them but that is limited to a family circle that does not include contact with objects or things that symbolize something for society, culture is able to contribute greatly to the development of children's knowledge horizon.

Frequency that can be carried some leisure activities depend on the type of activity, preferences and choices of individuals, the offer available on the market, the resources of time or money available to people. Although it is desirable for adults to involve their children in as many such activities and often it is difficult to determine the ideal frequency with which they have performed but certainly the fact that they are not applied has a significant negative impact on children. For this reason we were interested to check the activities of such households are never developed. I recoded the education level of parents of students in three categories: low education (more than 8 years of school), middle education (persons who have completed secondary level education) and high level of education – parents who completed a form of post-secondary education (post-secondary, university and post –graduate). We analyzed the lack of involvement of children in various leisure activities according to the level of education of their parents.

Education level of father	You went with your family or someone in your family on a trip	Did you visit any museum	You went to the theater, the opera or the philharmonic	You went to town
high level of education	10,2	30,8	60,3	2,8
low level of education	30,0	50,9	80,3	6,3

**Table 3 - Cultural and educational activities in which children are involved (%)**

Source: *Quality research students from pre-university education, Metro Media Transilvania, 2007*

Education level of mother	You went with your family or someone in your family on a trip	Did you visit any museum	You went to the theater, the opera or the philharmonic	You went to town
high level of education	11,3	28,1	60,0	5,1
low level of education	31,9	45,7	85,1	10,5

**Table 4 - Cultural and educational activities in which children are involved (%)**

Source: *Quality research students from pre-university education, Metro Media Transilvania, 2007*

The data in the tables above highlight at least two important aspects. On the one hand, the fact that mothers are frequently carrying cultural and educational activities with children compared to fathers regardless of their education level. On the other hand we see that children whose parents – whether it’s about fathers, whether it’s about mothers – have low levels of education are to a lesser extent involved in cultural and educational activities. (Table 3 and Table 4)

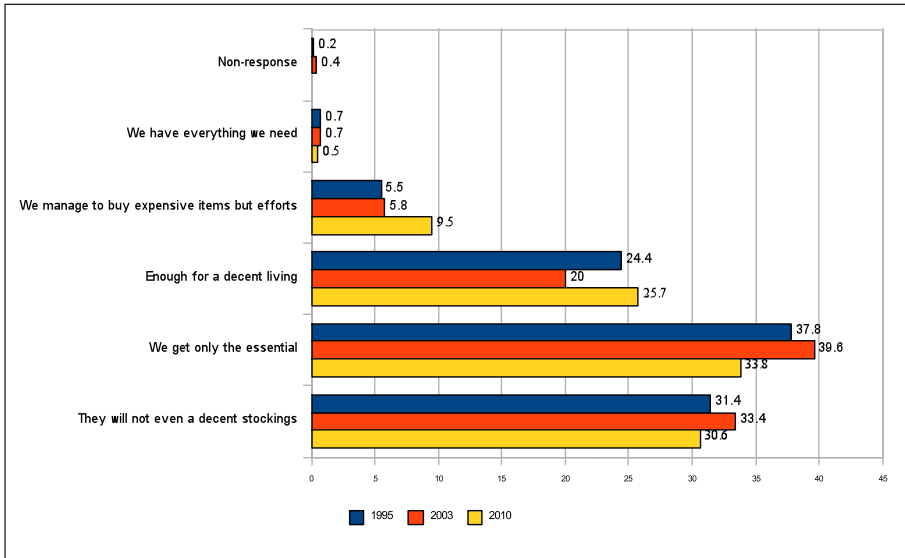
What limits them the most value and bring your other possibilities for leisure? The level of education of parents is one of the reasons but certainly not alone.

One of the reasons could be the available household income in Romania.

The survey data that we use in this paper reflects the situation in the period before the onset of the economic crisis facing most countries today.

In the years 2007, Romania was one favorable economic situation and the level of satisfaction of most people on income level is significantly improved compared to previous years and the current situation. This is very important if we take into account that not only school costs, but also the activities of children out of school.

Analysis of household income, compared to several years, it is very important in the context of this paper because of the way he considers members of a household depends on the financial resources to invest in children’s education but also in other types of activities related to the psycho-intellectual of children. In the mid 2000s the share of their revenue estimate as sufficient for a decent breeding was in previous years and those to come. (Fig. 3) and this means more willingness to invest in leisure and education. Resources allocated accordingly and investments in education are lower compared to previous years. National Institute of Statistics of Romania (INS) showed that less than 5% of the total consumption expenditure of the population are allocated for recreation and worship and below 1% for education (INS, 2011).



**Fig. 4 - Findings of income at the household level in Romania (%)**

Source: *Diagnosis of quality of life ICCV 2010*

No doubt the low incomes of the population of Romania is an impediment in the growth of private investment in education. Another reason, besides those raised so far – the level of education and income – is the perception of the population on the importance of carrying out cultural and educational activities.

In a study conducted in 2011 by the Soros Foundation Romania, on the topic of extra-curricular activities, the researchers concluded that the adult population shown in this type of activity only alternative to “*loss of time on the street*” (Popescu & Ionescu, 2012). In other words, educational activities organized either by the school or the family is not considered a way psycho-intelectual development, but a continuation of the surveillance and control of the child.

Leisure for adults and children actively is not one of the favorite activities we were interested in whether the activities are closer to school are more common.

I included the child activities with adults preparing homework, discussions on various issues of children and adults exercise of parental authority forms: reward and sanction. Regarding homework for school, I had two aspects. On the one hand this type of activity is not a “*minor affair*” (Macbeth, 1989 cited in Montandon, 1996, p. 65) if only because it takes place regularly and is assigned at least 1 hour per day. On the other hand, working together, the parent has the opportunity to be informed about the requirements, changes in children’s education and the child establish a better relationship with the parent.

Observed that in most families with school age children, dominates discussions of these themes that concern them children. Also, the second operation, the frequency swing is the preparation of homework. A positive aspect to be noted in the behavior of adults in Romania who have children of school age is that they prefer to reward a greater extent than to punish. (Table 5)

How often do your parents...?	At all	Once a year	Once every 6 months	Once every 3 months	Monthly	Non-respons
It helps you prepare for school	24,1	16,5	23,5	23,3	10,0	2,7
Talk to you about your problems	2,3	7,8	17,7	41,7	28,4	2,1
You quarrel	10,1	23,1	40,8	18,0	6,1	1,8
You rewards (money, gifts)	5,4	9,3	24,9	42,0	15,9	2,5

**Table 5 - Activities at home with dominant character education (%)**

Source: *Quality research students and teachers from pre-university education, Metro Media Transilvania, 2007*

Adults with children in Romania prefer activities that are to a greater extent related to school (to help their children to prepare lessons, discuss with them the problems they have is that they do at home, or on the rare outlets in town). Activities that involve interaction with other members of society, other than family members, trips, attending cultural objectives etc. not customary for adults and children in Romania. This way adults to spend the time you have available to younger members of their family deprives the latter of the opportunity to develop critical thinking in a way, to know and other people who are different them in terms of social, cultural, physical, psychological, ethnic, etc.

Education level of father	It helps you prepare for school	Talk to you about your problems	Spending time with you
high level of education	24,6	1,0	2,7
low level of education	30,6	3,6	3,6

**Table 6 - Dominant educational activities with parents not involved (%)**

Source: *Quality research students and teachers from pre-university education, Metro Media Transilvania, 2007*

Education level of mother	It helps you prepare for school	Talk to you about your problems	Spending time with you
high level of education	25,6	1,7	2,3
low level of education	24,5	4,2	4,2

**Table 7 - Dominant educational activities with parents not involved (%)**

Source: *Quality research students and teachers from pre-university education, Metro Media Transilvania, 2007*

As with other types of activities, in terms of dominant character education activities with highly educated parents are more involved compared with those with a low education. Also, the mother participate in a greater extent in such activities than fathers.(Table 6 and Table 7)

The types of activities we see that regardless of education level parents involved in a lesser extent in those that target support to prepare children for school than those involving children talk about personal problems or leisure. The types of activities we see that regardless of education level parents involved in a lesser extent in those that target support to prepare children for school than those involving children talk about personal problems or leisure. (Table 6 and Table 7) Nearly a quarter of parents do not support her in any way in preparing children for school and the differences between adults with high levels of education and those with low levels are very low.

	high level of education	low level of education
<b>mother</b>	37,5	18,9
<b>father</b>	36,1	16,4

**Table 8 - Children who receive training private lessons (tutoring school) depending on the level of education of parents (%)**

Source: *Quality research students and teachers from pre-university education, Metro Media Transilvania, 2007*

Parents with high levels of education not only supports its staff in preparing children for school in a greater extent compared to parents with low education, but calls and personnel in this regard. Notice that the percentage of children receiving private lessons is double for those who have parents with higher level of education than children whose parents have a low level of education.(Table 8)

## Conclusions

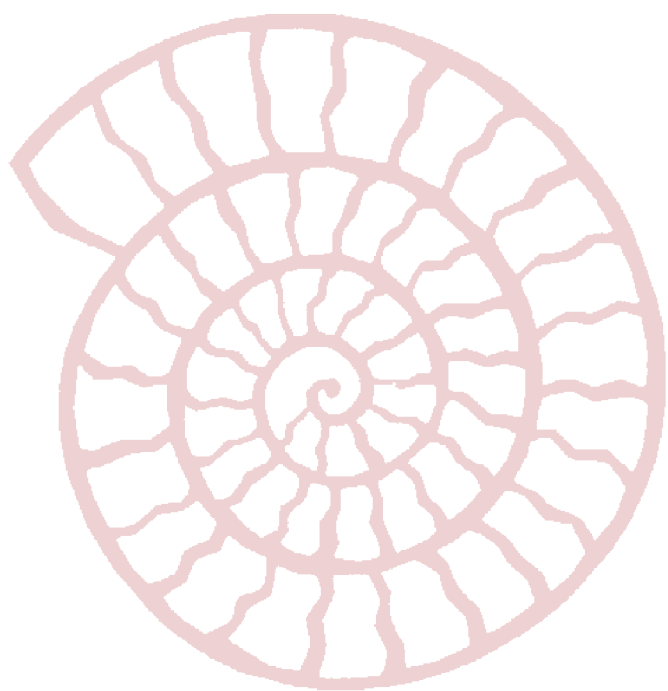
Interactions between Romania's adult population and children are less diversified. The space is often limited to personal, family and work-related are dominant in the classroom. The reasons are multiple. Some are subjective – and other family characteristics are likely objective – low income, costs too high for some families to capitalize on opportunities. The worst is the fact that an important part of adults not realize that such activities are complementary to those carried out at school and because it involves a lot of freedom of choice, passion, relaxation and much liked by children.


To understand the benefits of conducting such activities would be required to better inform, educate adults about the impact that we have on psycho-intellectual development of children on educational performance.



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# Professional teacher's development in enlarged learning contexts. The transition from skills to agency

## Lo sviluppo professionale docente nei contesti d'apprendimento allargati. La transizione dalle competenze all'agentività

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### ABSTRACT

The policies on education and training systems seem to point today at a new definition of framework to promote a New Welfare of active citizenship, that we could call "Learnfare". In pre-primary education this is expressed as a necessity to integrate enlarged learning contexts, in order to build an integrated system of education. So, what implications this prospective produce on the teacher's practice? Moreover, if we think at the roles traditionally associated to the pre-primary teacher's professional profile, what does it mean this kind of new framework? Today, professional teacher's development requires a conceptual change: it cannot longer be interpreted in terms of basic and strategic skills learning, but must include reflexive and transformative competences built on the interaction within a context that includes the parental and intergenerational relationships. Through the implicit and/or latent resources arising from these wider contexts, a teacher can activate a capability process on both his personal and professional training. Furthermore, the approach proposed about professional teacher's development could enact new pedagogical practices and theoretical pathways, in order to establish a new conceptual framework in the space of capability learnfare through which to address future policies.

Le politiche sui sistemi d'istruzione e formazione sembrano puntare oggi alla ridefinizione della prospettiva di learnfare per promuovere un New Welfare di cittadinanza attiva. Nell'educazione prescolastica questo si traduce nell'esigenza di integrare i contesti d'apprendimento allargati per costruire un sistema formativo integrato. Ma quali implicazioni produce questo sulla pratica dell'insegnante? Ma soprattutto, cosa comporta un rinnovamento di questo genere nelle funzioni tradizionalmente associate al profilo professionale? Oggi lo sviluppo professionale richiede un cambiamento concettuale: esso non può più essere interpretato nei termini dell'apprendimento di competenze basiche e strategiche, ma deve necessariamente comprendere la costruzione di competenze riflessive e trasformative sollecitate dall'interazione con i contesti parentali, intergenerazionali e sociali allargati. Attraverso le risorse implicite e/o latenti scaturenti dai contesti allargati l'insegnante attiva un processo di capacitazione sulla propria formazione personale e professionale insieme. L'approccio dello sviluppo professionale proposto diventa così capace di creare nuove direzionalità pedagogiche ed educative, in modo da stabilire un nuovo quadro concettuale di learnfare delle capacitazioni entro cui orientare le politiche future.

### KEYWORDS

Professional teacher's development, pre-primary education, enlarged learning contexts, capabilities, reflexivity.  
Sviluppo professionale docente, educazione prescolastica, contesti d'apprendimento allargati, capacitazioni, riflessività.

## Introduzione: Politiche educative e Active Welfare

Il miglioramento dei sistemi di formazione ed istruzione viene considerato oggi come il dispositivo più efficace per coniugare crescita economica e benessere sociale (COM, 2000; COM, 2010). Le politiche europee si basano sulla convinzione che il solido possesso di competenze e abilità risultano predittive al raggiungimento di obiettivi non solo sociali ed economici (COM, 2010), ma anche di potenziamento e valorizzazione delle abilità personali, favorendo un processo di apprendimento continuo. La prospettiva del *Lifelong learning* deve essere a sua volta capace di esprimere una politica formativa unitaria ed integrata, dall'ampio fondamento epistemologico, che impegni i singoli Paesi in una traduzione coerente dei paradigmi pedagogici accreditati con le relative specificità contestuali e situazionali (Margiotta, 2012)<sup>1</sup>.

Le politiche europee mirano al miglioramento dei sistemi d'istruzione e formazione puntando sulla precocità dell'investimento sull'istruzione, a partire dal primo segmento dell'educazione formale. Con l'accezione "Per una crescita intelligente, sostenibile ed inclusiva" il documento Europa 2020 (COM, 2010) ha inteso sostenere due strategie principali in materia di educazione prescolastica<sup>2</sup>. Da un lato troviamo politiche intese a sostenere l'inserimento precoce in funzione della riduzione dell'abbandono scolastico futuro in funzione dell'innalzamento del tasso di istruzione superiore<sup>3</sup>. Si tende cioè attribuire all'educazione

- 1 Il modello di formazione ad apprendimento permanente (*Lifelong learning*) centrato sulla responsabilità sociale di cittadinanza attiva, contribuisce a ridefinire il concetto stesso di formazione: nel discostarsi dalla tradizionale attività di progettazione di contenuti/corso, la formazione si riconfigura in qualità di attivazione/mobilitazione delle condizioni di sviluppo. Tali condizioni consistono nei processi di propagazione/diffusione di forme di crescita individuale e di gruppo, in un contesto che è sociale prima ancora che organizzativo. (Baldacci, M., Frabboni, F., Margotta, U., (2012). *Longlife/Longwide learning. Per un trattato europeo della formazione*. Milano: Mondadori).
- 2 Tenendo presente il termine inglese *pre-primary education*, si utilizza qui "educazione prescolastica" per indicare il complesso di realtà educative formali non obbligatorie che precedono l'inserimento scolastico nel primo ciclo d'istruzione a 6 anni d'età. Nel contesto italiano, infatti, si attesta la persistenza diffusa, a livello di percezione generale, di una lettura interpretativa del "segmento scolastico" come quello che inizia con l'obbligo d'istruzione", cioè con l'inserimento nella scuola primaria (o elementare). Tale persistenza interpretativa nega alla scuola dell'infanzia il riconoscimento di "vera scuola". Data la necessità di introdurre un paradigma formativo basato sull'esperienza e sull'auto-formazione, capace di generare un cambiamento nella percezione diffusa delle condizioni dell'educazione formale, all'interno del nostro discorso preferiamo adottare l'accezione terminologica di "prescolastica" al segmento 0-6 per la capacità immediata di evocazione intuitiva e concettuale, in funzione del riferimento alla corrispondente varietà di servizi e offerte educative formali.
- 3 L'iniziativa-faro europea "*Youth on the Move*" assegna centralità dell'educazione prescolastica in funzione della qualificazione degli apprendimenti. La UE raccomanda agli Stati membri di garantire "...investimenti efficienti nei sistemi d'istruzione e formazione a tutti i livelli (dalla scuola materna all'insegnamento superiore)" e "... migliorare i risultati nel settore dell'istruzione in ciascun segmento (prescolastico, elementare, secondario, professionale e superiore) nell'ambito di un'impostazione integrata che comprenda le competenze fondamentali e miri a ridurre l'abbandono scolastico"<sup>4</sup>. Il risultato posto prevede l'innalzamento del tasso di partecipazione all'"istruzione per la prima infanzia"<sup>5</sup> ad almeno il 95% per i bambini di età compresa tra i 4 anni e l'età del-

iniziale una funzione propedeutica, in funzione dello sviluppo di competenze fondamentali per proseguire con successo il percorso scolastico. L'acquisizione dei prerequisiti all'apprendimento scolastico diventa così la preoccupazione centrale delle politiche sull'educazione prescolastica, esprimendo una logica assicurativa e garantista rispetto al raggiungimento dei risultati futuri.

La seconda strategia investe sulla rimozione precoce dello svantaggio socio-culturale per migliorare i risultati scolastici e promuovere obiettivi di inclusione sociale (ET, 2020)<sup>4</sup>. Questo ricade a livello prescolastico incoraggiando in senso generalizzato il raggiungimento di una soglia minima comune di prerequisiti agli apprendimenti scolastici: la prevenzione dello svantaggio socio-culturale ed educativo diventa il dispositivo centrale per raggiungere una sorta di "uguaglianza in entrata" come testimoniano diverse ricerche comparative (UNICEF, 2008) e indagini OCSE (Starting Strong II, 2006; Report Eurydice, 2009).

Il quadro europeo adotta quindi una politica di investimento sui sistemi d'istruzione e formazione per la loro capacità di migliorare i risultati scolastici, consentendo una migliore collocazione e spendibilità professionale. L'incremento dell'occupabilità determina l'aumento della produttività e della competitività socio-economica, provocando un beneficio diretto sull'aumento del PIL.

Tali obiettivi politici si riflettono anche nell'evoluzione in atto nel sistema sociale: oggi assistiamo alla transizione dal sistema tradizionale e assicurativo del *Welfare State*, rivolto alla protezione compensativa dei rischi sociali ed economici (talvolta sottoforma di *welfare corto*)<sup>5</sup>, verso un *Active Welfare* che presuppone la mobilitazione personale in funzione della soddisfazione autonoma dei bisogni, secondo una nuova prospettiva preventiva. Questa considera l'attivazione delle potenzialità personali in funzione della realizzazione professionale ed esistenziale, che diventa condizione necessaria a svincolare l'individuo dalla dipendenza dai sistemi welfaristici tradizionali per renderlo unico responsabile della soddisfazione autonoma dei propri bisogni.

Ci troviamo quindi di fronte ad una "direzionalità combinata": da un lato essa investe sull'aggiornamento e il rinnovamento continuo delle competenze per incrementare la competitività entro l'attuale *knowledge society*; parallelamente, insiste su obiettivi di responsabilizzazione e attivazione individuale rispetto allo svi-

l'istruzione primaria obbligatoria. Tali raccomandazioni risultano strategiche per perseguire la riduzione del tasso di abbandono scolastico al 10% rispetto all'attuale 15%, e incrementare la quota di popolazione adulta in possesso di un diploma universitario dal 31% ad almeno il 40% (COM, 2010).

- 4 In *Education and Training 2020* si mira a far sì che tutti i cittadini, quali siano le loro circostanze personali, sociali o economiche, siano in grado di acquisire, aggiornare e sviluppare lungo tutto l'arco della vita le loro competenze professionali, favorendo la flessibilizzazione e l'adattabilità occupazionale degli individui, l'approfondimento della loro formazione, la cittadinanza attiva e il dialogo interculturale. A tal fine il documento riferisce come "*lo svantaggio educativo dovrebbe essere affrontato fornendo un'istruzione della prima infanzia di qualità elevata e un sostegno mirato, promuovendo un'istruzione inclusiva*". (CONCLUSIONI DEL CONSIGLIO (2009), *Quadro strategico per la cooperazione europea nel settore dell'istruzione e della formazione* («ET 2020») (2009/C 119/02).
- 5 Il concetto di "*welfare corto*" si riferisce alla situazione in cui Stato sociale di tipo assistenziale-compensativo riduce le proprie responsabilità permanenti per sostituirle con aiuti temporanei (Sennett, R., (2004). *Rispetto. La dignità umana in un mondo di diseguali*. Bologna: Il Mulino).

luppo e alla conduzione del proprio percorso formativo. La necessità di trovare percorsi rispondenti alle aspirazioni e caratteristiche personali, la formulazione ed elaborazione di un progetto esistenziale, le istanze di partecipazione alla definizione stessa dei bisogni individuali e sociali richiamano ad un nodo concettuale la cui soluzione risulta difficilmente rimandabile. È necessario cioè definire prioritariamente, in funzione dell'elaborazione di un indirizzo politico coerente ed integrato, il significato dello sviluppo formativo e del suo fondamento generativo (Costa, 2011)<sup>6</sup> per la creazione di scenari di praticabilità individuale e sociale.

Oltre al significato pragmatico ed esistenziale, è necessario considerare l'opportunità di un cambiamento di paradigma in senso etico-valoriale: le misure di qualificazione dei sistemi d'istruzione e formazione puntano a prevenire i rischi sociali connessi all'inoccupabilità insistendo sull'acquisizione di competenze professionali flessibili e modulabili in funzione del mercato del lavoro. In applicazione all'orientamento politico prevalente, l'insistenza sul perseguimento di prerequisiti prescolastici in funzione predittiva sui risultati futuri risulta incongruente rispetto alle finalità di personalizzazione e attivazione delle scelte individuali. Se il potenziamento delle proprie risorse viene interpretato nella sua sola capacità di sostituire il sistema sociale nella soddisfazione dei bisogni, essa appare in grado di suggerire nient'altro che traduzioni di valore di tipo monovalente e de-umanizzante. Lo sviluppo personale, cioè, non può essere interpretato secondo una mera logica strumentale di conseguimento di obiettivi di efficienza e spendibilità economica, ma va contemplato nella possibilità di cogliere, tra diverse opzioni realizzative, quelle più confacenti e rispondenti ai propri fini personali.

La restituzione di un significato umanistico all'esperienza personale va perseguito a livello politico coniugando esigenze socio-economiche e di umanizzazione dei percorsi esistenziali. L'esperienza della partecipazione sociale e del dialogo interculturale costituisce il cardine su cui impennare un cambiamento concettuale e semantico capace di restituire dignità ai percorsi di sviluppo personale e praticare nuovi orizzonti di crescita individuale e sociale. Nei contesti prescolastici, il potenziale relazionale costituito dall'interazione entro i contesti d'apprendimento allargati rappresenta il terreno su cui innestare un nuovo concetto di sviluppo formativo che investe tutti i partecipanti al discorso educativo.

## 1. La professionalità educativa e i contesti d'apprendimento allargati

L'educazione prescolastica, in quanto contesto educativo multidimensionale e pluralistico dalle importanti ricadute relazionali, rappresenta oggi l'ambito privilegiato per sperimentare l'esercizio di un nuovo diritto di cittadinanza basato

6 Costa introduce il concetto di generatività all'interno della pedagogia del lavoro per indicare la transizione dal senso tradizionale di percezione dell'attività lavorativa, basato sulla riproducibilità di logiche e pratiche, ad un nuovo significato centrato su processi ed esperienze motivazionali, entro "situazioni di intercostruzione e di interrelazione interdipendente e reciproca tra sé e gli altri; tra sé le istituzioni e le organizzazioni; tra sé e le culture; tra sé e gli ambienti professionali; e con sé stesso." (p.188) Il lavoro si ridefinisce nell'orizzonte della realizzabilità umana, comprendendo il potenziale antropologico correlato alla struttura dell'uomo e quindi alla generatività della soggettività che esprime (Costa M. (2011). *Pedagogia del lavoro e contesti di innovazione*. Milano: Franco Angeli.)

sull'apprendimento in termini di *learnfare* (Margiotta, 2012)<sup>7</sup>. L'espansione della partecipazione e del coinvolgimento di diversi interlocutori prima esclusi dalla definizione educativa rendono l'educazione prescolastica il contesto più favorevole all'emersione di nuove opportunità e modalità di interazione, capaci di sviluppare nuove prospettive di innovazione ed inclusione sociale. L'educazione formale si trova a comunicare con le reti parentali ed intergenerazionali e con gli *stakeholders* allargati delle reti sociali e territoriali (enti pubblici, gruppi, associazioni e realtà locali), che vanno supportati nella formulazione di strategie pedagogicamente orientate. Questi rappresentano dei contesti d'apprendimento allargati che vanno a costituire un sistema formativo integrato, fondato sulla sinergia e sulla coerenza delle singole azioni educative, che producendo a loro volta dei rimandi su ciascuno dei partecipanti. Oggi le famiglie, intese come primaria agenzia di educazione informale ed intenzionale insieme, esprimono quella tensione alla personalizzazione e alla mobilitazione personale già descritta rispetto alla definizione non solo dei bisogni, ma anche degli strumenti atti a definirli.

Il contributo della ricerca segnala la crescita di iniziative autonome dei cittadini e delle famiglie, che propongono soluzioni innovative, leggere ed intelligenti con cui organizzare i servizi educativi pre-scolastici (IRER Lombardia, 2004<sup>8</sup>; Murray R., Mulgan J., J.Caulier-Grice, 2008<sup>9</sup>; IRES Piemonte,

- 7 Margiotta, in *Dal welfare al learnfare. Verso un nuovo contratto sociale*, rileva una nuova criticità in ordine all'uguaglianza delle opportunità e alle corrispondenti disponibilità formative: spesso chi già possiede un'adeguata formazione di base è il destinatario di ulteriore investimento formativo, producendo paradossalmente un ampliamento della divaricazione esistente in termini di equità sociale e opportunità di accesso. Il *welfare to learning* o *learnfare*, inteso come diritto all'apprendimento, deve configurare la formazione e l'apprendimento permanente non tanto come fonti di compensazione, ma come reali fattori di conversione, di potenziamento delle capacità produttive e di partecipazione attiva in senso lato, anziché fattore di stratificazione sociale e perfino di discriminazione (in: Baldacci, M., Frabboni, F., Margotta, U., (2012). *Longlife/Longwide learning. Per un trattato europeo della formazione*. Milano: Mondadori).
- 8 Le ricerche dell'IRER Lombardia descrivono la nascita di servizi educativi innovativi, alternativi ed integrativi a quelli tradizionali (spazi gioco, nidi famiglia, nidi aziendali) creati da iniziative bottom-up, che manifestano l'espressione di nuove esigenze di socializzazione e personalizzazione espresse dai contesti parentali ed intergenerazionali del territorio. La valutazione del progetto di ricerca segnalano, tuttavia, la necessità di stabilire standard qualitativi omogenei capaci di valutare la molteplicità delle esperienze non formali ed informali in crescita, che integrano quelle tradizionali nella strutturazione di un sistema formativo integrato. Si rileva, in tal senso, l'insostituibilità dei servizi tradizionali nella soddisfazione dei bisogni collettivi, a cui si affiancano quelli di carattere innovativo in risposta alle esigenze emergenti (socializzazione delle famiglie, cure personali, vantaggi logistici). (Istituto Regionale di Ricerca della Lombardia, (2004). *I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia a carattere innovativo*. Milano: Consiglio Regionale della Lombardia.)
- 9 Il *libro bianco sull'innovazione sociale* illustra alcuni esempi di esperienze di integrazione partecipativa dei contesti sociali allargati nella progettazione e pianificazione della vita pubblica, sociale ed educativa. Il lavoro di *Children's Express* prevede la partecipazione di bambini, scuole e famiglie nel pensare idee per la rigenerazione dei quartieri (al fine di influenzare le politiche pubbliche, situandosi nel campo della progettazione territoriale ed organizzativa. Altri esempi di modelli partecipativo-preventivi che spingono all'innovazione dei sistemi prevedono dei *driver* per energizzare e rinforzare i gruppi emarginati. Tali esperienze innovative dimostrano come i cambiamen-

2013<sup>10</sup>). Tali situazioni segnalano che non solamente i contesti parentali ed intergenerazionali allargati intervengono sempre più a definire l'educazione formale, bensì contribuiscono ad evidenziare la richiesta crescente in merito alla formulazione di risposte in linea con le corrispettive motivazioni e visioni personali. I contesti familiari diventano così portatori di nuove esigenze sociali e al contempo contribuiscono a tracciare nuove opportunità ed orizzonti di praticabilità. I nuovi bisogni possono essere rintracciati nell'esigenza di auto-determinazione e di riconoscimento delle convinzioni più profonde e diversificate. La sollecitazione delle aspirazioni individuali diventa capace di produrre visioni prospettiche e soluzioni innovative, diventando al contempo opportunità di apprendimento e formazione permanente. Tali stimolazioni si configurano dunque come tensioni al miglioramento e opportunità di rinnovamento, oltre che possibilità concreta di realizzare un cambiamento concettuale in senso epistemologico. Esse si rivelano tuttavia inefficaci se non comprese in un discorso politico complessivo, che miri a ridefinire il concetto di formazione e di sviluppo come esercizio della libertà sostanziale di scegliere i propri fini esistenziali e le modalità con cui conseguirli.

La predisposizione *top-down* di interventi di sostegno all'educazione familiare rischia di ricadere nell'errore del *welfare* tradizionale. Infatti, anche se essa prevede la responsabilità personale in ordine alla soddisfazione dei bisogni, si basa su un'interpretazione unilaterale e massificata dei *basic needs*, ripercorrendo la tradizionale matrice economico-efficientistica. Solo la possibilità di scegliere e perseguire opzioni realizzative differenti, che scaturiscono dal confronto intersoggettivo e dalla negoziazione sociale, permettono di soddisfare realmente bisogni diversificati e realizzare contesti fondati sull'uguaglianza delle opportunità, inquadrando la prospettiva del *learnfare* entro un orizzonte di attivazione capacitativa.

ti spesso non siano incentivati a livello politico, ma provengano direttamente da esperienze *bottom-up*: esempi di organizzazioni *non-profit* cercano di produrre trasformazioni a livello del sistema, come le esperienze di *Time banking* introducono il concetto della capitalizzazione del tempo impiegato in mansioni di cura e assistenza per valorizzare le attività informali. Recentemente sono state sviluppate delle banche *person-to-agency*, come quelle sviluppate dalla SPICE, che ha all'attivo ben 40 progetti nel Galles del Sud dove le istituzioni come le autorità locali, le scuole e le associazioni offrono tempo per diversi lavori di volontariato che possono essere spesi come tempo per internet, pasti e anche affitto delle case popolari. (Murray, R., Mulgan, J., J. Caulier-Grice, (2008). *Generating Social Innovation: setting an agenda, shaping methods and growing the field*, London: The Young Foundation,. (Trad. It. A. Giordano, A. Arvidsson, *Il libro bianco sull'innovazione sociale*, Societing, 2011.)

- 10 L'IREs Piemonte sottolinea la definizione dell'innovazione sociale legata al miglioramento del benessere individuale e sociale e le condizioni per realizzarla nei contesti locali e territoriali. Dopo una ricognizione esplorativa delle innovazioni nei principali settori d'interesse, compreso quello educativo, il rapporto propone una disamina approfondita di alcuni casi d'interesse con particolare attenzione ai meccanismi e processi di generazione. Il rapporto descrive le procedure metodologiche in ordine all'analisi ed interpretazione dei dati per la comprensione della significatività dell'esperienza (confronto diretto con i diversi soggetti coinvolti, con interviste, visite, colloqui; *focus group* su aspetti specifici dei processi dell'innovazione sociale; eventuale organizzazione di tavoli di lavoro specifici con esperti.) (IREs, (2008). Aburrà L., Borrione P., Cagno R., Landini S. (a cura di). *Progetto di fattibilità per un Rapporto sull'innovazione sociale in provincia di Cuneo*. Consiglio Regionale del Piemonte.)



Attraverso le aspirazioni delle reti sociali, parentali ed intergenerazionali di costruire contesti educativi efficaci, non solo l'educazione informale ridefinisce sé stessa ma sollecita l'educazione formale alla rivalutazione degli obiettivi generali e delle competenze professionali richieste. La Commissione Europea (COM, 2011, 9) richiama gli Stati membri a “*promuovere un’adeguata professionalizzazione del personale operante nei servizi prescolastici, identificando le qualifiche necessarie per ciascuna funzione*”. Le politiche europee considerano l’investimento sulla formazione professionale continua degli insegnanti come presupposto indispensabile alla qualificazione degli apprendimenti conseguiti dagli alunni, mettendo in rilievo il tema dello sviluppo professionale. Esso viene identificato come “*l’insieme delle attività che maturano le competenze, la conoscenza, l’esperienza e altre caratteristiche dell’individuo*” (OCSE-TALIS, 2009)<sup>11</sup>. In tal modo, l’indagine comprende nella definizione di sviluppo professionale anche le diverse esperienze informali che l’insegnante/individuo compie durante il suo percorso esistenziale sottolineando le relative modalità e strategie d’apprendimento impiegate nella costruzione di nuova consapevolezza professionale. Il concetto di sviluppo proposto non va orientato tanto all’acquisizione di nuove competenze quanto all’adozione di atteggiamenti di rinnovamento e aggiornamento continui, e delle capacità di ricerca/scoperta in prospettiva innovativa, trasferibili a loro volta nei confronti delle generazioni future. Le politiche risultano unanimi nel concordare sulla necessità di incoraggiare e responsabilizzare gli insegnanti rispetto all’autoformazione e allo sviluppo professionale continuo, da praticarsi attingendo alla vasta gamma di opportunità date dal confronto e dall’interazione costruttiva. Tale ri-configurazione concettuale della professionalità educativa dev’essere sostenuta da una nuova progettazione della carriera professionale in senso espansivo e ricorsivo, dalla formazione iniziale al *continuing training* (CEDEFOP, 2010)<sup>12</sup>. Si inseriscono aspetti cruciali quali: il riconoscimento delle pratiche dialogiche e riflessive nell’*équipe* professionale, la nuova funzione di progettazione educativa degli spazi interscolastici ed extrascolastici, l’azione di integrazione dei contesti parentali, intergenerazionali e sociali allargati. Includendo tali nuove funzioni entro il profilo professionale, l’insegnante diventa capace di dare un nuovo senso e un nuovo valore al proprio agire educativo.

Il nuovo quadro di sviluppo professionale emergente sembra dunque esprimere un profilo affine ad una professione sociale, in relazione al mutamento del rapporto tra “*saperi sapienti*” e “*insegnati*” (Margiotta, 2010)<sup>13</sup> che travalica i con-

11 OECD, (2009). *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Result from TALIS*, OECD Publications: Paris.

12 Il CEDEFOP (*European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training*.) illustra uno schema di sviluppo professionale pensato sull’intero arco della carriera docente, articolato in:

1. Formazione iniziale (*Initial*): consiste nell’acquisizione di conoscenze e abilità di base per l’esercizio della professione.
2. Introduzione alla professione (*Induction*): consiste nei primi anni di pratica della professione docente, in cui conoscenze teoriche e azione pratica si integrano in una circolarità ricorsiva, autoalimentante e produttiva di competenze professionali.
3. Formazione continua o in servizio (*Continuing*): consiste nella formazione continua che investe l’intero arco della carriera professionale del docente fino al pensionamento.

13 Margiotta rileva, a proposito dell’insegnamento e della sua nuova interpretazione in qualità di professione sociale, che oggi “...all’insegnante si chiede soprattutto (e quasi

testi tradizionali della formazione professionale ampliandoli e riconfigurandoli all'interno di un sistema formativo integrato. Nei contesti dell'educazione prescolastica, gli insegnanti da sempre esprimono la necessità di progettare e concordare gli obiettivi educativi con le famiglie ed i contesti educativi allargati, sia in ragione della loro influenza che dell'esigenza di formulare azioni congiunte. Anche nei servizi a carattere innovativo, i contesti parentali, intergenerazionali e sociali allargati non si limitano alla co-progettazione e co-gestione in senso *bottom-up* rispetto a quelli tradizionali (IRER, 2004), ma provocano ricadute sulle funzioni tradizionalmente associate al profilo insegnante. Il recente *Education at a Glance* (2012)<sup>14</sup> tende a confermare tale funzione di integrazione dei contesti allargati assegnata all'educazione formale enfatizzando aspetti quali l'ambiente di apprendimento e l'organizzazione del contesto educativo. I dati rilevano come il maggior tempo impiegato dagli insegnanti italiani nell'attività didattica a scapito di quello dedicato all'organizzazione del contesto contribuisca a ridurre i risultati scolastici degli alunni nei test internazionali OCSE-PISA. Gli insegnanti del segmento prescolastico, la cui formazione in entrata manca di una prospettiva europea unica (Stamm, 2011<sup>15</sup>; rapporto della Provincia di Milano, 2006<sup>16</sup>), necessitano di ride-

*fino al punto di agire indipendentemente dalla forma organizzativa della scuola in cui insegna) di elaborare creativamente proprio quel rapporto [tra saperi sapienti e saperi insegnati, elaborandolo e sviluppandolo attraverso strategie non solo trasmissive o didattiche ma ancor più professionali, dunque formative; e che, infine, il profilo professionale che va tematizzato in indagini come questa non può che essere il suo profilo "in esercizio".* (Margiotta, U. (a cura di) (2010). *Abilitare la professione docente; Esiti occupazionali e differenziale professionale degli specializzati SSIS Veneto*, Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia).

- 14 Il rapporto OCSE *Education at a Glance* del 2012 sottolinea il fatto che gli insegnanti italiani dedichino la maggior parte del loro tempo di lavoro all'insegnamento nelle classi e poco tempo a scuola per l'organizzazione, per altre attività con gli studenti ecc... Questo aspetto dell'attività docente si traduce in un certo tipo di didattica, che rende i quindicenni italiani molto meno brillanti nei test internazionali rispetto ai loro coetanei giapponesi. Per favorire un miglioramento delle condizioni professionali in Italia diventa pertanto indispensabile considerare dapprima una radicale trasformazione della didattica e dell'organizzazione del tempo scuola e poi conseguentemente un aumento del tempo degli insegnanti a scuola dedicato ad altre attività oltre l'insegnamento in classe (OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en>).
- 15 Stamm intende evidenziare il quadro complesso e variegato dei profili professionali connessi all'educazione prescolastica in relazione alla differenziazione dei profili in entrata, dei percorsi di formazione iniziale, di status professionale e dei contesti organizzativi e gestionali in cui il personale si trova inserito. In Italia, ad esempio, vi è una distinzione tra l'educatore professionale operante nei servizi per la prima infanzia (3 mesi- 3anni) e l'insegnante della scuola dell'infanzia (3-6 anni) con differenze notevolissime di ordine contrattuale, normativo, formativo e lavorativo. (Stamm, M. (a cura di) (2011). *Formazione della prima infanzia: a che scopo? Cosa sappiamo, cosa dovremmo sapere e cosa può fare la politica*, Centro Universitario per la Formazione della Prima Infanzia ZeFF: Università di Friburgo).
- 16 Una ricerca della Provincia di Milano (2006) sui profili professionali degli educatori della prima infanzia evidenzia l'evoluzione di tali servizi nelle regioni italiane e la frammentazione delle professionalità educative richieste. La ricerca ha analizzato le figure richieste da alcuni Enti della Provincia di Milano per coprire gli organici dei servizi prima infanzia, ed ha evidenziato come, per i tre servizi identificati dell'asilo nido, micro-

finire il senso del loro lavoro valorizzando i processi di trasformazione e di interazione continua che si realizzano nello spazio dell'interdipendenza tra i confini della scuola e i *networks* informali. Le ricerche sullo sviluppo professionale in relazione ai contesti allargati sottolineano la necessità della formazione insegnante all'interno della professione (Annali della pubblica Istruzione, 2008)<sup>17</sup> che affermano come "...oggi quello dell'insegnante diviene sempre più un lavoro di gruppo, un'attività compiuta in sinergia tra la scuola e l'ambiente in cui essa si trova ad operare" (p. 32). In Italia, rispetto alla media TALIS, si punta meno sui progetti in rete coi colleghi (20% contro 40%) e sui programmi di qualificazione (10,8% contro 24,5%)<sup>18</sup> a fronte di una diffusa percezione dell'urgenza di affrontare il problema della condivisione/partecipazione del contesto extrascolastico alla definizione di strategie educative coerenti e sistemiche, come nell'esperienza delle "scuole aperte" promossa dalla Fondazione Reggio Children<sup>19</sup> o dell'approccio del *global curriculum* dei progetti "Senza zaino"<sup>20</sup>. Sviluppare competenze professionali di gestione dei contesti informali consentirebbe di migliorare la qualificazione professionale e legittimazione sociale, esigenza quest'ultima espressa dal 31,9% dei docenti italiani<sup>21</sup>, in funzione del riconoscimento del loro ruolo strategico per la crescita degli individui e del Paese. I contesti d'apprendimento allargati si qualificano dunque come lo spazio propulsivo entro cui il docente può e deve dare forma e qualità al suo sviluppo professionale, così come richiesto dalla Comunità Europea (COM, 2007) ed evidenziato da ricerche europee e internazionali (COM *E-Twinning*, 2011; OCSE-TALIS, 2009).

Il docente è chiamato a dare stabilità e forma consapevole alle azioni che nascono dai vissuti sociali e personali, talvolta impliciti e latenti, orientandoli e significandoli in senso educativo, e qualificando le risposte nei confronti degli stakeholders allargati. Diventano necessarie nuove politiche di sviluppo della professionalità docente, capaci di far leva sulle capacitazioni (Costa, 2012)<sup>22</sup>.

nido e centro per la prima infanzia, i titoli di formazione previsti per l'inserimento nel ruolo sono addirittura 15. (Provincia di Milano (2006). *Educatore prima infanzia: Profili professionali e offerte formative*, Direzione centrale affari sociali, Settore sviluppo delle professionalità, volontariato, associazionismo e terzo settore: Milano, p.18).

- 17 Presidenza portoghese del Consiglio dell'Unione Europea, (2007). *Sviluppo professionale degli insegnanti per la qualità e l'equità dell'apprendimento permanente*, Lisbona. In: Annali della pubblica istruzione, 1-2/2008.
- 18 Ministero dell'istruzione dell'Università e della Ricerca (2009). *Indagine TALIS 2008: guida alla lettura delle diapositive TALIS*, Roma, p.14.
- 19 Esempio di eccellenza internazionale, il *Reggio Emilia approach* rileva l'insostituibilità di un approccio programmatico in funzione educativa con la comunità educativa allargata (Comune di Reggio Emilia, *Reggio Emilia verso un Patto per l'educazione*, in: <http://www.comune.re.it/retecivica/urp/retecivi.nsf/DocumentID/>).
- 20 Il metodo del Curricolo Globale, applicato nei numerosi progetti "Senza Zaino" in sperimentazione in tutt'Italia, costituisce un'innovazione nell'approccio progettuale ed organizzativo dell'ambiente scolastico in quanto "la progettazione è progettazione dell'ambiente formativo" (Orsi, M., (2006). *A scuola senza zaino. Il metodo del curricolo globale per una scuola comunità*, Trento: Erickson, p.19).
- 21 Associazione Nazionale dei Dirigenti e della Alte professionalità nelle scuole, (2009). *La professione docente, valore e rappresentanza*, Nomisma Libri per l'Economia, Roma: AGRA Edizioni, p.38.
- 22 Costa in *Agency formativa per il nuovo learnfare*, fa riferimento al "learnfare delle capacitazioni" come diritto all'apprendimento permanente in funzione di sviluppo delle

La qualificazione professionale del responsabile dell'educazione prescolastica in funzione della gestione dei contesti d'apprendimento integrati ed allargati consente una triplice funzione. Da un lato, la focalizzazione sulla capacitazione degli apprendimenti allargati dei bambini consente di neutralizzare le derive tecnico- efficientistiche connesse alle politiche economiche. Il secondo aspetto considera come la costruzione del sistema formativo integrato produca benefici sullo sviluppo della relazionalità allargata di valore individuale e sociale. Infine, l'integrazione di aspetti informali nella professionalità docente permette di riunificare in senso umanizzante aspirazioni individuali e azione lavorativa, descrivendo un nuovo orizzonte di senso dello sviluppo professionale.

Se prima la professionalità dell'educatore/insegnante della prescolastica si collegava al saldo possesso di competenze tecniche e formali, oggi si trova a fare i conti con il crescente valore educativo di quelli informali, tanto da non poter essere ulteriormente rimandati nella definizione complessiva. L'integrazione tra contesti formali ed informali e l'esigenza di mantenere un costante riferimento educativo investono la professione docente: l'insegnante appare impegnato non solo a gestire esperienze e situazioni finora estranee alla sua sfera d'azione, ma soprattutto ad orientarle in senso *empowerizzante*, contribuendo a potenziale le risorse individuali. Per fare questo utilizza quale strumento di attivazione capacitativa le risorse sociali e relazionali scaturenti da quei stessi contesti d'apprendimento allargati che esprimono al contempo sia una nuova domanda sociale che la sua stessa soluzione.

Certamente un insegnante, per farsi gestore dei contesti di apprendimento allargati, deve avere libertà di sviluppare autenticamente, in senso capacitativo, la sua stessa professionalità. Non si può infatti pensare alla sua azione di abilitazione sui contesti allargati se gli viene negata la possibilità di scegliere quali di questi attivare, sostenere e coltivare. La capacità di scegliere ciò che ritiene veramente significativo, e la possibilità di realizzarlo, sono condizioni indispensabili alla progettazione di qualsiasi intervento di qualità. E tali condizioni investono, prima ancora dell'intervento, il piano umano, personale e professionale insieme. Il concetto di sviluppo va inteso dunque come percorso di capacitazione individuale di strutturazione semantica dell'azione, che esprime a sua volta un processo di agentivazione sui contesti informali periferici.

## 2. Sviluppo e libertà sostanziale

La capacitazione dello sviluppo professionale esprime il passaggio da una polarizzazione sui mezzi (produttività/ incremento economico) ad una centrata sui fini (agentività/ libertà sostanziale) (Costa, 2012)<sup>23</sup>. La capacitazione può essere

capacitazioni per la realizzazione dei funzionamenti. Le *capabilities*, sono l'insieme delle risorse relazionali di cui dispone una persona, congiunto con le sue capacità di fruirne e quindi di impiegarle operativamente. In questa prospettiva, la competenza dell'insegnante perde la valenza meramente prestazionale per diventare "competenza ad agire" (*agency*). (Costa, M. (2012). *Agency formativa per il nuovo learnfare*. Formazione & Insegnamento, vol. 2, pp. 83-107).

23 Il cambiamento di paradigma connesso alla professionalità docente e all'autoformazione permette di ripensare il significato del lavoro restituendogli un senso umano e personalizzante, che va al di là di traduzioni meramente tecnico-efficientistiche. Il con-

espressa nelle parole di Rossi (2011)<sup>24</sup> secondo cui “...la persona può vivere sé stessa in formazione e trasformazione, può farsi autrice di riscatto e liberazione, può guadagnare livelli più elevati di umanità e quindi può essere di più e meglio, può sapere di più e meglio, può soddisfare compiti vitali di stabilizzazione e transizione.” (p. 67). La transizione verso un nuovo paradigma umanizzante di capacitazione consiste, essenzialmente, nel processo di espansione delle libertà di cui l'individuo può godere: tuttavia, per poterle esercitare, l'individuo deve avere prima di tutto la capacità di saperle cogliere.

Il filosofo ed economista indiano A. Sen introduce il concetto secondo cui lo sviluppo individuale va inteso nei termini di costruzione di *capabilities* (capacitazioni), al fine di realizzare i *functionings* (funzionamenti), come obiettivi finali di realizzazione personale. L'unità di analisi proposta per l'identificazione della libertà sostanziale si fonda sulla distinzione tra i due. Sen descrive i *funzionamenti* come stati di realizzazione cui gli individui attribuiscono valore, mentre le *capacitazioni* si riferiscono agli insiemi di combinazioni alternative di funzionamenti possibili, intesi come opportunità di scelta tra opzioni differenti, che una persona è in grado di realizzare (Sen, 2000)<sup>25</sup>. L'approccio delle capacitazioni può guardare sia ai funzionamenti realizzati sia all'insieme capacitante delle alternative a disposizione, a seconda che ci si voglia focalizzare sulle cose che una persona fa o su quelle che è libera di fare. È, però, preferibile, secondo Sen, concentrarsi su queste ultime, dal momento che “è possibile dare importanza anche al fatto di avere occasioni che non vengono colte; anzi, è naturale muoversi in questa direzione, se il processo attraverso il quale vengono generati gli esiti ha un suo significato” (Sen, 2000, 80).

Martha Nussbaum propone una definizione più articolata delle capacitazioni (Mocellin, 2006)<sup>26</sup> e suggerisce un ipotetico percorso di sviluppo per arrivare ai funzionamenti: in *Creare Capacità*, Nussbaum afferma: “le persone che hanno ricevuto anche solo un'istruzione di base aumentano fortemente le opportunità d'impiego, le possibilità di partecipazione politica, le competenze per interagire proficuamente con gli altri nella società, ad ogni livello, locale, nazionale e anche globale.” (Nussbaum, 2012, 145)<sup>27</sup>. Tuttavia l'educazione di base, nella sua intera-

retto di formazione si ridefinisce nella transizione dalla “formazione per la professionalità” intesa in senso strumentale, alla “formazione come realizzazione” sul piano personale, di riappropriazione umanizzante. (Costa, M. (2012). *Agency formativa per il nuovo learnfare*. Formazione & Insegnamento, vol.2, pp.83-107).

24 Rossi, B. (2011). *L'organizzazione educativa*. Firenze: Carrocci.

25 Sen, A. (2000). *Lo sviluppo è libertà. Perché non c'è crescita senza democrazia*, Milano: Mondadori (ed. or: *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999)

26 Mocellin, S. (2006). *Ripartire dalla “vita buona”. La lezione aristotelica di Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum e Amartya Sen*, Padova: Cleup Editrice.

27 Secondo il pensiero di Nussbaum le caratteristiche personali (tratti personali, capacità intellettuali ed emotive, lo stato di salute, gli insegnamenti interiorizzati etc.) rappresentano stati fluidi e in continuo mutamento, che si modificano nell'interazione con l'ambiente sociale, economico e familiare, e sono definite *capacità interne* (*internal capabilities*). La combinazione di queste con fattori socio-economici, politici ed istituzionali in grado di supportarle (che chiameremo *fattori di conversione*) generano a loro volta le *capacità combinate* (*combined capabilities*). Esse esprimono la realizzazione compiuta della libertà sostanziale di scegliere e conseguire la vita a cui realmente si dà valore. Quindi per Nussbaum l'istituzione politica (Stato) giustifica la propria esistenza nella misura in cui non solo garantisce all'individuo il possesso delle capacità

zione con fattori ambientali e sociali, non determina altro che lo sviluppo di capacità innate: per arrivare alle capacità combinate, in grado di realizzare la libertà sostanziale di scegliere il proprio percorso di realizzazione personale, è necessario il supporto istituzionale, politico e sociale di definizione delle opportunità concrete al suo perseguimento. Infatti, solo la possibilità di disporre realmente delle condizioni favorevoli a realizzare i funzionamenti prescelti<sup>28</sup> costituisce garanzia di uguaglianza delle opportunità, che coincide con la libertà sostanziale di perseguire e raggiungere il benessere individuale e sociale. Le istituzioni politiche dovrebbero dunque ridefinire il loro ruolo in funzione capacitativa: la creazione delle condizioni socio-culturali favorevoli all'espansione personale dovrebbe costituire la preoccupazione politica principale.

Secondo i modelli teorici esaminati, lo sviluppo individuale (infantile e adulto, personale e professionale) va interpretato come realizzazione di un funzionamento esistenziale. Nell'educazione prescolastica, l'integrazione dei diversi contesti educativi con cui il bambino interagisce assume il valore di dispositivo di capacitazione degli apprendimenti e delle capacità necessarie al loro esercizio. I confini educativi formali tradizionali (scolastici) si espandono fino a comprendere e integrare molteplici agenzie educative, istituzioni sociali e interlocutori locali (enti, associazioni e gruppi coinvolti) oltre ai contesti parentali e intergenerazionali. Ecco dunque che la progettazione e gestione allargata dei contesti educativi nel loro complesso non risulta di per sé sufficiente a garantire opportunità realistiche di praticabilità della libertà sostanziale. Diventa necessario pensare all'espansione dei contesti periferici in senso realmente inclusivo ed promozionale, che attribuisca loro un nuovo valore di generatività esistenziale (Costa, 2012), in modo da costituire reali fattori di conversione sui funzionamenti possibili. Il sostegno alla capacitazione del dialogo, della comprensione e della solidarietà reciproca realizzano un potenziamento abilitante dei contesti parentali, intergenerazionali e sociali allargati, favorendo l'espansione della libertà sostanziale di sviluppo individuale. Le risorse generate dall'integrazione dei contesti formali ed informali costituiscono sia i fattori di costruzione delle capacità interne, stabilite nel momento della formazione culturale e sociale, che i fattori di conversione per l'estrinsecazione delle capacità combinate, intese come potenziale di realizzazione individuale.

Sullo sviluppo professionale dell'insegnante, l'opportunità di interagire con i

interne (ad esempio, attraverso l'istruzione), ma deve anche creare le condizioni esterne favorevoli alla loro piena espressione in senso realizzativo ed esistenziale (Nussbaum, M. (2012). *Creare capacità. Liberarsi dalla dittatura del Pil*, Bologna: Il Mulino (ed. or: *Creating Capabilities. The Human development Approach*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge (Mass.) – London, 2011).

- 28 Il *capability approach* seniano permette di stabilire un'unità di misura più plausibile e realistica della ricchezza di un paese rispetto al PIL, consentendo la comparazione tra situazioni individuali in maniera più oggettiva e attendibile rispetto all'approccio *welfarista* tradizionale. Rispetto all'adozione di un modello che considera la ricchezza di un paese esclusivamente nei termini di reddito pro capite, Sen contrappone una visione di garanzia istituzionale della libertà individuale, che può esprimersi compiutamente solo se sussistono le condizioni imprescindibili alla sua realizzazione. È in questi termini che si esplica il concetto di *well-being* come il più alto raggiungimento del benessere sociale ed individuale. (Sen, A. (2000). *Lo sviluppo è libertà. Perché non c'è crescita senza democrazia*, Milano: Mondadori (ed. or: *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999)

contesti d'apprendimento allargati gli consente di accedere a tutta la gamma più vasta di combinazioni di funzionamenti possibili. Le capacità combinate che si strutturano attraverso la costruzione di relazioni con i contesti parentali ed intergenerazionali trasformano le capacità personali: indicano nuove direzioni di sviluppo, mettono in discussione quelli finora percorse, fanno emergere criticità e risorse latenti, e prefigurano nuovi scenari immaginativi.

Come sottolineato da Nussbaum, la sola garanzia dell'istruzione di base (dai bambini agli adulti) o della formazione professionale iniziale non è più capace di garantire di per sé sviluppo personale in termini di funzionamento realizzativo: è necessario favorire e sostenere il pieno esercizio delle capacità combinate. Le risorse relazionali che scaturiscono dal processo di significazione dei contesti allargati determinano l'attivazione di un processo di capacitazione individuale combinato, per la realizzazione del funzionamento dello sviluppo professionale. Tuttavia, la valorizzazione dei contesti d'apprendimento allargati in senso capacitativo risulta inutile se non accompagnata dalla garanzia di poter disporre delle condizioni ed opportunità necessarie alla realizzazione dei funzionamenti prescelti.

L'educazione ha sempre dovuto fare i conti con il confronto fra differenze, e nello spazio fra di esse ha situato la sua riflessione pedagogica: è dunque pensabile un professionista dell'educazione che non faccia esperienza di tale diversità nel suo vissuto personale? I contesti multiculturali, le tensioni tra centro e periferia, tra globale e locale sollecitano la società civile ed i sistemi educativi ad una complessiva ri-valutazione dei principi e dei significati su cui stabilire il giudizio critico, l'autonomia di pensiero, la solidarietà. La riflessione contribuisce a rifondare in senso umanistico il significato del sociale: esso presuppone la capacità di concepire sé stessi non solo in quanto appartenenza ad un gruppo o contesto, ma soprattutto come esseri umani legati ad altri esseri umani dalla necessità di riconoscimento reciproco. È sufficiente soffermarsi a considerare le diversità culturali come espressioni di modi differenti di raggiungere scopi comuni, per poter riconoscere e rintracciare la matrice umana sottostante ogni azione particolare, che accomuna tutti nella ricerca di realizzazione dei funzionamenti esistenziali. Il discorso sulla capacitazione come garanzia di opportunità di scelta tra opzioni realizzative differenti si presta dunque anche all'interpretazione delle problematiche interculturali che un sistema formativo integrato si trova a dover affrontare. L'insegnante che interagisce con tali tensioni di differente matrice personale e culturale deve sviluppare competenze professionali che travalicano quelle tradizionalmente associate al suo ruolo. In questo senso, l'educazione prescolastica appare il contesto privilegiato su cui innestare nuove modalità di integrazione e reciprocità, capaci di costruire apprendimenti condivisi di emancipazione personale, e conseguire obiettivi di promozione della cittadinanza attiva.

La nuova funzione di sviluppo dei contesti d'apprendimento allargati rivaluta così il ruolo dell'insegnante, ponendolo al centro della mediazione e della gestione delle relazioni. Tale professionalità complessa esige ed introduce la necessità di un suo riconoscimento puntuale, normativo e pedagogico insieme, che consenta di generare opportunità e condizioni reali al suo sviluppo. Pensando alla necessità di emancipazione dal ruolo tradizionale, l'*Education International* contribuisce ad evidenziare la discriminazione di genere sottesa al fenomeno della femminilizzazione crescente nella professione insegnante. Essa indica come *"the disproportionate representation of male staff in ECE (Early childhood education) may wrongfully suggest that the role of educating and caring for young children should be the exclusive responsibility of women"* (Education International, 2013, 26). Puntare sullo sviluppo delle capacitazioni individuali e so-

ciali permetterebbe alle donne di emanciparsi dall'associazione tradizionale tra ruolo professionale e cura materna, permettendo loro di esprimere altre competenze e costruire funzionamenti raffinati.

### 3. Orizzonti di capacitazione

Il processo di capacitazione dei contesti d'apprendimento allargati nella costruzione di un sistema formativo produce una ricaduta di significato sul concetto dello sviluppo della professionalità docente. L'insegnante diventa capace di attivare nuovi dispositivi relazionali e comunicativi (es. empatici), modalità gestionali ed organizzative inedite, nuove strategie d'azione.

Tuttavia, una polarizzazione esculsiva su strumenti e dispositivi metodologici servirebbe solamente ad intaccare la superficie della problema: la validazione dei contesti educativi allargati, sia per la costruzione di capacità interne che combinate, richiede il passaggio da una visione centrata sulle competenze e sull'autoreferenzialità ad una realmente capacitativa ed emancipativa. Questo consente all'insegnante di non limitare il proprio sviluppo all'acquisizione di competenze comunicative, relazionali e gestionali allargate ma di attivare i contesti informali come dispositivi-cardine di opportunità di realizzazione della libertà sostanziale.

Lo sviluppo professionale deve consentire all'insegnante di valorizzare la propria agentività, rendendolo libero di attivare in senso capacitativo tutti quei processi lavorativi e personali coerenti con il suo progetto di vita. In tal modo la competenza si "spoglia" dal valore incrementale e performativo per assumere un significato olistico ed estensivo rispetto alla libertà d'azione, e diventa competenza ad agire. Ciò consente di operare una ridefinizione del legame formativo tra l'individuo, autore del proprio sviluppo, e la combinazione dei funzionamenti possibili che scaturiscono dall'integrazione dei contesti. Il dispositivo cardine su cui l'insegnante converte la propria professionalità, intesa quale opzione realizzativa, è costituito dalle risorse di apprendimento scaturenti dalla partecipazione democratica alla definizione sociale, derivate dai contesti allargati. Attraverso esperienze di negoziazione e condivisione sociale l'insegnante acquista capacità combinate di tipo riflessivo e critico-emancipativo, che gli consentono di raffinare le proprie capacità di giudizio e di comprensione, dispiegandogli nuovi orizzonti capacitativi e di scelta. È necessario dunque puntare sulla riquilificazione del profilo insegnante dotandolo della capacità di *agency*, come competenza ad agire all'interno di sistemi complessi e multiformi, potenziandoli in senso capacitativo. Gli orizzonti di capacitazione possibili si esprimono nelle seguenti accezioni:

### 4. Trasformare le relazioni in innovazione sociale

I contesti parentali ed intergenerazionali si trovano oggi ad affrontare problemi legati alla funzione educativa e alla mancanza di una progettualità esistenziale. Trovano inoltre difficoltà a reperire gli strumenti concettuali necessari per compiere scelte di valore e individuare criteri stabili in base ai quali orientare i propri interventi. La prospettiva che si intende avanzare confida nelle capacità della famiglia di trovare in sé stessa le forze per affrontare le difficoltà e le crisi, per vagliare proposte ed adeguarle ai bisogni evolutivi di tutti i componenti della famiglia, così come accade per tutti i partecipanti ai contesti di apprendimento allar-



gati. L'intervento istituzionale deve limitarsi a garantire sostegno esterno alla definizione valoriale che costituisce di per sé un fatto privato, seppur socialmente negoziato e condiviso. In *Development is freedom*, Sen giustifica l'esistenza degli assetti istituzionali nella misura in cui aderiscono ad un principio organizzativo superiore, fondato sulla *democrazia partecipativa*. La democrazia, grazie alla sua struttura fondata sul dibattito, il confronto intersoggettivo, la discussione e la trasparenza, garantisce una funzione di sicurezza protettiva dei processi istituzionali, e dunque potenzia la capacitazione individuale e collettiva.

Un sistema formativo integrato è per sua natura eterogeneo e composito, i suoi partecipanti sono portatori di storie e vissuti personali, prospettive e tendenze differenti, talvolta contrastanti. Il superamento dell'incomunicabilità e dell'opportunismo latente sono favoriti dal ricorso all'apprendimento cooperativo, che si genera lì dove l'azione collettiva converge sulla realizzazione di un obiettivo comune e alla sua significazione valoriale. Richiedendo responsabilità individuale, tale azione produce al tempo stesso l'acquisizione personale delle capacità necessarie a portare a termine il processo democratico. L'apprendimento che si genera nei contesti cooperativi permette non solo di passare da un sistema di *stakeholders* interdipendenti ad una rete di condivisione e negoziazione dei significati, ma determina la stessa modificazione del sistema, orientandolo in senso inclusivo ed emancipativo. Il *cooperative learning* diventa il dispositivo privilegiato su cui far dialogare intelligenze differenti e multiappartenenze, orientandole alla coesione sociale e allo sviluppo dell'innovazione (Ellerani, 2013)<sup>29</sup>.

Come riferito da Raffaghelli (2012)<sup>30</sup> per i contesti scolastici, anche entro i contesti d'apprendimento allargati si rende necessaria la predisposizione di un *setting* formativo che offra opportunità e situazioni di apprendimento reciproco, capace di spingere gli individui fuori dal tracciato ristretto ed autoreferenziale delle proprie prerogative esistenziali, al fine di contemplare nuove possibilità realizzative. Se lo sviluppo della capacità di attribuire significati diventa prioritario, in relazione alla proliferazione delle opportunità generate dall'incontro, anche le identità personali si strutturano insieme al sapere che vanno elaborando (Dallari, 2000)<sup>31</sup>. L'adozione di una pratica di tipo narrativo, il recupero delle capacità poetiche, narrative e la dimensione dell'esperienza estetica consentono di aprire nuove modalità di interpretazione e comprensione della realtà. Diventano spazio di comunicazione profonda tra gli individui, favoriscono la penetrazione delle differenze, e contribuiscono a valorizzare il denominatore comune sottostante, il senso dell'umanità diffusa. Oltre che una modalità di comprensione interculturale e intersoggettiva, la narrazione si qualifica a pieno titolo come elemento paradigmatico di fondazione pedagogica.

Tali riflessioni conducono ad una nuova interpretazione del concetto di *Life-long learning* in prospettiva *locale-divergente* (Alberici, 2004)<sup>32</sup>, al punto da de-

29 Ellerani, P. (2010). *Ambienti per lo sviluppo professionale degli insegnanti: Web 2.0, gruppo, comunità di apprendimento*, Milano: Franco Angeli.

30 Raffaghelli, J. E. (2012). *Apprendere in contesti culturali allargati. Formazione e globalizzazione*. Milano: Franco Angeli.

31 Dallari, M. (2000). *I saperi e l'identità. Costruzione delle conoscenze e della conoscenza di sé*. Milano: Guerini.

32 Alberici, A. (2004). *Prospettive epistemologiche. Soggetto, apprendimento, competenze*. In: Demetrio D., Alberici A., *Istituzioni di educazione degli Adulti*, Milano: Guerini associati.

terminare l'adeguamento della logica organizzativa delle istituzioni educative. Esse si aprono alla dimensione sociale allargata e si fanno terreno permeabile di sollecitazioni e contaminazioni reciproche tra formale e informale, ed assumono la forma della comunità educante (Gardner, 2011)<sup>33</sup>. In tal modo, le aspirazioni individualistiche di gruppi e singoli costruiscono strumenti per condividere socialmente pratiche ed obiettivi, che trovano negli insegnanti gli interlocutori formali capaci di orientare e qualificare in senso educativo i loro sforzi.

## 5. Trasformare lo sviluppo in agentività sostanziale

La nuova funzione connessa allo sviluppo della professionalità docente produce nuove prospettive entro i contesti più tradizionali del confronto professionale, cioè all'interno delle comunità di pratica (Wenger, 1998)<sup>34</sup> professionali, oltre ai nuovi contesti allargati di tipo sociale, parentale ed intergenerazionale.

Nelle *équipe* professionali, l'insegnante utilizza quella che Giddens (1999)<sup>35</sup> definiva come la riflessività di modernizzazione sociale, in cui le pratiche sociali (e professionali) sono costantemente riformate ed esaminate alla luce dei nuovi dati acquisiti su quelle stesse pratiche, alterandone il carattere in maniera sostanziale. Le sfide della contemporaneità chiamano le comunità professionali a scontrarsi con la crescente proliferazione delle conoscenze, anziché che con la loro mancanza, come succedeva in passato. Tale sovrabbondanza ha generato un'unica certezza, che è quella di trovarsi immersi nell'incertezza, nell'ambiguità e nell'ambivalenza. In questa situazione puntare sulla riflessività come riddiscussione costante e adozione di un atteggiamento critico permette di valorizzare le opportunità insite in tali contesti, rintracciabili nella libertà, disponibilità e apertura al cambiamento che essi consentono. La razionalità riflessiva indicata già da Schön (1993)<sup>36</sup> come "conversazione riflessiva con la situazione" distingueva tra una riflessività sull'azione, di retrospesione sulle ragioni che l'hanno prodotta, ed una riflessività in azione, volta alla regolazione e modulazione tempestiva dell'azione durante il suo compimento. Tale pratica di riflessività agentivo-trasformativa si propone qui quale meccanismo di capacitazione in quanto richiede agli insegnanti di assumere continui atteggiamenti di strutturazione e destrutturazione delle consapevolezze acquisite, e coinvolge le identità professionali in un continuo processo di ricombinazione delle capacità combinate. Tale logica di apprendimento permanente consente di situare lo sviluppo delle comunità di pratica in una prospettiva di innovazione professionale.

Come già visto, nei contesti parentali e intergenerazionali, l'insegnante si pone a sostegno del cambiamento nel sistema di relazioni familiari, affinché la famiglia costruisca un nuovo equilibrio al proprio interno e nel rapporto con il contesto sociale. L'azione professionale dell'insegnante non si limita alla pre-

33 Gardner, H. (2011). *Cinque chiavi per il futuro*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

34 Wenger, E. (2006), *Comunità di pratica. Apprendimento, significato e identità*, Milano: Cortina (ed. or: *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Oxford University Press. Oxford, 1998 Wenger, E., (1998).

35 Giddens, A. (1999), in U. Beck, A. Giddens, S. Lash (1999). *Modernizzazione riflessiva*. Trieste: Asterios.

36 Schön, D. (1993). *Il professionista riflessivo*. Bari: Dedalo. (ed. or: *The Reflective Practitioner*, Basic Books Inc, New York, 1983).

venzione o al rimedio compensativo dei problemi connessi all'educazione familiare, ma agisce incentivando l'estrinsecazione di nuove opportunità di crescita per tutti i partecipanti all'interazione. Il sostegno parentale fornito dall'insegnante si rivolge, in senso prospettico, all'emancipazione dell'intero nucleo familiare orientandolo all'incremento delle potenzialità individuali e all'ampliamento del suo spazio d'azione. In questo senso, lo sviluppo professionale docente realizza funzioni di consulenza proattiva (Simeone, 2002)<sup>37</sup> ai contesti parentali ed intergenerazionali, per dotarli di capacità di apprendimento e ricerca di soluzioni personalizzate.

L'insegnante/educatore attiva così nuove modalità di sviluppo delle capacità dei contesti d'apprendimento allargati, e nuove modalità di condivisione e negoziazione democratica entro i processi decisionali delle comunità professionali. L'azione professionale consente non solo di realizzare opportunità educative realmente inclusive, ma diventa capace di provocare delle ricadute significative in termini di attivazione e potenziamento delle risorse e delle dotazioni personali. Dal confronto intersoggettivo e dalle pratiche riflessive e di *counseling* si generano nuove modalità di interpretazione della realtà, che aprono prospettive inaspettate e generative di ulteriori sviluppi.

Il ripensamento dello sviluppo professionale passa dunque per il paradigma dell'agentività: la riflessività applicata all'azione individuale e sociale consente di praticare nuove modalità e forme di interazione/interpretazione/elaborazione della realtà (Striano, 2001)<sup>38</sup>. L'attività di *counseling*, come strumento di potenziamento delle risorse personali, si combina con la riflessività dotandola di agentività comunicativa (Habermas, 1986)<sup>39</sup> di stimolazione sulla produzione di nuovi significati, e quindi valida in senso euristico e critico-emancipativo..

Tali riflessioni producono un ripensamento sulle politiche di sviluppo professionale finora adottate. Riuscire a estrarre un potenziale formativo dal paradigma capacitativo della libertà d'azione consentirebbe di aprire nuove prospettive di formazione continua per gli insegnanti, sia di tipo individuale, che, soprattutto, di tipo collettivo. Ciò consentirebbe di dare vita a nuove forme di comunità di pratica allargate e a nuove reti di sviluppo professionale, in grado di rafforzare l'identità collettiva della classe docente e la sua voce negoziale all'interno delle politiche sociali.

## Conclusioni

La prospettiva di agentivazione in senso capacitativo permette dunque di agire in senso prospettico su tre fronti differenti: la nuova definizione dello sviluppo professionale e del suo significato paradigmatico producono nuovi modi di concepire la formazione degli insegnanti nei contesti prescolastici. si stabilisce il senso con cui intendere le politiche di *learnfare*. Questo consente di riflettere

37 Simeone, D. (2002). *La consulenza educativa. Dimensione pedagogica della relazione di aiuto*. Vita e Pensiero: Milano.

38 Striano ha analizzato le funzioni attribuite alla pratica riflessiva con riferimento all'agire educativo. (Striano, M., (2001). *La razionalità riflessiva dell'agire educativo*. Napoli: Liguori Editore).

39 Habermas, J.(1986). *Teoria dell'agire comunicativo*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

sul senso delle politiche e sulla necessità di definire un nuovo ruolo delle istituzioni sociali ed educative.

La prospettiva delle *capabilities* rileva l'urgenza di politiche globali di tutela dell'affermazione personale nei contesti professionali, che investono il concetto stesso della formazione. La connessione tra sviluppo professionale docente e capacitazione individuale e sociale tramite i contesti formativi allargati conduce a trasformare il concetto di formazione continua: la professione insegnante si allarga di confini e prospettive, conduce oltre il concetto di competenza – grazie a quello della consapevolezza riflessiva, trasformativa (Mezirow, 2003)<sup>40</sup>, e i concetti di autoefficacia ed *empowering* professionale –, valorizzando i vissuti culturali e professionali e aumentando il livello di *agency* personale.

I contesti dell'educazione prescolastica, proprio in quanto primo segmento dell'educazione formale in prospettiva longitudinale, assumono una funzione propulsiva sul nuovo modo di intendere la professionalità educativa. Questo implica l'adozione di nuove strategie di formazione a sostegno della capacitazione professionale. La formazione delle capacità combinate, integrate con le risorse dei contesti allargati, richiede delle garanzie di pratica delle libertà sostanziale. Le capacità combinate si creano agendo su diverse dimensioni: la creazione di opportunità di formazione continua di libera scelta dell'insegnante in base a desideri, interessi e motivazioni; il sostegno alla mobilità, anche professionale; la definizione di un nuovo profilo contrattuale, normativo ed istituzionale. Tali opportunità permetterebbero all'insegnante di riappropriarsi della sua libertà di sviluppo e trovare nuovo riconoscimento sociale. Tali interventi vanno ricondotti all'obiettivo generale di validazione del sistema formativo integrato, che dà valore alla partecipazione sociale e all'educazione familiare. Le relazioni formale-informale diventano, così, nuovi giacimenti di potenziamento intersoggettivo. Le opportunità latenti dei contesti informali rappresentano possibilità concrete di realizzare i propri funzionamenti: le condizioni/opportunità di conversione attivabili derivano dai *network* territoriali, dalle iniziative di *governance*, dal confronto con ambiti parentali, intergenerazionali e sociali in senso allargato.

Il potenziamento di reti e relazioni informali per la costruzione di un sistema formativo integrato consente di avviare la transizione verso un sistema di *New Welfare* che presuppone l'attivazione e mobilitazione individuale nella progettazione, gestione e raggiungimento degli obiettivi prescelti. Il senso di questo nuovo *Active Welfare* si dispiega nel superamento del concetto di bisogno: favorire e sostenere potenzialità e sviluppo personali abilita l'individuo a provvedere autonomamente alla propria soddisfazione, intesa qui in senso espansivo e realizzativo.

Le politiche vanno dunque orientate a predisporre gli accorgimenti e le misure necessarie a sostenere e promuovere la libertà individuale di realizzare sé stessi, individualmente e socialmente, in modo a costituire reti di reciprocità e supporto sociale. L'azione competente si pone come attivatrice di capacitazioni sociali che fa della riflessività il dispositivo sociale di ripensamento e adeguamento dell'azione competente: essa rimanda alla capacità di tornare su sé stessi in modo ricorsivo, ma anche alla consapevolezza che l'agire, la deliberazione sociale e il valore assegnato diventano suscettibili di continua ridiscussione e ridefinizione. Ciò permette a ciascun individuo di scegliere e perseguire responsa-

40 Mezirow, J. (2003). *Apprendimento e trasformazione. Il significato dell'esperienza e il valore della riflessione nell'apprendimento degli adulti*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

bilmente il proprio progetto di vita, attivare dispositivi di ripensamento e flessibilità personale e promuovere la capacità di pensiero in senso creativo ed innovativo. Il dinamismo e la capacità di rinnovamento costante attivato dai contesti sociali e relazionali allargati diventa il volano di un nuovo modo di intendere il *learnfare*, come capacità di promuovere autonomamente i processi di apprendimento permanente.

In tal modo lo stesso concetto di *welfare* come assistenza e sostegno ai più deboli assume una valenza più vicina al concetto di benessere, inteso come ri-personalizzazione e ri-appropriazione del valore semantico ed umanistico connesso alla partecipazione sociale. La finalità critico-emanipativa connessa alle politiche sociali si esprime così nel senso di capacitazione della cittadinanza attiva e dell'inclusione, come auspicato dalle politiche europee di carattere generale.

La ridefinizione del ruolo delle politiche sociali ed educative coinvolge anche le funzioni delle istituzioni sociali ed educative. Infatti, fenomeni quali la globalizzazione, i problemi di *welfare*, le nuove domande sociali hanno finito per svuotare il significato delle istituzioni. La rifondazione del significato umanistico dell'esperienza personale e il discorso sulle capacitazioni determina un ripensamento del ruolo delle istituzioni e propone un nuovo modello di finalizzazione pedagogica, fondato sulla difesa delle capacitazioni. Esse diventano un nuovo modo, più profondo ed estensivo, di intendere il concetto di "diritti umani". Nel suo ultimo libro "La Fin des societies", Touraine (2013)<sup>41</sup> sostiene che tutte le istituzioni sociali abbiano perso il loro significato originario. Secondo la nostra prospettiva, una risposta collettiva e individuale contro questo declino deve contemplare la difesa del diritto di capacitazione dell'uomo, e la seguente propagazione e diffusione di nuove forme di crescita individuale e sociale.

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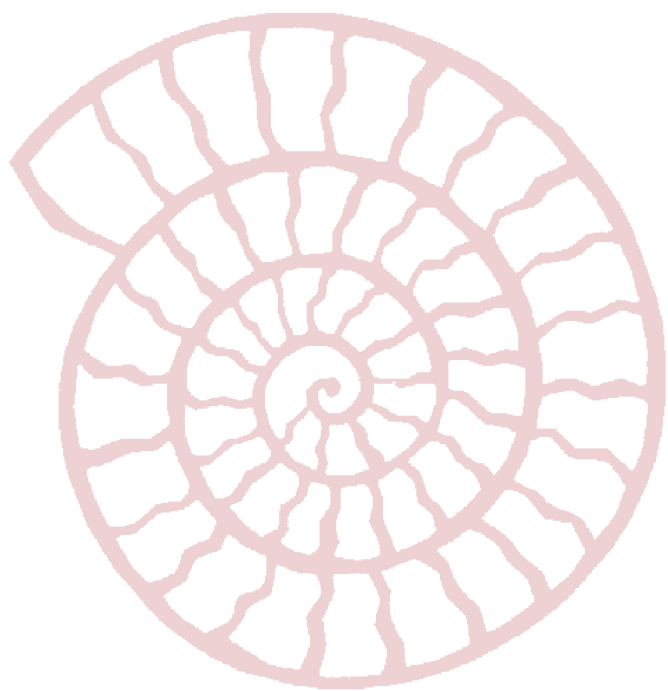
41 Il sociologo francese sostiene che la globalizzazione ha svuotato il significato delle istituzioni ed ha causato la "fine del sociale": a partire dallo studio della sociologia industriale e della formazione politica dei movimenti sociali, egli arriva a d affermare che la decomposizione del capitalismo industriale stia facendo perdere a tutte le istituzioni sociali il loro significato originario, e che per riempire il vuoto serve una risposta fondata sulla difesa dei diritti umani, come manifestato a livello mondiale da nuove soggettività espresse nei recenti movimenti sociali (Touraine, A. (2013). *La Fin des societies*. Paris: Seuil).

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Linguaggi creativi e riflessione degli adulti  
per trasformare la relazione educativa



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Creative languages and adults' reflection  
to transform the educational relationship





# Using picturebooks for intergenerational communication

## Usare picturebooks per la comunicazione intergenerazionale

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### ABSTRACT

This essay based on the opinion that the intergenerational communication is a prerequisite for a harmonic and creative coexistence of all members of a society examines the potential utilization of children's books, especially picturebooks, in the reinforcement of intergenerational relations. It also argues that children's books not only constitute a suitable tool for the reinforcement of the adult-child relationship but also constitute an interesting reading experience for the adult while contributing in a variety of different ways to the lifelong education of both adults and children.

Questo saggio parte dall'idea che la comunicazione intergenerazionale è un prerequisito per una convivenza armonica e creativa di tutti i membri di una società. Il lavoro esamina pertanto il potenziale utilizzo della letteratura per l'infanzia, in particolare i picturebooks, come mezzo per il rafforzamento delle relazioni intergenerazionali. Si sostiene, inoltre, che la letteratura per l'infanzia non solo costituisce uno strumento adeguato per il rafforzamento della relazione adulto-bambino, ma può diventare anche un'esperienza interessante per l'adulto, contribuendo in una varietà di modi diversi alla formazione permanente di adulti e bambini.

### KEYWORDS

Crossover children's literature, picturebooks, intergenerational communication, adult education

Letteratura per l'infanzia, libri d'immagini, comunicazione intergenerazionale, formazione degli adulti.

## Visiting books, instead for Introduction

Instead of the introductory comments regarding the issue of this essay which are common in such studies, I would like to begin by telling a story. I would like to tell a story just to give a good example which will show that a story for children is a good tool for the intergenerational communication. Let's see the book written by Mem Fox and illustrated by Julie Vivas, titled *Wilfrid ordon McDonald Partidge*, (1989). This is also the name of a boy, of a small boy with a big name. The boy lives next door to a retirement home and he is a regular and welcome visitor, he is friends with all old people who live there, but his best friend is Miss Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper, because she has a long name such as his, she has four names as he did. One day the boy overhears his parents saying that Miss Nancy has lost her memory. The boy is confused because he doesn't know exactly what memory means. It is an excellent book and it's important for the children to learn how to behave and interact with older people. After reading it, it also offers the opportunity to both adults and children to talk about it and collaborate and interact to make a list of memories. It is also a good story which shows that adults enjoy reading a book for children.

Another book for young children which deals with the issue of adults' memories but from another perspective is the *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)*, written by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard and illustrated by James E. Ransome, published in this book, two little girls, Sarah and Susan, visit their Great-great-aunt Flossie. Her house is crowded full of stuff and things. Books and pictures and lamps and pillows ... plates and trays and old dried flowers and boxes, and boxes of hats! The two girls pick out the hats and try them on. Aunt Flossie says they are her memories, and each hat has its story. Her collection of hats has lots of stories. Aunt Flossie goes back in time and revisits her past. She narrates to the girls her memories and stories that each hat brings to her, some of which relate to historical events, such as a big fire in Baltimore. During the narration the reader, either child or adult is encouraged to see the unlimited ways in which an illustrated book can act as an entry point for intergenerational communication. It also illustrates how important it is for an effective communication someone to narrate his/her memories and how important it is to ask questions and listen carefully to the answers.

In her book titled *A Day's Work* (1994), illustrated by Ronald Hilmer, Eve Bunting describes in a touching narration the difficulties of an adult in finding a job and especially of a grandfather of an immigrant background named Francisco, displaying an aspect of the adult reality.

A different approach on the labor subject is made by a different, humorous book for young children the *Click, Clack Moo: Cows That Type*, written by Doreen Cronin and illustrated by Betsy Lewin (1999). It begins with the problem of Farmer Brown: *His cows like to type. All day long he hears. Click, clack, moo. Click, clack, moo. Clickety clack, moo. At first, he couldn't believe his ears. Cows that type? Impossible!. Then he couldn't believe his eyes: Dear Farmer Brown, The barn is very cold at night. We'd like some electric blankets. Sincerely, The Cows". Farmer Brown said: "No way! No electric blankets" and the cows went on strike. The left a note on the barn door: "Sorry. We 're closed. No milk today". The next day the Farmer got another note: "Dear Farmer Brown. The hens are cold too. They'd like electric blankets. Sincerely, The Cows".* The story continues this way until the Farmer is finally forced to negotiate with the farm animals and find a satisfying solution for all of them. Although it is clear that it is a politicized book, what makes it interesting is that it offers a good opportunity to start a conversa-

tion between adults and children about matters of the adult reality. Of course we cannot avoid noticing the intertextual references to the book *Animal Farm* of George Orwell and that the cows' expression "No milk today" refers to the homonymous famous song of Graham Gouldman in this sense it triggers at the same time the adult readers to find their own communication points with the book.

## 1. Children's literature and adult reader

The books mentioned briefly above offer us a great opportunity to start thinking about the role of children's literature in the creation of opportunities of communication and the empowerment of the relationship between children and adults.

At the same time, they offer us a good opportunity to consider the relationship of an adult reader with a children's book. We should mention, however, that one of the things that sets children's literature apart from the rest of literature is that although it is created for children, the whole process of creation, promotion and distribution of children's books belongs to adults. This discrepancy between the target readership and the creators of the book has fueled many studies. On the other hand, this discrepancy gives the key to providing answers that surround the study of children's literature. Historically speaking, children's literature has shown that the role of adults is not only to control children's texts. In many cases and for a variety of different reasons, it is a fact that many adults enjoy reading children's books. They find them informative and entertaining. All that we have to do is visit Amazon or Goodreads websites and take a look at the readers' reviews to be convinced.

After all, a book for children, with words and pictures, or only with pictures, that speaks about social depravity, homosexuality or the Holocaust can certainly not be a book that addresses only children. Likewise, a book with a philosophical content that deals with the profundities of life, like *How to live for ever* (to mention a title of Colin Thompson book) or a book that reminds us that *You're Only Old Once* (to refer a humorous title of a Dr. Seuss book) can not be a book that addresses only children. The same is also true of books that draw their material from nostalgic images of the past or from popular myths and infuse them with new or different meanings, often leading to the reversal of truths that we so tenaciously held on to as children. Or, to slightly alter the words of Sergio Tofano, the truths "that belie our expectations".

Many children's books 'speak' to an adult readership. This, coupled with the fact that many of them share a close inter-textual relationship with adult literature, has the recently fired discussion in academic circles. The debate focuses on the facility with which children's literature crosses over to adult literature. It can communicate with both readerships and respond to the emotional, educational, aesthetical and overall needs of both age groups despite the fact that each age group communicates with books in a different way (Beckett, 2009; 2012). The recently invented term "crossover children's literature" assigns a theoretical framework to what we all already knew: namely, that book for children also reach out to adult readers, transcending boundaries and thus broadening its limits. In other words, in the wider sense of the term, it describes literary texts that spark the interest of a wide range of age groups. The reason for this new interest in "crossover literature" is that it has recently been noticed that many children's books address adults and children alike, and it's done on a very conscious level. If one takes into account the thematic content, the complex narrative techniques

and intricate structure and the inherent ideological meanings, one could argue that some children's books appear to have been written more for adults rather than for children.

There are many good reasons that explain why crossover literature is becoming so popular. One reason is the changes in the way people communicate today since the dividing line between what it means to be a child and what it means to be an adult today has become rather unclear (Falconer, 2009: 4). Another reason is the generation of baby boomers born after the Second World War who also played a part in this development (Nodelman, 1995: 92-93). This generation believed that children were far more mature than people had thought them to be. As a result, they had higher expectations of their offspring than ever before. There are quite a number of writers who claim that when they write they do not have any specific age group in mind and that their books are for any person of any age (Shavit, 1999: 89) and so a children's book winds up being 'suitable for adults' as well. Even so, what is important is not so much defining the term "crossover" (as no definition completely covers all parameters) but rather understanding that children's literature, now more than ever, has the power to bring adults closer to the literature of children and in so doing provides them with a splendid opportunity to better understand this phase of a person's development.

## 2. Crossover picturebooks

The term crossover has been linked to the term picturebooks. Studies by Nikolajeva and Scott (2006), David Lewis (2001), Nodelman (1988), just to mention a few, that look at picturebooks—despite the fact that each study has a different objective— all converge on one thing, namely, that the dynamic relationship between verbal and visual text in picturebooks is what determines the book's meaning. Picturebooks, with the innovative techniques they employ and the intricate dialogue that exists between picture and text not only create multiple levels of interpretation but also defy conventional norms and codes that have traditionally prevailed in illustrated books for children. This has resulted in the creation of a distinctive category of books, the crossover picturebooks. These books with their complex narrative techniques, their use of parody and irony in both image and text, their multiple points of focus, their meta-narratives and their postmodern narration are just a few of the elements that make picturebooks so interesting and captivating to adult readers.

Carol Driggs Wolfenbarger and Lawrence Sipe discuss the reasons why picturebooks are "a unique visual and literary art form" for all ages: "The process of reading these books [picturebooks] requires an active experience of creating routes of reading that account for the tension between words and images, references to related texts and specially located memories and meanings evoked by the text. Unfortunately, many readers leave primary grades with the idea that picturebooks are only for the very young" (2007: 378).

Sandra Beckett who has systematically studied crossover children's literature for roughly two decades now, in her latest study *Crossover Picturebooks: A Genre for All Ages*, notes that "because picturebooks offer a unique opportunity for collaborative reading between children and adults, they empower the two audiences more equally than any other narrative form" (2012: 2; see also Scott, 1999: 101).

### 3. Picturebooks and adult's training

The recent systematic and methodical study of picturebooks has shown that picturebooks can be used as suitable educational material for the training of both young adults and adults. They present a wide range of possibilities in visual literacy and can stimulate higher order thinking (see Martinez, Roser, Harmon, 2009: 291; Sharp, 1991) because of their social, political, cultural and historical references. Ben Miller and Michael Watts (2011), for example, while searching for picturebooks that could be used in Economics classes illustrate how some of them can be used for college level economics and others for economic units in elementary classrooms. They found that a very large number of picturebooks (which they have listed) cover an equally large number of relevant themes like discrimination, aging, demographics, competition, entrepreneurship, game theory, migration and others. Other studies show that picture books can be used for the teaching of foreign languages to adults and still others can be seen as a perfect tool for rekindling scientific curiosity or illuminating science topics no matter what the age of the learner. They also trigger, in the short time it takes to read them, a deeper understanding of a single concept (Bloem, 2012; Carr, Buchanan, Wentz, Weiss, Brant, 2001).

Each picturebook is different in its own way. Each has its own thematic material, its own ideology, narrative techniques, tone and organization of visual and lexical material. They all promote critical thinking in both children and adults and encourage encoding and decoding skills of visual and lexical messages. Many recently published picturebooks, like the picturebooks that I will consider, "utilize images to create settings that can literally set the plot in a certain surrounding." Their "visual codes also include motion lines, speech and thought balloons and interpicture words (words that appear inside image, but are not part of the narrative" (Nikolajeva, 2010: 60-61).

Many picturebooks act as mirrors in which the child can get a better look at himself/herself. This is also true of adults. Adults can ponder on their mistakes, their weaknesses or strong points and stand before all that is grand and significant in life. Picturebooks may offer them a chance to rethink their choices and their desires, the futility or the importance of their goals and how they may achieve them. Another important benefit is that adults, as co-readers with children, have a great opportunity to meet up and better communicate with their younger counterparts. In them, they can also find all sorts of interesting topics that deal with modern day life and its problems as the prevalent themes in children's books draw inspiration from a social context: social values, political and cultural themes are all very popular because they aim to help young readers familiarize themselves with the real world that surrounds them while at the same time proposing ways to better cope with it.

### 4. Picturebooks and intergenerational communication

However, I will not discuss the multitude of ways that picturebooks can be used in adult education programmes. Instead I will comment on specific parts of picturebooks that shed light on the reasons why they may be considered an interesting adult reading experience and a suitable material for the intergenerational communication.

Beginning our brief tour of the world of picturebooks let us pause for a while

at *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* by Maurice Sendak (1993), a book which, in the opinion of many critics, “is no longer a picture book for children.” Jane Doonan writes that it might seem that only adults with a religious background and a knowledge of the Holocaust could make anything out of *Dumps* and that Sendak has produced a picture book for them rather than for children” (Beckett, 2012: 4). Carol Scott in her study “Dual Audience in Picturebooks” poses a rhetorical question: “For who is this book intended?” because if it is for children, she wonders, then “What does Sendak hope to communicate to them? That they are entering a world that does not value them and has no place for them?” (1999: 99). Indeed, *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* is a book that sends out a strong political and highly social critical message by urging adults who read the book to own up to their responsibility for the agonizing reality of the homeless, innocent and abandoned “in the dumps” children, who have to live ‘in houses without walls’. The pictures dare adults to take a sharp, critical look at the world of homeless children who are, of course, the victims of an indifferent society. I could say modern society but history has shown us that throughout the ages children have always been subject to abandonment and abuse of all kinds.

In his book, Sendak makes use of two short nursery rhymes to which he incorporates a plot in order to construct his book. Despite the rhymes’ gibberish and surrealistic content, he injects them with meaning through his images and in so doing “interprets” them. The few words of the nursery rhymes

*We are all in the dumps / For diamonds are thumps / The kittens are gone to  
St. Paul’s! / The baby is bit / The moon’s in a fit / And the houses are built  
Without walls*

*Jack and Guy Went out in the Rye / And they found a little boy / With one  
black eye / Come says Jack let’s knock Him on the head / No says Guy Let’s  
buy him some bread / You buy one loaf / And I’ll buy two / And we’ll bring  
him up*

take on multiple meanings in a rather fraught ideological background (see also Yannikopoulou 2010: 171; Neumeyer, 1994: 30). Many of his pictures are not accompanied by text while others use comic techniques and still others present the text ingeniously embodied within the pictures. The pictures themselves narrate the story of the adventures of the homeless children who live in carton boxes. These unfortunate children are threatened by hunger, poverty and disease while the kittens and a little boy, the “poor little kid” as he is called, are abducted by a gang of Rats –that most probably symbolize adult corrupt power– until they are saved by Jack and Guy and the Moon. The illustrated narration of the book projects urgent social and political issues while the ideological content is shaped by subtle hints that refer to child cancer, aids and the Holocaust (see also Yannikopoulou, 2010: 171; Cech, 1995: 246-247; Neumeyer, 1994: 32-34).

The child reader follows the enigmatic plot and is entertained by the cartoon figures, the rhyming and the surrealistic metamorphoses of the Moon. His/her taste for adventure is sated by the abduction and the pursuing chase. The adult reader will also definitely find interest in the book’s meanings as they surface from the sharp sarcasm of the pictures, the exclamatory phrases entraped in cartoon balloons and the lexical items that are all an integral part of the plot.

The first and most obvious novelty that the reader encounters is the title page which is not at the front of the book but in the back. The cover page shows two little children standing in front of the dark, gaping face of the moon which looks



like a cave's opening. This picture, as Lawrence Sipe points out, is fraught with religious meaning as it carries influences by Andrea Mantegna's *Christ's Descent* (1996: 97). Some of the children are wrapped up or 'dressed' in the front pages of newspapers where only these printed headlines appear: *Leaner Times*, *Meaner Times*, *Homeless Shelters*, *Children Triumph*. The headlines of the newspapers have a protagonist role in the interior of the book so it may well be that the newspapers themselves convey the most important meaning of the book. The young reader will see that the children use the newspapers to cover their naked bodies and shield themselves from the rain and the wind. The adult reader, on the other hand, will read the headlines and discern the sharp sarcasm: "Housing Units", "Invest in property", "You can afford your own house". The newspapers themselves, once they have fulfilled their promotion of 'investment' programs, are really only good for the garbage dump but they come in handy to the homeless children. The newspapers symbolize the inadequacy of the Press to offer protection to the wretched and suffering people in today's society. Another bitter outcry against an apathetic society is how the "houses built without walls", that is, the carton boxes that the children live in, ironically enough, once contained the products of a good life ("uneda biscuit", "frozen foods").

Unlike most children's books, the main characters do not return to safety or to a better life after all their trials and tribulations. For them, there is only suffering, uncertainty, abandonment, fear and even the threat of death right through to the end of the book. On the first page of the book's interior, there is a picture of the protagonist, also known as the "poor little kid", who was abducted by the Rats. He could easily be taken for a poor boy from Somalia. If one takes into account the year the book was published, one can argue that this little, naked, dark-skinned boy represents all the poor children of Somalia. That's why Lawrence Sipe notes: "Sendak has changed the most violent image [of the nursery rhyme] 'the baby is bit' from the original 'the babies are bit', presumably to focus his story line and personalize it, as well as to connect the first rhyme to second" (1996: 90).

More and more picturebooks are turning to social themes with a political slant, moral dilemmas, or themes pertaining to our human existence. Sometimes the end of the story is left open, without clear cut explanations or answers, as seen in *We are all in the dumps with Jack and Guy*, most likely because some things can not be easily answered. Other times, there is a feeling of a quasi end, a dangling end, so to speak, whereby the ending of the book takes an unexpected turn or has a twist to it.

A good example of stories with unexpected endings is the collection of a retelling of classic fairy tales in *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales* written by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith (1992). It would be really interesting reading one of them such as the "The really ugly duckling": *Once upon a time there was a mother duck and a father duck who had seven baby ducklings. Six of them were regular-looking ducklings. The seventh was a really ugly duckling. Everyone used to say, "What a nice looking bunch of ducklings – all except that one. Boy, he's really ugly". The really ugly duckling heard these people, but he didn't care. He knew that one day he would probably grow up to be a swan and be bigger and look better than anything in the pond. Well, as it turned out, he was just a really ugly duckling. And he grew up to be just a really ugly duck. The End.*

Whatever the end may be, what is of more importance in these books is the way they shed light on different aspects of the issues at hand while at the same time encouraging logical associations and a thought-provoking quest for answers.

*The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales* is a typical example of a postmodern picture book. These retold narratives question their traditional counterparts with metafictional elements that cause havoc to the original organization of the stories while simultaneously parodying them. The reader will encounter a series of humorous twists and turns that defy literary convention and stereotypes in narrative structure.

The narrator is good ol' Jack from *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Jack undertakes the set up of the book. His role is to intervene and make sure that the thread that binds all of the retellings of these classic fairy tales remains unbroken. Things, however, are not always easy for Jack. Some of the heroes mess up his work by appearing where they shouldn't appear. The hasty Little Red Riding Hood begins her story before the reader even reaches the title page. Jack, much annoyed, shuts his ears to the piercing, visually painted red voice of hers and interrupts saying: *Listen Hen – forget the wheat. Here comes the Title Page*. But it isn't just Little Red Riding Hood who plays with the book's entire set up. It is also Jack who moves the endpaper to the interior of the book in order to outsmart the giant: *Shhhhh. Be very quiet. I moved the endpaper up here so the Giant would think the book is over*. And here's something else that's weird. The Table of Contents is found somewhere inside the pages of the book. And if were it only that! In one of the first pages, the dedications are printed upside down. There is a reason for this as Jack explains: *I know, I know. The page is upside down. I meant to do that. Who ever looks at that dedication stuff anyhow? If you really want to read it- you can always stand on your hand*.

Apart from the humorous, crazy set up of the book, the surrealistic content and equally surrealistic rapport of the characters as well as its peritextual elements, all conspire to carry the book to its funny, surrealistic ending. Generally speaking, the book's whole set-up is an exceptional example of the role of peritextual elements in the shaping of meanings (see Sipe, 2010; Sipe, McGuire, 2006; Sipe, 2001). Printing elements such as the characters of the typeface also play a definitive role. They grow, shrink, spread, or fade away. Sometimes they follow a linear pattern while at other times a curved one. In this way, the lexical text also becomes a visual text that each and every time lends a special or additional meaning. When traditionally conventional practices or set perceptions are questioned, old meanings and ideas are infused with new ones. So it is with children's literature. The new replaces the old and the familiar, new dimensions are charted, and different ideologies are formed (Oikonomidou, 2000). As true as this may be, these new perspectives are better understood and appreciated by seasoned readers who have previous knowledge of the original texts of fairy tales as well as of literary conventions as a whole. Even so, young children today are very good at decoding short and multi-meaningful visual messages. This no doubt helps them in their ability to better communicate with picturebooks. For the adult reader, postmodern picturebooks parody popular fairy tales, ones they are very familiar with, within a modern framework. They offer up a wonderful opportunity for them to rethink the same stories in their new dimensional settings and in so doing re-evaluate the world they live in and its conventions (Kanatsouli, 2000).

After reading the book we can discuss with the children and ask them about the obstacles the characters have to face or if they are able overcome them and what choices did they make. We can also discuss the effects of the changes made in the traditional fairy tales and we can cooperate in order to locate the elements, printed, artistic, narrative or other which are responsible for the various shades of meaning of every retelling.

## Conclusions

Books for children says Sandra Beckett “read by adults, are often seen merely as ‘escapist pap’ or an indication of ‘the infantilization of adult culture’ and the ‘dumping down’ of culture in general”. It would be better she continues to say that instead of talking about the “infantilization of adults to talk about the “adultization of children and young adults” because children’s literature is becoming “more adult as children and adolescents become increasingly sophisticated” (2010: 65-66).

Of course, international social and technological changes from the 1960 s onwards have inevitably influenced the content and form of children s books. The advent of television, in particular, had a huge impact on children’s literature. Exposure to images through television screens made children and adults alike more aware of the problems and the ills of modern-day life. In a sense, this freed creators of children’s books because it enabled them to deal freely with difficult themes that traditionally adults did not want their children to know about. Authors of children’s books looked at writing as an innovative, creative practice whereby they could “use complex narrative techniques with more innovation and audacity than authors writing exclusively for adults.” This resulted in a quality upgrade of many children’s books and a new “very sophisticated style” that drew readers of all ages (Beckett, 2010: 67).

This new “very sophisticated style” owes its existence to the power of picturebooks to defy literary and structural conventions, discover new codes and ‘talk to’ literary tradition and previous artistic creations as well as to the fact that modern reality offers many levels of interpretation and meaning.

I think it is worth mentioning that in 1986, Theodor Seuss Geisel’s celebrated his 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday with the publication of his new *You’re Only Old Once. A Book for Obsolete Children*. On the back page we read:

*Is this a children’s book?  
Well ... not immediately.  
You buy a copy for your child now  
And you give it to him on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

Of course, he doesn’t literally mean it. He means something else: that picturebooks have at least an equal place in any adult’s library with other so-called ‘adult’ books and that they can offer an equally interesting reading experience.

Summing up, I hope that after our “visit” of picturebooks we infer that books for children can offer an equally interesting reading experience for adults and can be used not only as educational material or only as a medium for intergenerational communication, but also as a medium of enjoyment. Moreover children’s books can stimulate reflection. In other words, they can make adults think about the different or alternative ways of being and acting in every day life.

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# How children's books can help parents understand their children

## Come la letteratura per l'infanzia può supportare i genitori nel comprendere i propri figli

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### ABSTRACT

Children between the ages of four and six are overcome by strong emotions which can stem from feelings of insecurity, fear and inadequacy as they struggle to understand and become a part of the world that surrounds them. Children's stories can be a valuable tool in helping parents and guardians understand and decode children's behavior. Because children can not yet verbally express themselves adults must be able to decode their ways of communicating. Children's books with children as protagonists can offer valuable insight to the inner world of children as well as entertainment to both children and adults alike. These stories are intergenerational. They not only help small listeners discover role models but also provide literary enjoyment to adults.

I bambini di età compresa tra quattro e sei anni sono scossi da forti emozioni che possono derivare da sentimenti di insicurezza, paura e inadeguatezza in una lotta per capire ed entrare a far parte del mondo che li circonda. La letteratura per l'infanzia può essere un valido strumento per aiutare i genitori e in generale gli adulti a capire e decodificare il comportamento dei bambini. Poiché i bambini di queste età si esprimono diversamente dagli adulti, questi devono essere in grado di decodificare i loro modi di comunicare. La letteratura per l'infanzia, con i bambini come protagonisti, sono in grado di offrire informazioni preziose sul mondo interiore dei bambini, nonché essere un grande intrattenimento per bambini adulti. In questo modo, possiamo considerare queste storie come intergenerazionali: non solo aiutano i piccoli ascoltatori a scoprire se stessi, ma risultano in oltre una valida forma di godimento letterario per gli adulti.

### KEYWORDS

Crossover literature, children's literature, power and control over children, parental role models, subjectivity.  
Incrocio narrativo, letteratura per l'infanzia, potere e controllo dei figli, modelli di genitorialità, soggettività.

## Introduction

The phenomenon of adults and children reading the same texts is by no means a new one. Before children's literature was established as a distinct genre, there were many books whose stories were gripping enough to be enjoyed by children as well by their parents.

### 1. Children's Literature: A crossover literature

As Pat Pinsent points out, "the phenomenon of readers who defy boundaries is common for books which, while ostensibly addressing children, have attracted adults whose nostalgic memories of childhood classics are blended with an increased awareness of their hidden depths" (Pinsent, 2004, p. 3). The argument that children's books can offer adult readers a kind of escape from their own grim reality into an idyllic world of innocence is definitely a good one. Jacqueline Rose (1984) supports the view that children's literature was invented by adults for adults so that through children's texts they may cling onto a sense of long-lost innocence—which of course is an illusion—which they believe is the hallmark of childhood.

Another factor leading to books crossing age boundaries is the role of parents as the first mediators to their children of fairy tales and other stories. However, this adult mediator role does not seem to belong to the phenomenon of crossover literature which by definition is "a literature which addresses a diverse, cross-generational audience that can include readers of all ages" (Beckett, 2009, p. 3). It would appear that the boundary between what an adult reads to his children and what he chooses to read for himself are two different things. As true as this may be, the fact still remains that it is far from clear whether adults as mediators read solely for the sake of the child or whether they also read for their own purposes and pleasure as well.

I will address the role of the adult who reads stories to children or for children for the double purpose, whether intentional or unintentional, of better understanding them and so being in a better position to offer them their help and guidance. It should be remembered that categorizing readers based on the age factor is a very recent practice which mainly serves commercial necessities (Beckett, 2009, p. 11). For years and years folk tales were narrated in public to the entire local community regardless of age differences. Both young and old listened to these tales together. Even when the scenes got scary, the children were present. By listening to these tales, children were very early on familiarized with the difficulties and obstacles of real life which were rendered symbolically through the art of storytelling.

I shall use this past tradition of adults, and in particular parents, who read the same stories as their children but, of course, I shall place it within a modern framework. The adult who reads these stories aims to decode the fictional child's way of thinking so as to better understand, help, support and offer relief to his own child. This, however, is not the only advantage. Through reading texts for children, he inevitably learns a lot about himself as well. He may, in a sense, remember his own reading experiences as a child which offers him the opportunity to ponder on his very own inner self. Francis Spufford says it well: "The words we take into ourselves help to shape us. They help form the questions we think are worth asking; they shift around the boundaries of the sayable inside us, and

the related borders of what is acceptable; their potent images [...] dart new bridges into being between our conscious and unconscious minds (Spufford, 2002, p. 21-22).

## 2. Methodological issues

As can be concluded from my introduction, my scientific method will be to approach literary characters, both adults and children alike, with the help of the discipline of psychology, at times using psychoanalytic theories and combining them with Sandra Beckett's (1999, 2009) views of crossover fiction or kidult fiction as it is sometimes called (Gonzalez Cascallana, 2004, p. 165). "Crossover fiction" means the reading of texts based on the double audience they address. To this psycho-centric approach, I will also incorporate the very interesting sociological point of view of Joseph Zornado on the ways modern adult culture shapes the development and personality of children.

I shall begin with Joseph Zornado. Although I do not agree with his theory in its entirety, I will make use of it mainly as a tool that will allow me to adopt a critical stance of the ways that the subconscious intentions of adults who, through literary narration, attempt to communicate with children and get into their minds and the way they work. Parents' intentions, on a subconscious level, despite their indisputable love for their children are not always a priori well-meaning and positive. In Zornado's opinion, adults are indoctrinated into the mainstream ideology as a result of their own educational background and cultural accretion. As a result, they tend to reproduce and impose their own dominant and often times oppressing ways of thinking onto their children. The same happens in their literary narrations for children.

Here is a characteristic example of Zornado's position: the infant comes into the world and is almost always greeted by an institutional hierarchy that immediately represents to the infant the nature of the lived relationship as an event of power and control [...] Children's literature is a part of a montage of adult cultural practices that, along with child rearing pedagogies, speaks to the cultural context that gives to adult authors and children's texts and so to a reproduction of unconscious relational practices bent on exercising and justifying adult power over the child (Zornado, 2001, p. XVI-XVIII).

The books I shall discuss address the ages between five and eight. I believe that in this phase of a child's development, adult control over children is inevitable seeing as children are not yet capable of protecting and guarding themselves. This makes exercising some measure of control over them more readily acceptable. Perhaps the key question that remains to be answered is the level of control that should be used. But allow me start with a few indicative examples.

## 3. Children's fears and children's literature

Oscar (*Oscar y El Leon de Correos – Oscar and the Post Office Lion*) is a boy who is very afraid. In his overactive imagination the iron lion at his neighborhood's post office building takes on real life dimensions. Every time his mother sends him to the post office to mail a letter by putting it in the lion's huge and permanently open mouth, Oscar comes face to face with his fears. He is scared to death that the lion with his wide open mouth will devour him all in one single gulp. The

same happens at night when he can't sleep out of fear of the boogey man lion. Here are some excerpts:

He needed to have three lights on: the overhanging light fixture, his bedside lamp and the corridor light as well.

[...]

Would he drag him by his feet? Pull out his hair? Or would he do something so terrible that he could hardly imagine it? Oscar didn't dare scream out of fear that his voice would not come out or that the boogey man would pounce on him. Whenever he felt him close he would remain totally still and shut his eyes with all his might. He could hear the boogey man's footsteps and feel his breath. His fear wouldn't allow him to open his eyes and face him.

The underlying fears that torment the boy lose their power when they are rationalized. In this particular story, adult intervention and how it is done is crucial. It is the post office manager himself who intervenes and comes to Oscar's aid. He explains to the boy how the lion's mechanism works and in so doing helps the boy see how groundless his fears are. Also, his father – in the delightful ending of the story – will confess that he, too, had the same fears for the very same lion when he was little boy.

It is natural that children who live in their own fantasy worlds should give flesh and blood to the personal ghosts that disturb, haunt and frighten them. Jackie Stallcup points out: "many modern picture books seek to reassure children that they have nothing to fear from imaginary dangers while at the same time demonstrating that there are very real dangers that only adults can defuse" (Stallcup, 2002, p. 126).

Psychologists keep on reminding us that all adults including parents should not try to inflict their sterile perfectionism on children. Trying to forcefully chase away a child's fear is not always the recommended thing to do and rarely does it ever work. There are other methods, smarter ones, such as what Oscar's father did when he spoke to Oscar about his own childhood fears. Or like the post office manager himself when he provided a logical explanation to Oscar of how the lion machine worked. It is important for children and the adults who nurture them to understand that fears, to a certain extent, are natural and that people of all ages have them (Rogge, 2006, p. 65). When adults use that kind of honest approach, children feel that they are being sincerely supported and understood, that the adults around them really do comprehend the emotional difficulties they face when it comes to working out and overcoming their fears.

#### 4. Loss in Children's Literature. Transitional objects

In another book, *The Snowman Took Mom Away* by Voula Mastori, certain habits that many young children have cause adult concern. It could be the loss of a very dear person belonging to a child's immediate environment, for example a mother, or perhaps the child feels deprived of love and attention by the adults in his/her life. Very often this will lead the child to seek for a substitute figure in order to fill the void that has been created. Pacifier, thumb sucking, teddy bears, security blankets or any kind of comfort toy provide the child with the sense of touch that is so vital to if he/she is to overcome the loss or sense of deprivation (Rogge, 2006: 74-77). Let's look at an example of when children first attend kinder-



garten. In the beginning, they usually suffer fear and anguish when the time comes to let go of their caretaker's hand:

It was cold that day. No matter how tightly I squeezed into my coat my shaking wouldn't stop. Even mom's hand was cold. Still, this didn't stop her from taking me to that nursery school. So here I am. With all the other children scattered about and me clutching my mother's hand and her handbag ... just for good measure (*The Snowman Took Mom Away*, 24-25).

The tragedy of loss is enacted by many of the characters and in many acts in this multicultural school. It is there, at the school, that the children feel the first pangs of loss. The teachers understand the little dramas in the hearts of the children and so let them cry for as long as they need to. In time, each child reveals his or her own way of dealing with his or her fears and insecurities, for example, when Sou turns to his towel:

He was yellow with black, narrow eyes and a huge towel [...] he wouldn't go anywhere without his towel. Even when he went to the bathroom, he would take his towel with him even though it was troublesome. See, if it went to school surely they would put it in a higher grade than Sou (37).

The towel gives Sou what he needs at that particular point of his life, a familiar reference to hold onto. It is a substitute just like a pacifier or a teddy bear. It helps him cope with the loss of his loved ones in a new environment, very different from his family environment.

These "transitional objects" as they are called act as a symbolic connection to the need for a maternal presence. They have the magical power to offer love and in so doing may bridge the void that is created by the temporary or permanent absence of a mother. The mother as an external object becomes one and the same as the internal mother presence in the child. The object acts as a buffer to the child's loneliness. It is a constant reminder to the child that he/she is not alone. Stuffed animals for example spark the memory of the warmth and softness of a mother's body (Kashdan, 1999, p. 124-127), their importance is so great that some researchers believe they make up the core of adult life (Kidd, 2011, p. 50). If seen in this perspective, as a means to balance internal voids, as antidotes to the pain of loss, then, parents can understand why children use them for extended periods of time.

## 5. Ego and alter-ego in children's books

Children who feel unloved or are in fact unloved by the people who most closely surround them often display disturbed behavior. In the following story the main character of the story creates an alter-ego, someone his own age, who is to him real and visible when, of course, others can't see him. In *My friend Jimmy* by Elena Artzanidou, Dimitri blames his imaginary friend, Jimmy, for all his mischief which, of course, is clearly not true as he (Dimitri) is the only real child in the book:

In the end, I paid dearly for your huge appetite. Mom knew that we had eaten all her cookies, the orange ones that we liked so much. If you could

have heard her shouts, never mind the punishment she allotted, you wouldn't be standing there so calm and cool. Say something, don't just stand there! Aren't you going to ask me what the punishment was? (p. 14) [...]

Whenever we are up to no good, afterwards, no matter what I say, you never say a word. But whenever you want to cook up trouble, you never shut up until you drag me into it, too (18).

Dimitri's imaginary friend is a reflection of what is going on in Dimitri's mind. He also very conveniently acts as a scapegoat, a way to defend himself whenever he misbehaves and adults want to punish him. Or, it could be that his little mind is simply unable to separate what is real from what is imaginary.

The story's intention is educational, not only because it emphasizes the type of punishment that Dimitri's actions bring about but mainly because it stresses the importance of the literary child's socialization, and through him, of course, the child reader's as well. Dimitri often automatically calls on his imaginary friend like when he is given his milk to drink: "But Jimmy has to drink his milk, too!" he says to his mother who plays right along saying: "Oh, yes, of course, I'll put him some milk, too." In the house, maybe he can get away with it but it isn't so easy to do outside the house. Other people think Dimitri is a weirdo, for example, his teacher who comments: "Again he is talking to himself!" And his classmates call him "loony."

It is only when he leaves the comfort and safety of his inner world and becomes friend with a real live boy, a classmate of him, that the need for an imaginary friend is eliminated. All types of neuroses come about when basic needs on an organized hierarchy are not met (Bosmajian, 2009, p. 191). The insecurity that a lonely child or an only child may feel often leads him to behave in ways that seem strange to others. So, an adult can help a child who has concocted an imaginary friend by introducing real live playmates into the child's life. By communicating with real flesh and blood playmates, the child can let go of his fantasy world and enter the real world.

## 6. Protective parents

Parental role models, that is to say, behaviors that parents develop to protect and better deal with their children present a wide variety in children's literature. After a surging wave of books with a rather liberal penchant that advocated non-dominating tactics, more and more books are now stressing the importance of parents adopting stricter, more traditional roles in the upbringing of their children. Equally important is the need to intervene more often in their children's lives. This seems to be especially true in the portrayal of the father figure in books. In place of the rather "feminist" daddies that were once so popular, we now see fathers who without losing an iota of their gentleness and keen interest in their children's upbringing are also coming across as dynamic and self-sufficient role models.

This is what the little literary boy in Svein Nyhus's *Daddy* believes. Little Tommy, right from the start of the book, wonders where his daddy is. He wants to see him very much and he remembers (or thinks that he remembers) how his father would "assemble his toys without even reading the directions" and other such accomplishments like "Dad can open a lock without a key." The book's illustration of the father is super-sized most likely to emphasize the unfailing admiration that little Tommy has for him.

Agnes Margrethe Bjorvand rightly observes that Tommy's happy relationship with his father is somewhat ambiguous. It could be that Tommy dreams of having such a wonderfully close relationship with his father or it could be wishful thinking on his part (Bjorvand, 2010, p. 230). The book's literary reality reinforces the uncertainty. Tommy's father is often away on business. So, it could be that Tommy's fixation with his father – there is no mention of a mother – is due to the fact that he very rarely sees him and so misses him to the point that he idolizes their relationship.

What is most importantly accentuated in the book is the boy's need for a strong father figure, one with typical masculine traits. Fine and well, we may think, but surely what is even more important is the child's need to feel loved and protected. However true this is, the need for a father figure seems to outweigh all other needs. In fact the book promotes the typical macho stereotype father image and encourages real fathers to respond to this stereotype.

Regardless of the degree of tolerance displayed by parents, the book expounds on the need to provide a secure, stable and trusting environment for their children. This is the message Isidoro's parents try to get across to him when they see him sad about not being able to go on summer holidays due to the financial crisis. Quite imaginatively they make up a fictional character, someone who has been shipwrecked and who sends Isidoro letters telling him how to transform his house into a holiday place:

I have a marvelous idea! It just came to me. The word house (which you say is the most boring place in the world) begins with an H just like Hios, Halki and Hawaii. So, what about transforming your house into an island? Think of it! And if you want I can give you some terrific ideas (*Holidays at home with Isidoro*, 25).

Of course in real life real parents do not have the time or energy to act so inventively and imaginatively to their children's needs. Often, they are totally unprepared for such a responsibility. As true as this may be, they can pick up ideas and find inspiration in the smart plots of children's books and in so doing face up to their own difficulties in dealing with situations and the profound needs of their children.

The little girl in *I Like to Scream* discovers very early on that by screaming and shouting she can get what she wants. She tries it out a first time and when she sees that it works like magic she permanently adopts this method to have all her wishes fulfilled:

- My voice is magic! They give me anything I want just so I won't bother them and to just make me stop shrieking and scaring them. When it's cold outside and I first ask gently and politely my mother for ice cream:
- Mom, I want an ice-cream cone.
- Mom tries in her own way and says: –You'll get sick. Think about for a minute.
- But I want ice-cream, I go on to say.
- Mom again insists and says no.
- I want ice-cream, I insist.
- Mom still says no. Then I open up my big mouth and start screaming.
- I said I WANT ICE-CREAM!
- And Mom gives it to me.

The book vividly portrays how the little girl uses all kinds of tricks to get her way. She has her mother twisted around her little finger. By threatening to

scream at the top of her lungs she controls the adults in her life. But as soon as she goes to kindergarten she enters a totally new environment and another phase in her life. Her wants constantly clash with the wants of the other children. It soon becomes evident that the only way to survive is through everyone making mutual concessions. The well-trained teacher of course knows this and shows –to the readers- proper ways that an adult should deal with children: namely that an adult should keep a balance and not give into the inflated ego of a child. That he/she should teach the child the meaning of boundaries, the limits they are allowed to go to. And so, our little heroine is forced to accept the boundaries set down for her. She learns that there are lines that simply can not be crossed. In other words she is taught to respect other people's space.

- Can I watch TV, mom?
- No, she says. And even when I hear this word that I can't stand, I don't scream like I used to.

### 7. Multiple points of view in children's books

In the existing plethora of books which deal with the way parents deal with their children there are innumerable variations. As adults what we tend to notice first is the various types of pedagogical perceptions – ranging from liberal to conservative, from democratic to authoritative– that characterize the child/adult relationship. What usually evades adult readers, however, is that either way what is projected at all times is the will and desires of adults onto their children. The shaping of children's characters and how they will turn out to be as adults is determined by adults, first and foremost the parents, who impose their standards on them through controlling behaviors. When this control is exercised gently but firmly and not in an oppressive, domineering way, it is better accepted by the child but also plays a more determinative role in the child's development.

As much as these books, like the examples I have cited, allow plenty of margin for the adult to peruse, accept or reject this or the other pedagogical perception, like Jornado says, they do not offer much guidance in helping him/her realize the extent of his power over the child. They muddle reality and prevent him/her from questioning his own intentions and the mainstream culture as well.

Books that do not take a supporting stand, however indirectly, for this or the other pedagogical scheme but instead lead adults to perceive that the adult/child relationship is primarily structured on the basis of adult control and authority are books that through characterization introduce a variety of subjective viewpoints. This can happen within children's books. For example, in Alvin Granowsky's book, the famous story of Jack and the beanstalk is presented from two points of view, that of Jack's and that of the giant's. The first version is the classical story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, known to all of us. In the second version, the giant's wife tells the story of how Jack stole the money, the harp and the goose that laid golden eggs from her good-hearted dead husband (*Giants Have Feelings, too. Another Point of View*). The story is reversed and the giant is a good man who falls victim to Jack's cunning exploitation of him.

In Anthony Browne's illustrated book *Voices in the Park* there are four different points of view of the same events that take place in a park. Each character narrates his own version of the events. There is a bossy mother, her son whom she oppresses, a disappointed father and his very active daughter. The four points of view are marked by a change in typeface (Schwenke Wyile, 2006, p. 187).

The book illustrates to the adult reader that all points of view, no matter how subjective, are equal and that all could be a likely account of the events in the park. None are subject to criticism. The adult reader comes face to face with his/her own self and has the opportunity to self observe and ruminate on the power privileges that mainstream ideology can exercise on children. These kinds of books can make the adult reader re-evaluate his subconscious beliefs and even go so far as to demolish them.

In *Zoom* by Istvan Banyai, the reader sees how modern books for children reassess or demolish popular perceptions on what children should be allowed to read depending on their age. In many ways, it is also a philosophical book as it illustrates the relativity between shifting points of view. In this wordless picture book, the faceless observer, every two pages, zooms in and out of what he has seen in the previous two pages and from his new position sees much more. He/she is therefore forced to broaden his understanding and to admit that the way we perceive of things is relative and dependent on circumstances. Therefore, he comes to realize that he has to be very careful when standing up for his views especially when he tries to impose them onto young children.

## Epilogue

The adult who reads literature with his child or for his child can absolutely find ideas on how to deal with the childhood phase of his children. But he can also find his own thought processes, his own ideas which he can re-evaluate and in so doing come to a better understanding of his own intentions and courses of action. It is many ways not unlike an epiphany. He/she comes to realize that texts for children have a sub text or “shadow text” which addresses him or her only. “The simplicity of texts of children’s literature is only half the truth about them. They also possess a shadow, an unconscious – a more complex and more complete understanding of the world and people that remains unspoken beyond the simple surface but provides that simple surface with its comprehensibility. The simple surface sublimates – hides, but still manages to imply the presence of – something less simple” (Nodelman, 2008, p. 206).


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# Towards a framework for the design of socio-technical environments for intergenerational learning in community settings

## Verso un framework per il disegno di ambienti socio-tecnici per l'apprendimento intergenerazionale nelle comunità

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### ABSTRACT

This article introduces a reflection and practical insights for the design of intergenerational learning environments for community settings or spaces of border learning: spaces standing mid-way between the formal structures of scholarly institutions and the informal and fluid spaces of interaction characteristic of local communities. The paper is written from a theoretical standpoint informed by experiential education and critical pedagogy, drawing in particular on the insights of John Dewey and Paulo Freire. It focuses on the potential of cyclic models of inquiry for informing the design of socio-technical environments in which intergenerational groups are involved in bi-directional learning practices. A framework for the design of intergenerational learning environments is introduced, and its application is exemplified with data from a participatory content creation project involving two rural communities.

Questo articolo introduce una riflessione e spunti pratici per la progettazione di ambienti di apprendimento intergenerazionale in contesti di comunità o comunque spazi di apprendimento oltre il confine: spazi a metà strada tra le strutture formali delle istituzioni accademiche e gli spazi informali e fluidi di interazione caratteristici delle comunità locali. Il lavoro si è basato, dal punto di vista teorico, dalle idee della formazione esperienziale e la pedagogia critica, attingendo in particolare da John Dewey e Paulo Freire. La ricerca si concentra sul potenziale di modelli ciclici di ricerca basata su progetto come base alla progettazione di ambienti socio-tecnici in cui i gruppi intergenerazionali sono coinvolti in pratiche di apprendimento bidirezionali. Viene introdotto un quadro di riferimento per la progettazione di ambienti di apprendimento intergenerazionale esemplificando i concetti o con i dati di un progetto di creazione partecipata di contenuto culturale, che coinvolge due comunità rurali.

### KEYWORDS

Community education, intergenerational learning, lifelong learning, inquiry-based learning, participatory content creation, technology-mediated learning

Educazione a livello di comunità, apprendimento intergenerazionale, apprendimento permanente, apprendimento basato sulla ricerca, creazione partecipata di contenuto, apprendimento mediato da tecnologie.

## Introduction

Some of the most promising developments brought by digital technology to education happen at “the edge of the educational establishment” (Brown, 2005). Developments can include new models, new tools, and new learning spaces that step out of conventional patterns and boundaries. Novelty is not always experienced as a rupture. It can be instantiated as a form of continuity, dwelling on new understandings and applications of established models and practices, or the re-envisioning of spaces and tools to sketch novel teaching-learning scenarios. The blend of digital technologies and experiential education principles can be thought to mark just this kind of continuity in community education. Communities are spaces of experience and spontaneous social interaction. Everyday interactions are accompanied by information exchange, and in some instances become contexts for rich knowledge production episodes, for instance when telling the story of a long-passed communal event. Communities are therefore as well natural places of learning. Yet, learning happens in spontaneous, fragmented and unstructured ways. The ensuing knowledge may be as well unstructured, often tacit, deprived of critical reflection and conscious pursuit. It is on the outline of these fragmented processes and tendencies that novel learning environments can be designed that account for both individual and collective learning needs. In this context, digital technologies can be used to support knowledge production and exchange, augment authorial experiences and provide new platforms for interaction and networking. These environments promise to develop into context-specific and community-driven hubs for lifelong learning, alternative educational spaces that offer possibilities for growth and development that are only superficially or insufficiently afforded by scholarly institutions. Novel learning spaces can encourage individual learning while supporting the community to grow as a collective whole, by strengthening bonds among members, facilitating the expression and circulation of knowledge among different generations, and nurturing well-being and development.

This article engages with these issues and provides a reflection and practical insights for the design of community-based socio-technical learning environments informed by experiential learning tenets. The focus is on local communities tied by a common history and tradition (such as rural communities), and urban neighbourhoods where members engage in social interaction on a regular basis. But these insights may also be applied in spaces of “border learning”, standing mid-way between institutionalised education contexts and loose spaces of socialisation in family and neighbourhood settings, such as community technology centres, libraries and youth clubs (Bruce, 2008). The writing is guided by the question: *How can we exploit the potential of digital technology in the design of community-based learning environments that encourage and nourish intergenerational exchange, facilitate explicitation of tacit forms of knowing, and contribute in the long run to building vibrant and resilient communities?* To provide viable answers, the paper proceeds by interpreting the key tenets of experiential education from a design thinking perspective. A framework for the design of intergenerational learning environments is introduced, and its application is exemplified with findings from a participatory content creation project involving two rural communities.



## 1. Designing socio-technical learning environments around experiential learning tenets

The philosophy of experiential education can be traced back to a simple observation: that by purposeful, directed attention to and reflection upon a practical activity, knowledge emerges. John Dewey, credited with sketching the theoretical bases of experiential education, takes *observation* and *reflection* to be the landmark elements that change an experience into an educational experience (Dewey, 1938). To make space for thoughtful design thinking in an experiential education paradigm, the forthcoming sections analyse the relation between learning and experience as embedded in communal spaces. In particular, they shed light on the fundamental processes by which lived experience may become a fertile ground for nurturing knowledge exchange and learning processes.

### 1.1. Learning from experience

As Dewey (1938) argues, not all experiences are educational. Experiences may be non-educative (with no learning outcomes) or mis-educative (sources of distorted understandings). What does it take, therefore, for an experience to be or become educational? Answers to this question have been brought by studies in experiential education, inquiry-based learning, but also by critical pedagogy (e.g. Freire, 2006), constructionist education theories (e.g. Papert, 1980, 1991), and the situated learning body of theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Without attempting for a consonant coverage of all these bodies of theory, the forthcoming part overviews a series of elements and processes that provide the missing link between experience and learning: *inquiry*, *purpose*, and the triangle *action (creation)-observation-reflection*. These elements and the relations established among them will prove relevant for the design of community-based learning environments.

*Inquiry* is defined by Dewey (1991) as “the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole”. Inquiry is triggered by an unsatisfactory situation. The agent’s discontent with present conditions compels her/him to identify a problem, or a mismatch between her/his inner needs and desires on the one hand, and the possibilities offered by the environment, on the other (Bruce and Bishop, 2008). After acknowledging the problem, the agent is compelled to take action to find a solution. The expected result of inquiry is solving the doubt, producing knowledge, or reaching the state called by Dewey “warranted assertibility” (Kaufmann, 1959).

*Purposes* are “end-views”, visions of the consequences likely to occur as a result of taking a certain course of action. If the agent regards these consequences as desirable, purposes can become powerful drivers for action. For Dewey (1938), one of the fundamental tasks of education is to support learners in developing the capacity to formulate purposes and commit to actions that bring desired consequences, resisting and overcoming obstructive impulses. Freire (2006) argues that awareness and goal-setting are crucial elements in the development of critical consciousness (*conscientizaç o*), the ultimate goal of education as theorised in his critical pedagogy writings. Inquiry and goal-setting are intimately connected, as inquiry is the necessary pre-requisite for purposeful action.

The triangle *action-observation-reflection* has been conceptualised in sever-

al theoretical traditions as the landmark pattern of educational experiences. In *Experience and education* (1938), Dewey explains how these particular processes enable the formulation of purposes as end-views from the sublimation of blind impulses: the agent that has acted or is about to take action will 1) observe external conditions, 2) recollect similar experiences, and 3) reflect on them, judging and relating between what has been observed and what has been recollected, so that the likely consequences of action are going to be envisioned.

Constructionist thinkers, notably Seymour Papert, have theorised learning in relation to a particular type of action, *creative action*. Constructionism argues not only that learning is uplifted by acts of creation, but that the process of learning itself is an act of knowledge creation that the student can only perform and control by herself/himself (Papert, 1980, 1991). The educational value of creative acts is concretised in scenarios modelled upon the triangle *action-observation-reflection*. Creative processes will produce tangible or intangible artefacts, which enable agents to observe and reflect on the creative process in relation to its outcomes. Papert (1991) illustrates this approach by his concept of “soap-sculpture math”: science education in which students engage actively with the object of learning by applying theories, principles and models to immediate problems, or to guide the development and behaviour of elements in game-like environments. Learning is further reinforced in collaborative contexts, in which creative acts are accompanied by sharing and discussion among peers. According to Papert (1991), learning “happens especially felicitously in a context where the learner is consciously engaged in constructing a *public* entity, whether it’s a sand castle on the beach or a theory of the universe” (author’s *emphasis*). Sharing, discussion and negotiation with peers help to solidify knowledge. Creative acts can also inspire and engage the learners by enabling them to relate to the end-result of their work, which can motivate, drive and give coherence to their actions. Therefore creation is potentially a key driver for successful goal-setting and commitment to attaining the goal. The anticipation of a desired creative outcome can motivate and animate the learner, enabling her/him to persevere in her/his action and delay obstructive impulses, what Dewey (1938) reckoned to be an essential function of education.

### 1.2. *Cyclic models of experiential learning*

When seeking to connect the elements outlined above to the design of learning environments for community settings, there are two aspects to consider: the first is the *continuous* nature of the process linking experiences in an individual’s life, as well as those experiences and learning; the second regards the nature of the *knowledge* produced and shared in everyday interactions in community settings.

The continuity of experience is one of the elements that Dewey singled out as a characteristic feature to be accounted for in a theory of experience (1938). *Continuity* refers to the way experiences are connected and associated, so that each new one builds upon and garners significance based on the imprints and internalisation of the preceding one. This continuity makes it opportune to conceive of learning processes not as timelines or chronologies, but as cycles, in which each iteration builds upon the results of the passed learning experience and solidifies knowledge together with finer understandings of experience (Enfield, Schmitt-McQuitty, & Smith, 2007). This is why many experiential learning models are proposed as cyclic iterations, such as *Observation-Recollection-Judgement* (Dewey, 1938), or *Experience-Reflection-Abstraction-Experimentation* (Kolb, 1984).

Some models explicitly relate learning to acts of creation. This focus on creation makes them particularly adapt for the design of technology-enhanced environments, as they provide coordinates for the usage of communication technologies in relation to creative acts. A landmark model is *The Inquiry Cycle*, developed by the Community Informatics Research Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for supporting inquiry-based learning, in particular in communities (Bruce, 2002; Bruce and Bishop, 2008). The Inquiry Cycle advocates the use of creative, hands-on activities coupled with group sharing and discussion as catalysers for learning. The Inquiry Cycle bears five main steps, *Ask-Investigate-Create-Discuss-Reflect*. The creative act is central, yet creation does not necessarily imply that concrete artefacts will be developed. Creation can imply as well the agent-led production of meaning (Bruce and Bishop, 2008: 710-711).

A different perspective to creative activities is given by Paulo Freire (2006: 96-117), who argues that acts of creation can be employed for developing *conscientização*, or critical consciousness, the cornerstone of his liberating pedagogy theory. Freire proposes a process based on *coding* and *decoding*, a cycle in which a life situation is encoded in pictorial representations and decoded through observation and critical reflection. Freire used this method as an emancipatory tool to enable low-literate groups in the rural areas of Brazil to take critical distance, come to grips with oppressive events in their past life, and break patterns of dependency. Encoding is done by using drawings and pictorial representations with evocative power, which both conceal and reveal emotionally charged situations. This process is dialogic, it involves a second party, an educator who participates in the exploration of people's life context, constructs meaningful codifications of familiar situations, and assists them to interpret and assess them critically. According to Freire, the practice of encoding-decoding coupled with reflection in dialogic settings favours the development of critical thinking and enhanced interpretive abilities.

A second aspect of importance for designing community-based learning environments regards the type of *knowledge* that can be elicited, produced and shared in community interactions. The knowledge naturally produced and transmitted in communities has often been theorized as having a tacit and an explicit dimension. Polanyi (1962: 601) defines tacit knowledge as "what we know but cannot tell". By way of contrast, knowledge that can be articulated and communicated in speech is called interchangeably explicit knowledge (Nonaka et al., 2000), objective knowledge (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2001), or declarative knowledge (Kogut and Zander, 1993). Knowledge production episodes in communities and in traditional learning scenarios, for instance the master-apprentice relationship, are infused with a rich overlay of tacit knowledge. The possibility to convert tacit into explicit knowledge has been the object of research in knowledge management and organisational studies. One landmark model of knowledge conversion is the SECI model for knowledge creation in organisations (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka et al., 2000). The model builds on the assumption that organisations are collective entities that create knowledge dynamically and continuously, through action and interaction within the organisation and between the organisation and the environment. The knowledge produced has both tacit and explicit dimensions, yet, the authors argue, it is possible to get hold of and convert tacit to explicit knowledge by capitalising upon naturally occurring processes in the organisation: Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, and Internalisation. These processes can be structured and streamed in desired directions, so that knowledge creation and conversion cycles are enacted in a purposeful man-

ner. By extension, these processes are also spontaneous occurrences in communities, and can be structured and used to enable a community to constantly grow its knowledge base, convert tacit into explicit knowledge, and create a culture of learning among the members.

### 1.3. *The Romani Voices project*

*Romani Voices* was a participatory project that explored the potential of digital technologies as vehicles and platforms for giving voice to minority cultures. 'Voice' was used as an umbrella concept to indicate expression, communication and knowledge production processes, but also emancipation and action-taking for achieving self-designed goals by previously disadvantaged or marginalised groups (Tacchi, 2010; Sabiescu, 2013). The project involved two Romani communities in rural Romania and employed ethnography, participatory action research and participatory design principles to engage members in the co-design of a communication solution that could enable them to achieve locally-defined development goals.

The two Romani communities are located in South-Eastern Romania, Galati county, in the villages of Podoleni and Munteni. Both communities are part of the Romani ethnic minority, yet they belong to different sub-groups. The Roma in the village of Podoleni are part of the assimilated Roma. Since they have given up nomadic lifestyle several hundreds of years ago, they have adopted in time most of the traditions and customs of the Romanian people. The Roma in Munteni, on the other hand, have only been settled at the end of the 1950s. Their nomadic lifestyle and a strong cultural ethos enabled them to maintain a high degree of cultural specificity, so that they appear to be an enclave surrounded by Romanian people, yet abiding by community-centric traditions and moors transmitted from generation to generation. The community maintains specific rules regarding rites of passage (such as weddings), social organization models, rules of conduct, and gender roles. A distinctive feature of this community is that they are semi-nomadic: people travel during the spring and summer in the Romanian countryside, to sell cauldrons and metal products created by themselves (Sabiescu, 2013).

Both communities are marked by poverty and scarce economic possibilities. Some of the Roma in Podoleni earn revenues from construction work, while a smaller number of local people are accomplished musicians. For the others, revenues come sporadically from daywork. The Roma in Munteni are traditional coppersmiths, yet face decreasing demand for their products as cheaper alternatives are becoming widely available. With respect to education, the Roma children can pursue primary and secondary school in both villages. In Podoleni, education was considered by members a value of utmost importance, and some families went through strenuous efforts to send their children in nearby cities for high-school, and, more rarely, university studies. In Munteni, access to education was hindered by various factors and especially the frequent travels, early marriages, and the perceived lack of importance of education beyond basic literacy acquisition when leading a traditional lifestyle (Sabiescu, 2013).

In each community, the project started with an intensive exploration phase. By means of ethnography and participatory action research, local people were involved in exploring and reflecting upon their individual and collective history and present conditions, and envisioning how information technologies could enable them to attain communication goals that were previously out of their

reach. After examining several options and technological platforms, both communities opted for building a website, yet each saw it as a platform for communicating very different messages. The community in Podoleni wanted to use the Internet to create the premises for a dialogue with the majority culture. The Roma in Munteni wanted to give visibility to their traditional metalworking profession, but also speak about their poverty and the scarce possibilities to perform any other work besides coppersmithing.

The website content was produced locally by community members under the facilitation of the field researcher. The design of the content production experience was guided by the Inquiry Cycle (Bruce and Bishop, 2008), which was customized and refined in each community based on continuous assessment. The Inquiry Cycle was used to motion an iterative process by which members documented their traditions, history, and present-day priorities and gradually brought them to life in digital media, contributing to the production of rich multimedia narratives. People used audio recorders, video and photo cameras under the facilitation of the field researcher to gather community stories and testimonials that illustrated traditions, values, as well as issues of collective concern (Sabiescu, 2013). Footage and edited content were visualised in group settings in which discussion and critical reflection were encouraged. In this process content themes were tracked, validated by collective consensus, and used to guide the design of the information architecture for each website. Recordings were edited into short theme-based movies with formats ranging from stories to interviews and short documentary-like accounts. Movies accompanied by transcripts and photographs were mapped on the information architecture and published on the two community websites ([www.romanivoices.com](http://www.romanivoices.com)).

## 2. Towards a framework for designing socio-technical environments for intergenerational learning in community settings

This section introduces a framework for the design of learning environments in which several generations of a community can be involved in exploring, documenting and representing in digital media issues of collective relevance and concern. The first part discusses how learning activities can be modelled around cyclic models of experiential learning, and introduces the customized version of the Inquiry Cycle used in the *Romani Voices* project. The second part outlines a series of elements to be considered for structuring and organising learning experiences centred on creative activities. The description is illustrated by vignettes from the *Romani Voices* study.

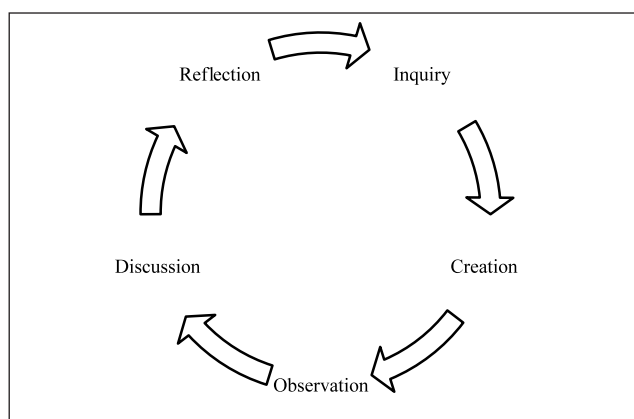
### 2.1. Design process: elaborating on the Inquiry Cycle

The Inquiry Cycle (Bruce and Bishop, 2008) is an activity design tool that integrates a quintessential synthesis of experiential education and inquiry-based learning tenets. When employed with collectivities, the Inquiry Cycle sets in motion a process in which learning emerges from a series of tightly connected processes:

1. Externalisation and sharing of knowledge, values, interests, and communal issues;
2. Providing acts of expression with a tangible quality by recording, or by de-

- signing the act of externalisation as a creative act (through performance, drawing, etc.); and
3. Generating awareness and critical distance from the creative product and process by guided observation and reflection.

In *Romani Voices*, the steps in the model and their sequence have been modified to fit the purpose of the on-site activities. The resulting model (Fig. 1) bears five core stages: *inquiry*, *creation*, *observation*, *discussion*, and *reflection*. These five stages constitute into a frame for conceiving learning activities in group settings. The role of each step in relation to learning outcomes is further described below, and illustrated by examples from the *Romani Voices* study.



**Fig. 1 - The modified version of the Inquiry Cycle employed in the Romani Voices project.**

Source: author.

*Inquiry* refers to digging into a subject, topic, theme or concern aware and actively. Its aim is to surface knowledge, opinions and beliefs that are critically related to a problem posed. Discussion and negotiation in group settings are particularly adapt for framing activities of inquiry, as they may favour the emergence of multiple perspectives and enlarge the pool of understandings on the subjects tackled. In *Romani Voices*, inquiry was used to build a pool of community-relevant themes that were further explored in content production sessions. The format of inquiry activities varied. At times discussions on latest happenings or enduring community concerns brought about interesting subjects to document. These were explored in small groups under the facilitation of the field researcher, in open formats where discussions were guided by active questioning and an evolving agenda. For instance, the subject of *poverty* was examined in several inquiry sessions with different members of the community of Podoleni. These served to bring to surface several layers of this collective concern, spanning causes (lack of job opportunities), effects (unhappiness, scarce resources for keeping children at school, lack of aspirations for the future) and relations with other community core concerns, for instance its bearing on education and well-being. At other times, inquiry was triggered by a record of content themes already drafted in past exercises. By reflecting on these themes, people came to realise what were the underlying roots of collective hardships and problems, or how they embraced together, as a community, certain values such as honesty and respect for the elderly.

*Creation* refers to pursuing the lead opened by inquiry for creating a communication artefact. The role of creative activities is to confer expression and knowledge with an almost tangible, object-like quality. Creation can involve manipulation of digital media, but can also take the form of verbal or artistic expression, for instance a storytelling event or a theatrical performance. In *Romani Voices*, creation sessions were the marrow of the content production flow. A creation session consisted in the recording (audio, video and through pictures) of a community event, a storytelling session, or an interview. Production sessions were focused on a set of content themes or on a particular event. Many production sessions were held in people's houses and courtyards, in village streets, but also in places where people worked and, in the case of Munteni, in nomadic camps. Most sessions were organized as social gathering events. This lively atmosphere encouraged other community members to join. Some volunteered to tell their stories when a certain theme appealed to them, even if their input was not planned, or proposed other themes that in most cases were accommodated.

*Observation* refers to critically inspecting the artefacts produced as well as the process leading to their production. The direction of this critical examination is shaped by the goal of a particular initiative, and the learning outcomes envisaged: observation can trigger associations with other stories, beliefs or concerns; it can motion attention to inadvertencies between what has been captured and real life; or it can direct participants back to their inner attitudes, beliefs and opinions on the subjects tackled. The primary purpose of observation sessions is to instill participants with a sense of acute, critical awareness, to equip them with a scrutinizing lens that can be used to examine the process in which they engage and the outcomes generated. In *Romani Voices*, observation was performed during collective screening sessions. The purpose of observation sessions was to gather critical input and comments, but also to enable participants to see the results of the process in which they had been engaged in different roles, from storyteller to content producer. At times, only the people directly involved in producing the footage attended, for instance the storytellers and the content producers. They were encouraged to examine critically the quality of the footage or the editing and make suggestions for improving further recording sessions or perform particular edits. At other times, and especially for edited content, a larger number of community members joined.

*Discussion* captures the verbal interaction in which meanings and understandings are negotiated in group settings. Discussion can be a means to prompt and direct critical inspection of creative artefacts before, during or immediately after an observation session. In the two field studies, discussion proved particularly valuable for investing observation with a quality of active pursuit, given by verbal interaction in group settings. Therefore discussion sessions were organized in association with screening and visualisation sessions. The discussion was guided by the lead facilitator in the direction fit for the purpose a session served: gather critical input, obtain agreement for publishing, or brainstorm on other subjects to be documented.

*Reflection* can be conceived as an active thinking engagement with the entire process motioned by previous steps in the cycle and their outcomes, whereby the agent's associated inner thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes are re-considered. The process takes place in the individual mind. In collective settings, reflection can be conceived as a pause for thought where ideas and insights are triggered by the preceding steps in the cycle, and in particular observation and group discussions. In *Romani Voices*, reflection was encouraged by active questioning

during discussions. This was particularly compelling when a community member was involved in first person, as producer or as content provider. Discussions encouraged people to take critical distance, relate their activities to the outcomes achieved, and decide whether the content produced was something they wanted to publish for the wider public.

## 2.2. Design elements

The enactment of the cycle in a particular context will depend on the peculiar characteristics of the community involved and the core purpose of the experience. Its application can be facilitated by considering a series of aspects, and in particular: *the collective purpose, learning outcomes, content, roles, tools, and time.*

### *Collective purpose*

The purpose of an inquiry-based learning experience can be seen as an 'end-view' of the consequences likely to occur by engaging in a certain course of action (Dewey, 1938). In group-based learning activities, having a clear purpose contributes to providing coherence, consistency and direction to group efforts. The collective purpose is not merely to be communicated, but forged, negotiated and refined by members. Depending on a community's specific priorities, grand purposes can be envisioned that regard the community as a whole, or a definite segment of it, such as youth or children. Envisioned purposes may be focused on knowledge production, but also on intangible outcomes. For instance, a community may want to gain agency for political action, cope with trauma in the aftermath of violent historical events, or come to grips with discrimination and stigmatisation. When the focus is on creative acts, the purpose can also be conceived as a concrete vision of the end product, which will give participants a sense of what they are going to achieve through their efforts.

The purpose has to have immediate and inherent relevance for participants. For instance, in *Romani Voices* the purpose was negotiated during several months, until it was articulated in a way that was agreed by community members. The envisioned outcome was a community website in both settings, yet the role of the website was conceived differently. In Munteni, the main purpose was to communicate to the non-Roma the struggles and difficulties encountered by the community caught at the edge between traditional living marked by nomadism, the centrality of their metalworking profession as the only source of revenue, and the declining demand for the metal products they tried to sell during their travels. In Podoleni, the community website was seen as a gateway for community expression, from traditions in which local people took pride, such as music, to present-day concerns, such as poverty. In its final form, the website was to become a business card for the community, a means for presenting and communicating itself to the outside.

### *Learning outcomes*

The definition of the learning outcomes needs not be reduced to traditional notions of knowledge and skills acquisition. Learning to be, awareness-raising, acquisition of critical thinking capacities and abilities to engage in productive enquiry (Brown, 2005) are possible learning outcomes that may be associated with a particular experience. The learning outcomes can be structured for the collectivity, for different groups (e.g. based on age or interests) or for individuals. In initiatives pursuing knowledge exchanges among generations, the learning out-



comes may be different for different generations. For instance, the younger generation may set out to understand and learn about the historical past of the community, while the elderly may pursue acquisition of digital literacy skills. These goals can be met through the design of learning experiences that involve knowledge exchanges modelled around digital media production.

**Content**

The content, or subject matter, may be circumscribed to the subjective world of individual participants, encompassing feelings, memories, impressions and ideas, but also to collective knowledge, issues and priorities. What makes the content in a collective learning experience depends on the purpose set and the learning outcomes pursued. One important aspect is that the subject matter should not be pre-imposed, but emerge in dialogue with learners. Rather than a given, the subject matter is *discovered* through inquiry. Several rounds of inquiry may make the subject matter evolve in directions impossible to foresee at the start of an experience.

Community history	The wedding
Deportation to Bug	The baptism
The forced settlement in the 1950s	Poverty
Religion	Lack of work places
The church	Lack of housing sites
Christian faith	Traditional professions
Christian conversion	Child education
Miracles of faith	Life on the road
Romani identity	Discrimination
Romani traditions	Child discrimination in school
Cultural events	

**Table 1 - Provisional list of content themes half-way through the content production experience. Romani Voices study, Munteni.** Source: author.

In *Romani Voices* the subject matter for the content production experience was not pre-defined. Content themes emerged, changed, and were refined in the on-going process of content production. As people discussed about relevant subjects, produced content about these, and visualised this content, new aspects to explore emerged. For instance, for the community in Munteni it took time to understand which were the most crucial aspects to document, and what they really wanted to communicate to a public audience. From a rich set of themes (Table 1) emerging half-way through the content production timeline, towards the end of the experience it became more clear that people wanted to focus on three main themes: their coppersmithing traditional profession, the semi-nomadic lifestyle, and the difficult life conditions. Production sessions started to be intensively focused on these three themes. People felt compelled to speak about how poverty affected them, what they lacked, and how they hoped to escape poverty and lead a decent life. Stories about people’s life on the road were focused on the hardships entailed by living in tents for many months, travelling around with small children, and the effects on people’s lives and on the life per-

spectives and education of their children. Cauldron-making was the subject that caused the greatest enthusiasm in the master coppersmiths. Stories were told about cauldron-making as tradition and as profession, and highlighted the masters' skills and the quality of the products made. People also hoped that they could use the community website to spread awareness of the existence and quality of their products and in the long run boost sales.

### *Roles*

In collective learning experiences, the traditional roles of 'teacher' and 'learner' are likely to be obscured and absorbed into others, as required by the specific type of activity enacted. The teacher and learner may be not be apparent even in the case of rich knowledge production episodes. Let us take, for instance, the case of storytelling-intensive content production experiences. It is likely that roles in content production will be filled depending on interests and prior knowledge and skills. For instance, storytelling may involve a storyteller, a person eliciting the story, and one recording it. Not all people will be invested with each role. Yet as long as they are drawing on communal knowledge, they are equal shareholders and observers of what is being externalized and represented, and it is this concerted effort that contributes to generating knowledge. In this case, each participant will be at the same time a teacher and a learner, a hybrid role that reflects the equalitarian pedagogical relationship promoted by Paulo Freire's critical or liberating pedagogy (Freire, 2006). In *Romani Voices*, people involved could fill two roles: providers of stories and testimonials, and content producers. The distribution of people for these roles was done on the basis of interests, knowledge and skills. The youth typically filled content production roles. In both communities, content production teams emerged by local initiative and remained usually stable throughout the project course. The storytellers were involved on the basis of their capacity to cover one or more of the main subject areas defined in the communication vision. If *poverty* was the main subject treated, for instance, the storyteller could be a mother who encountered difficulties in keeping her child in school, as well as an elderly who struggled to make ends meet.

### *Tools*

A variety of tools can be used to support each step in the Inquiry Cycle. Digital technologies are particularly useful for supporting creative activities, as well as sharing and communication among participants. Without attempting to cover the variety of technological options for supporting these activities, two points can be mentioned in this respect. First, as Freire has argued, it is opportune to select and use technologies cultivating a human-centric rather than a techno-centric approach (Freire, 1973; Kahn and Kellner, 2007), considering the effects on the community in the long term. Second, wherever possible technology devices already owned and used in the community can be employed in creative ways. Media options range from devices owned by people, such as mobile phones, to computers in community multimedia centres and libraries, to photo and video cameras.

### *Time*

Inquiry cycles can be accommodated in a day experience, or be spread across many months. Their value resides in the continuity of such experiences: each new iteration of the cycle contributes to solidifying knowledge, and motions attention to new knowledge instances. The sequence of steps needs not be fol-

lowed in a rigid manner. Steps are often combined, for instance observation may twin discussion and reflection sessions, or creative acts may be coupled with discussion. In *Romani Voices*, the project activities were spread along 27 months in Podoleni, and 23 months in Munteni. More than half of this time was dedicated to content production. During these months, the steps in the cycle were enacted continuously, in two formats: collective production sessions (with the assistance of the lead facilitator) and community-managed sessions (managed by local people by their own initiative). Collective sessions were 2-3 weeks long, and alternated every 6-8 weeks with community-led sessions. The precise format and sequence of sessions were not rigidly structured. At times creation activities were pursued intensively, while at others frequent visualisations of footage and edited content were organised. Community-led production sessions were particularly flexible. When local people were in charge, they were often inspired to produce multimedia content triggered by events and happenings in the community, without going through the precise steps of the Inquiry Cycle.

### 2.3. A community-centric and relational perspective

The elements outlined above have been singled out as pointers for guiding the design of community-based learning experiences modelled around cyclic models of inquiry. Of equal importance is the stance taken in approaching and enacting them. In this respect, this article argues for a relational and a community-centric perspective. A *relational perspective* calls attention to the way the elements are related, and the mutual determination among these, so that the definition of each element is likely to affect the definition of the others. For instance, agreement over a collective purpose is likely to affect the definition of the learning outcomes and the learning content. In a *community-centric perspective*, the broader and long-term impacts of learning experiences are formulated by focusing on the collectivity, rather than the individual. Setting up this type of experiences is not about creating media artefacts, nor about disparate learning episodes, but about building community capacity for those aspects that a community itself prioritizes, whether it is about coming to grasps with discrimination, building agency for political action, or boosting media literacy levels. In this respect, a series of aspects can be reinforced:

A first correlative regards the *flexibility* of the framework introduced. Each step in the Inquiry Cycle calls for and is related to the others in a seamless manner. At the same time, these steps can be customized to respond to specific contextual constraints and opportunities. New steps in the cycle may be added or subtracted any time during the timeline of a learning experience. Enactment is about experimentation and continuous adaptation, enabled by a continuous observation and reflection on how the experience progresses. In *Romani voices*, the 5-stepped Inquiry Cycle was complemented with a *Planning* component in both communities, to make it possible for intensive 2-weeks production sessions to be iterated across many months without losing track of the process. In Munteni, several content production hubs were accommodated. To update all participants on progresses outside their production hub, a *Progress overview* step was added to the cycle (Sabiescu, 2013). These examples show that the model is not a rigid tool, but one open for experimentation and change as required by the local context and the constraints of the initiative run.

Second, a community-centric perspective may ask for a critical look at the *evolving interplay among people and technology*. The development of complex

relationships between people and technology in time may run the risk of unwarranted changes in communities. Ivan Illich (1973) cautions against the inversion of means-ends relations when it comes to using technology, which may subjugate people by stimulating an endless expansion of new needs and desires that are never fully gratified (Kahn and Kellner, 2007). Freire's notion of 'ethnotechnology' hints at the importance of subsuming technological uses to the purposes held by educational programs, and in particular to the development of *conscientizaç o* (Ibid.). and the pursuit of individual and collective freedom.

Third, relations among people, and *tensions between the individual and the collective* may become apparent in the application of the framework. A community-centric perspective implies that sight of the collectivity should not be lost even when individual learning outcomes are considered. This stance is not to be taken as a constraint, but rather as an opportunity. For instance, such a vision can help identify ways by which individual learning may be best pursued by capitalising upon existing communal assets, practices, and relations. An example is the design of media literacy programmes for adults through the involvement of younger media literate generations, devising scenarios in which bi-directional knowledge exchange processes are accommodated.

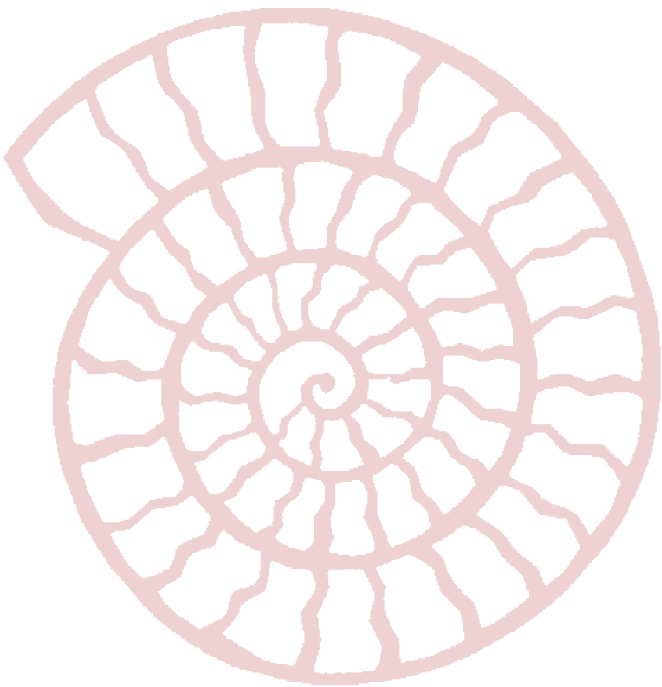
## Conclusion


This article provided a reflection on the design of socio-technical environments for intergenerational learning embedded in local communities, and drawing on collective knowledge pools and existing interaction practices among members. It argued that the design of such environments can be framed by experiential learning tenets, and singled out a series of design elements prone to foster bridges between experiential and learning realms in purposeful, structured ways. On these premises, a framework for the design of technology-mediated intergenerational learning environments was introduced. Rather than a recipe, this framework was provided as an exemplar of how experiential learning tenets can be elaborated from a design perspective and used to set in motion learning experiences designed with and for local communities.

There was an underlying assumption, running through this article, that by persevering in the enactment of these learning experiences as part of long-term community education initiatives, the impetus will be created for the creation of alternative pedagogical spaces, with aims, methods and approaches that fit members' needs for education. The pursuit of learning in these spaces may complement that of formal educational establishments, and fill the needs for lifelong learning that cannot be accommodated by the latter. Yet, the full potential of these learning environments is to be achieved by a shift from singular instances and projects in isolated places to continuous processes linking learners and communities across time and space, and therefore moving from learning environments to learning networks. This perspective is in need for its own theoretical grounding, with sensitivity to how learning and in particular intergenerational learning is pursued differently at the crossroads between formal and informal education settings (Margiotta, 2013). This calls for future research, particularly design-based research in community education, which can capitalise upon the possibilities opened up by information technologies for nurturing learning within and across community spaces, and use these insights for informing a grounded body of related theory.

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# Parental education and teachers training for the role of parental guides in Europe

## Educazione alla genitorialità e formazione degli insegnanti per un ruolo come guide parentali in Europa

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### ABSTRACT

As teachers, we feel we have a duty toward our students in helping them to become their best version, by providing not what they want, but what they need. And what they need mostly is an interested and informed parent, who doesn't stop learning about the different stages her child goes through in order to support her all the way in becoming an independent and accomplished adult and a good future parent.

We begun this year's project at the kindergarten “Tudor Vladimirescu” regarding parental education using previous data. Along the way, by participating to the conference “Good practices of parenting at European level”, we gained information we used in some training sessions. Furthermore, we used the research developed by the Grundtvig project Leadlab to develop tools for parental education and gained more by the teamwork from the study visit “Adult education – validation of former learning and assessing progress and achievement”.

Come insegnanti, sentiamo di avere il dovere di supportare i nostri studenti nel realizzare la propria e migliore versione di sé stessi, fornendo non quello che vogliono, ma ciò di cui loro hanno bisogno. E tra questo bisogno si trova la presenza di genitori informati ed interessati ai propri figli, che non smette di imparare a conoscere le diverse fasi della crescita, attraverso le quali il bambino passa fino a diventare un adulto indipendente e un future buon genitore. Durante il corso di quest'anno è stato implementato un progetto di formazione alla genitorialità nel contesto della scuola dell'infanzia “Tudor Vladimirescu”, basandosi su esperienze precedent. Lungo il percorso, abbiamo partecipato al convegno “Le buone pratiche della genitorialità a livello europeo”, il quale ci ha orientate nello sviluppo di sessione di formazione alla genitorialità. Inoltre, abbiamo usato la ricerca sviluppata all'interno del progetto Grundtvig LEADLAB per sviluppare strumenti per l'educazione dei genitori; nel contesto di questo progetto, le nostre idee sono state rafforzate dalla visita studio e scambio europeo per formatori “Educazione degli adulti – convalida del precedente apprendimento e valutazione dello stato di avanzamento”.

### KEYWORDS

Parents, intergenerational learning, positive discipline.  
Genitori, apprendimento intergenerazionale, disciplina positive.

## Introduction

Parenting can be seen both as a science and as an art. It can grow as an experience of positive and negative role-models, as an acquired skill by means of studying and social observing. It can carry a lot of emotional weight, who can, sometimes, cloud judgement in one way or the other. Mixed messages sent to children by parents, grandparents, other members of the extended family have different consequences on the future adult and parent.

The duty of the teacher is not only to keep informed about the latest news and research, but to develop a personal relationship with the parent, in order to guide and counsel for the benefit of the children.

Good practices”, “better practices”, “best practices”... these words are often used in the field of education and in international jargon when alluding to development projects. But what are we trying to say when we employ such words? Essentially we refer to case studies, which may serve as excellent examples for the selection and development of new projects. The idea of selecting, studying and then circulating these “best practices”, contributes to the promotion of creative and sustainable solutions to different social problems such as violence in schools. We can say that these patterns construct a bridge between empirical solutions, research and education.

The following paper comprises a theoretical background, followed by the presentation of the first year of the project “Educated parents make good choices” project I begun to develop with the parents from the class I am leading. The project includes various forms of interaction, from theoretical group sessions, parent-children workshops, personalized counseling sessions, parents’ workshops etc. It valorizes my 12 years experience as a teacher, several conferences on the subject, courses (“Educati asa!”, a course about applied behavioral analysis), a Grundtvig project (I attended the course realized during the LEADLAB project, “Personalization in adult education: methods, strategies and tools”) and conclusions about guiding the attitude toward work of young children obtained in a study visit funded by the European Commission.

### 1. Stages and implementation of the project

The experimentation group involved 26 families, among whom only 4 were experienced parents (with older children).

Analyzing the ages of the children and the needs of the parents, we came up with an initial schedule for our monthly meetings and for the individualized counseling, which was revised and approved by the principal.

The initial themes for the monthly parent teacher meetings were:

- “Let’s know each other!” – round table debate
- “Perfect Kindergarten” – non formal education through drawing
- “Healthy child” – round table debate
- “Eating healthy” – workshop
- “The role of school drama in the development of the child” – school drama
- “The pre-school curricula” – presentation
- “What we did!” – exhibition with the children’s works
- “Martisor for my mother” – workshop with the fathers
- “Easter bunny” – auction with children’s works
- “Little ecologists” – flower planting



The themes proposed for the weekly personalized counseling sessions comprised subjects varying from the role of different family members in the child's life (mother, father, grandparents, brothers and sisters), self-knowledge, tools for knowing the child, parental styles, responsibilities for parents and children, health, love languages, giving and receiving to free time organization.

After one month of kindergarten, we analyzed the questions of the parents regarding the day their children spent in kindergarten, and the most frequent were:

- Has he cried?
- Has he eaten, slept?

Only 3 families thought to ask "Is he playing with other children?". We concluded that they lacked information about the child's program in the kindergarten and the new focus on education through play.

So we decided to modify the project, and insert a smaller project, called "What we know", which involved parents staying during classes, during one week. The objectives were:

- To inform and involve parents in educational activities;
- To give the opportunity for the parents to see the children's behavior in other environment than the family and play groups
- To move the parent's focus from issues regarding baby age (crying, sleep, food) to issues related to the new stage the children cross into.



**Fig. 1 - The class coat of arms, realized by the parents**

Because group cohesion wasn't what was supposed to be (the parents did not communicate with the teacher, they skipped some of the meetings, they did not try to know each other), we replaced the Easter Bunny auction with a joint workshop, parent-child, with the purpose of realizing object from recyclable materials (the main reason was to promote parent involvement in education) and we realized, in a parents workshop, a coat of arms for the group.

Also, we tried to involve the children in the parents' education, by asking their help for practical matters, such as organizing the room for meetings.



Fig. 2 - Parent-child workshop

## 2. Personalisation in parental education

I derived some of the ideas about a personalized approach from the Grundtvig in service training course “Personalization in Adult Education: models, strategies and tools”, that I followed in Rome, 11-15 March, 2013, financed by the European Commission, through the Life Learning Programme. The course was one of the result of a Grundtvig multilateral project, LEADLAB.

LEADLAB was a European project funded through Grundtvig – Lifelong Learning Programme, which brought together partners from six European countries: Italy, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Spain.

The goal of the LEADLAB project was to meet the challenge of making adult learning systems more attractive, increasing participation in lifelong learning by developing an innovative adult learning approach, able to foster adult and elderly people to participate in lifelong learning, valorizing their life experience and the informal dimension of knowledge.

The course aimed to spread and improve personalization culture, to show a model of intervention shared at European level and to introduce the guidelines to design and produce learning personalized experiences for adults and elderly people.

The definition of personalization reached through the project implies:

- Involvement of the all dimensions of learner;
- Development of self directed learning process;
- Development of self regulated learning process;
- Co-design of the learning pathway and process;
- Development of self-evaluation process;
- Learning challenges not learning objectives;
- Learning pathway not instructional curriculum or training program;
- Achievable results are not predictable *a priori*.



Fig. 3 - Learning personalization strategy, according to LEADLAB

Important points about the biographical approach:

1. to write a biography is not to write a professional curriculum, but is telling about themselves;
2. it is requested to highlight elements of his/hers life relevant with reference to the new learning experience and that have contributed to become what he/she now is;
3. the focus is on the informal and not formal previous learning experience including also personal life;
4. negative experiences are relevant as well positive experiences;

Following these lines, I applied the biographical method, formulated by the LEADLAB project, to my class, and wrote a questionnaire who tried to involve all dimensions of the learner. We suggested to the parents, through the questionnaire, to look upon the skills they have acquired in educating children through psychology and pedagogy studies, parental education courses, the relationship with own parents, raising another child, informal talks with other parents. Also, we asked them to analyze the relationship they have with their own parents, in order to help them understand better their reactions as parents.

1. What was the source of your parental competences?
  - a) Psychology and pedagogy studies  
Age group .....
  - b) Parental education courses  
Name and duration.....
  - c) Relationship with own parents
  - d) Raising another child
  - e) Informal talks with other parents
2. If you have formal education in the field, name 2 principles / methods/ tools employed in the relationship with the child
3. Write down at least one thing that you value concerning the relationship with your own parents and one you don't appreciate.

4. Exemplify a specific situation in the relationship with your own parents you remember fondly and one you did not like.
5. Do you think that you have the same tastes, the same approach to the world as your parents? Exemplify.
6. How much time do you use weekly to the task of improving your parental skills? How do you improve them?
7. When talking to other parents, do you reflect upon their ideas or do you consider that you know best what your child needs?
8. More often, in relationships with other parents, you discuss things related to:
  - a) Physical well being (food, health, sleep)
  - b) Cognitive development
  - c) Physical development – small muscle motility, big muscle motility (how they move hands, the entire body)
 Social development (how they interact with adults, other children)
9. Which of these directions of development you think you should insist on? (including through individual or group research)

**Questionnaire**  
(based on the biographical method applied on parental skills)



**Fig. 4 - Questionnaire meeting**

In another meeting, we tried a debate about a formative agreement between the teachers and the parents regarding the development of parental skills, for the benefit of the children. We will work on it the following year, along with a job description for good parents.

We use the results in order to personalize the learning of the parents according to their needs and the specific challenges they face in the relationship with their children.

### 3. Study visits and their role in teacher training

In April 2013 I had the chance of participating to the study visit “Adult education: validation of former learning and assessing progress and achievement”, held in Oslo, Norway, financed by the European Commission through the Transversal Program.

The objectives of this program are:

- Facilitating the information exchange between decisional factors and educational specialists for common goals of the participating countries, in pre-university institutions
- Supporting participants to learn about already applied measures in education at European level
- Spreading out last minute information concerning European education
- Offering opportunities for encouraging, initiating and support activities linked to other actions from Longlife Learning Program.
- Encouraging participants to be more self conscious about their role as resource persons and to establish links during the study visit
- Emphasizing themes referring to the Lisbon process.

A learning professional taking part in a study visit will be able to:

- exchange expertise with other learning professionals from across Europe;
- establish important new contacts at European level;
- learn about the latest trends in education and training systems in other European countries; and
- bring back home the insight and knowledge you acquired to disseminate it.

### 4. Themes featured in the study visit program

Europe 2020 strategy puts strong emphasis on education and training to promote ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (Council of the European Union, 2010d). In the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training after 2010, the Council of the European Union stresses that it is important to develop partnerships between education and training providers and businesses, research institutions, cultural actors and creative industries to promote innovation and increase **employability** and **entrepreneurial potential** of all learners (Council of the European Union, 2009a). Broader learning communities, involving representatives of civil society and other stakeholders, should be promoted to create a climate conducive to creativity and better reconciling professional and social needs, as well as individual wellbeing (Council of the European Union, 2009b).

Also, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (Council of the European Union, 2009b) after 2010 reiterates the need for high quality teaching through adequate **initial teacher education** and **continuous professional development** and through making teaching an attractive career choice. Flexible training provision and investment must be provided to initial and continuing training for teachers and trainers due to the changing labour markets and working environments (Bruges communiqué, 2010).

The recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on **key**

**competences for lifelong learning** (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2006a) defined a framework combining knowledge, skills and attitudes which all individuals need for personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. It is a reference tool to support policy-makers, education and training providers, employers and learners. Key competences become a priority for all age groups.

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) (Council of the European Union, 2009b) sets promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship as a strategic priority for Member States until 2020. Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants – complete their education, through, where appropriate, second-chance education and more personalized learning. By doing this, education and training systems contribute to reducing social inequalities and enable citizens to realize their full potential (Council of the European Union, 2011b).

Reducing the share of **early school leavers** to 10% from the current level of 14.4% in both general education and VET is one of the headline targets of Europe 2020 strategy. The Commission approved in 2011 an action plan that will help Member States to achieve this headline target by the end of the decade (Council of the European Union, 2011a). VET in particular can contribute to reducing the percentage of early school leavers through a combination of both preventive and remedial measures for example, through labour market relevant VET, increased work-based learning and apprenticeships, flexible learning pathways, effective guidance and counselling, and by learning content and methods that acknowledge young people's lifestyles and interests, while maintaining high-level quality standards for VET (Bruges communiqué, 2010).

**Access to pre-primary education** is essential for a good start in life as it promotes children's sociability and lays the basis for further learning. It is especially important for children from families with low incomes, ethnic minorities and migrants.

Member States have introduced **alternative (more flexible) forms of education and training**, second-chance programmes, mechanisms for informing parents about absences and reduced costs by providing free course materials and transportation. Close cooperation between general education and vocational sectors and 'second-chance' schools for adults is important. For children with special needs, access is increasingly considered as being given the possibility to attend general or special education based on what provides the best learning possibilities for the individual child. At higher education level, free education is key as tuition fees may reduce access.

Making **lifelong learning and mobility** a reality is one of the strategic objectives for European cooperation in education and training after 2010 (Council of the European Union, 2009b). Most countries have made progress in defining unified and overarching lifelong learning strategies. Cooperation should address learning in all contexts – whether formal, non-formal or informal – and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning. The Bruges communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training calls for more actions to ensure maximum access to lifelong learning so that people have opportunities to learn at any stage in life and by making routes into education and training more open and flexible (Bruges communiqué, 2010).

Exchanging information on different policy options can help advance reforms of national education and training systems and, with other common learning ac-

tivities, progress towards the common objectives and benchmarks for lifelong learning. **Coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies** integrating education, higher education, adult learning and VET still need to be implemented. A holistic approach connecting lifelong learning and VET with other policy areas such as macroeconomics, employment, competition, enterprise, research and innovation, and social policies is crucial.

As such, the study visit program has a strong influence not only on the participant, but also on the people he comes into contact, professionally speaking. The participant becomes a resource person, at local, county, national and international level.

## 5. Training teachers for the role of parental guides

The good practice examples seen on the study visit and the results of the work done were presented at first in the national conference “The European dimension of school” we organized in May 2013 at kindergarten “Tudor Vladimirescu” Craiova. Here, I emphasized one of the conclusions of the study visit, which was that teachers need to prepare children for their life roles. We discussed then that, throughout Europe, children do not want to become skilled workers anymore. They all want to become chiefs and they are encouraged in this thinking by their parent. This leads to a lack of skilled laborers, to dropping out (because the children try to follow studies they are not suited for) and to unemployment. So, we must fight this trend not only by introducing career orientation and entrepreneurial elements at young ages, we also must work with the parents in order to make them see that they must take into account the children’s preferences and talents when selecting a future carrier. This is done, in early ages, by encouraging parents to know their own children, to have a healthy relationship with them and to train the children in assisted decision making.

In the workshop about the study visit program I will organize in June, I intend to challenge the teachers to find solutions to involve more the parents in the educational process mediated through European programs implemented by the school.

The mentorship program will begin as dissemination and valorization for the study visit, “Let’s learn together!”, within the framework of Didactica Nova magazine collaborator, aims to put together experienced and debutant teachers. One of the recommended themes to work on will be about the teacher – parent relationship, because in the formal studies for becoming a teacher, it is a problem usually ignored.

## Conclusions

Parents have a very important role in their children’s lives. As children are different, educating the parents to cope with their role should be a personalized experience. The involvement of all the dimensions of the parent as a learner can be done through a number of methods, such as the biographical approach, a personalized educative agreement and individual counseling. The teachers’ initial training does not usually emphasize the role of the parent in the educational life, and the teachers lack many skills in working with adults. As such, a continuous training with elements of adult learning characteristics should be taken in consideration for every teacher who will inevitably, give parental education.

## Disclaimer

The content of this article does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the author(s).

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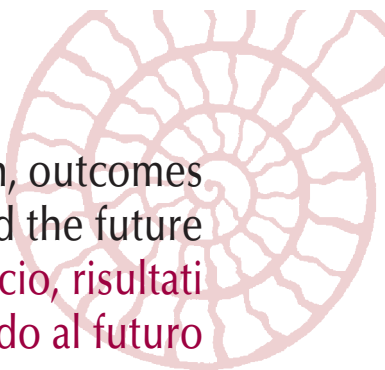
Sperimentando l'apprendimento intergenerazionale  
attraverso l'uso di linguaggi creativi

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Experiencing intergenerational learning  
with creative languages







# ALICE project: approach, outcomes ...and the future

## Il progetto ALICE: approccio, risultati ...e uno sguardo al futuro

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### ABSTRACT

This article introduces the ALICE (Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences) project approach, its main results and a reflection on its contribution to the EU policies. The ALICE project introduced the concept of creative languages (art, digital storytelling, social media) as instrument to build rich and caring environments for children to grow up. As an expected result, the adults' reflection on their own role as educators through intergenerational learning could be stimulated, with impact on the achievement of adults key competences for lifelong learning 1, 4, 5, 7 and 8 (European Commission, 2007) for the participating adults. Children are not direct beneficiaries of the project's approach: however, we can expect that the adults' improvement with regard to the above mentioned Key Competences, will encompass better life conditions for the children.

Questo articolo introduce i risultati dell'approccio formativo adottato dal progetto ALICE (Formazione degli Adulti per la generazione di esperienze intergenerazionali creative). Vengono inoltre considerati i risultati principali del progetto e si riflette sul suo contributo alle politiche dell'Unione Europea. Il progetto ALICE ha introdotto il concetto di linguaggi creativi (arte, narrazione digitale, social media) come uno strumento per costruire ambienti ricchi per la crescita dei bambini. Come risultato atteso il progetto mirava a promuovere la riflessione degli adulti sul proprio ruolo come educatori all'interno delle relazioni intergenerazionali, con impatto sul raggiungimento, da parte degli adulti coinvolti, di specifiche competenze chiave per l'apprendimento permanente 1, 4, 5, 7 e 8 (Commissione Europea, 2007). I bambini nelle famiglie degli adulti coinvolti non erano diretti beneficiari del progetto: tuttavia, possiamo aspettarci che il miglioramento degli adulti per quanto riguarda le suddette competenze chiave, implicherà migliori condizioni di vita e di educazione dei bambini.

### KEYWORDS

Project, pedagogical approach, Work-programme, educational outcomes.  
Progetto, approccio pedagogico, programma di lavoro, impatto educativo.

- \* While whole article is the result of collaboration and agreement between the two authors, the specific contributions have been made as follows:  
Umberto Margiotta supervised the whole article structure and rationale. Furthermore, he wrote the following paragraphs: § *Introduction*; § 5. *Conclusions*  
Juliana Raffaghelli curated the final paper version and wrote the following paragraphs: §2. *Alice project approach and objectives* § 3 *Project Outcomes & results*; § 4 *Best Practices Selection*.

## Introduction

In the contemporary European society, social cohesion can only be built through an integrated vision of the social tissue's complexity, where diversity (among cultures, age, gender) is to be considered an opportunity. Intergenerational learning (IL) bring to the fore the question of "differences" that enrich: in fact, IL can be a twofold purpose process enacts processes of informal learning towards the achievement, both by adults and children, of key competences for lifelong learning, while at the same time that improves dialogue among generations through civic participation in common social and institutional spaces. IL is hence, a mean and an end to foster social cohesion. However, generating spaces for IL as well as ensuring it is a rather new issue for educational research and practices. Currently intergenerational learning practices and research is focused on how to promote IL. This include the experimentation and analysis of different features of IL across different ages, from effective parenting and early child education and care, to the dialogue between senior volunteering and young teen agers.

In line with this focus of interest, the ALICE (Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences) project introduced the concept of creative languages (art, digital storytelling, social media) as instrument to build rich and caring environments for children to grow up. As an expected result, the adults' reflection on their own role as educators through intergenerational learning could be stimulated, with impact on the achievement of adults key competences 1, 4, 5, 7 and 8 (European Commission, 2007) for the participating adults. Children are not direct beneficiaries of the project's approach: however, we can expect that the adults' improvement with regard to the above mentioned Key Competences, will encompass better life conditions for the children.

This article introduces the project's approach, taking into consideration the development and implementation of pedagogical practices as well as their related tools and reflections, across five Member States engaged in the partnership: Greece, Italy, Romania, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

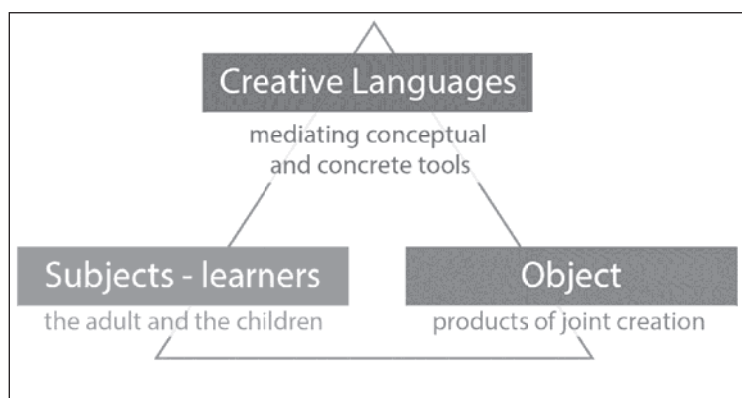
### 1. ALICE project approach and objectives

As stated previously, intergenerational learning is an uncommon situation, which requires pedagogical innovation and *crossing boundaries* of practice (both personal and institutional). The key point is: how can we ensure IL? What environments and languages best promote connections between generations? In spite of the potential of IL, it must be considered that today's adults were raised in the industrial society, by teachers trained to teach in old systems. Therefore, adults, particularly those with low educational attainments, do not recognize the own creative role as educators. Instead, they rely on the schooling system, which in many cases (i.e. immigrant parents, but also highly educated parents) have deeply different values with regard to the family identity and culture. As a result, they do not spend enough quality time with children; either they do not search for quality advice with regard to their educational relationship with children.

The answer found by ALICE partnership emphasized the role of Creative Languages, i.e. forms of expression that go beyond the languages traditionally adopted in educational settings. A framework was built in order to address an experimental action that lasted two years. In this pedagogical framework creative languages *mediate* the educational relationship between the adult and the children. In the sense adopted by the well known work of (Vygotskij, 1978; Wertsch,

2007), *mediation* is the process supporting the learner's activity; in fact, the learner uses *conceptual* and *concrete* tools, which are the result of socio-cultural development, in their effort to solve a problem. Along this process, the learner can contribute to the transformation of culture. We recall here another important concept, the one of *zone of proximal development*, which is the space where a learner is able of moving from an initial condition, towards a new situation where new skills and knowledge is achieved. The key idea enclosed here regards not only the *space*, but also the fact that the entire process depends from the learner's activity according to the own initial skills and knowledge.

Vygotskij applied his conceptual framework to a number of experimental situations (mainly regarding psychological experiments in laboratory) and later on this was extensively applied to educational psychology in traditional learning settings. We applied this to the intergenerational learning situation, where the learners are two, the adult and the children. This could be represented as follows:



**Figure 1 – Mediation in the process of Intergenerational learning within ALICE approach**  
(based on Vygotskij concept of mediation)

Within ALICE, the following Creative languages were initially proposed and explored:

- Music, and adults' creative interactions with children
- Children's literature and metaphors to enact intergenerational dialogue
- Digital storytelling: intergenerational narratives
- Games and social media to promote intergenerational learning

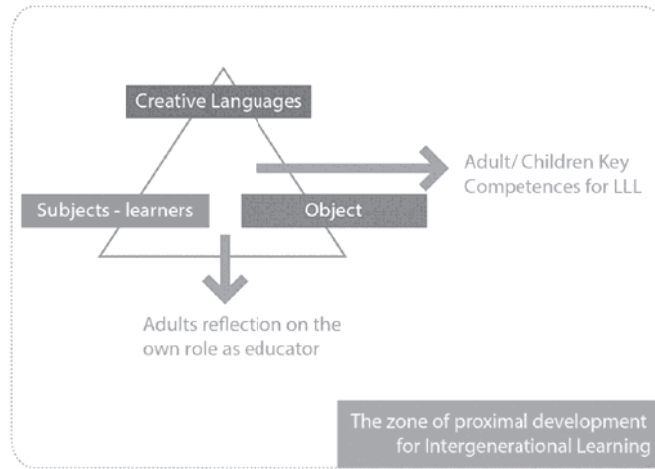
However, these are not necessarily the only creative languages that could be adopted within an intergenerational learning situation. Many more ideas could come from the diverse fields of Arts and Crafts. Furthermore, the children's age, as well as the contextual factors and prior knowledge by the adult will generate important contingences to the selection of a Creative Language.

In fact, during the piloting of activities other new languages were explored:

- Art crafts with paper and recyclable stuff
- Cooking
- Autobiographical writing

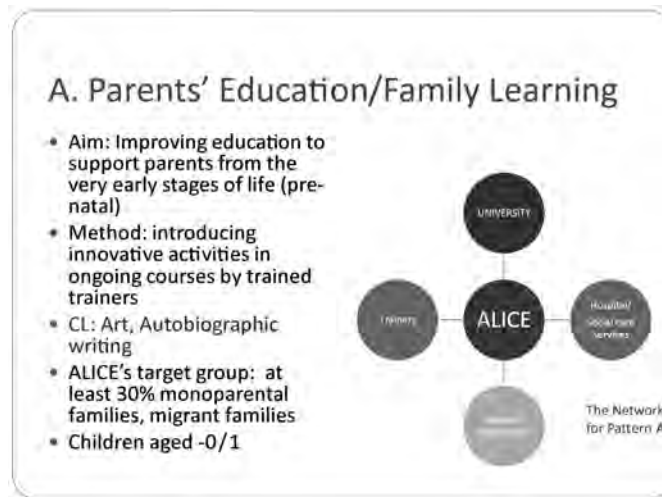
*Our thesis within ALICE project has been hence that adults as reflective educators, through joint creative experiences, will generate rich learning environments that are the base for XXI Century Skills: creativity, adaptability, expression of the self and collaboration with others.*

*Furthermore, the adult as reflective educator is able of learning from the own creative experience with the children.*



**Figure 2 – Mediation in the process of Intergenerational learning within ALICE approach** (based on Vygotskij concept of mediation)

Here follows some *patterns* taken from real ALICE experimental activities, showing how this theoretical model could be implemented:



**Figure 3 – Pattern A: Parental Education**



Figure 4 – Pattern B: Senior Volunteering

As main action, the project aimed to experiment adult's education pilot programmes to show/learn about the importance of creative languages (art, storytelling, social media) in connection with the idea of building rich and caring environments for children to grow up.

However, if the project had only implemented this strategy, the risk could have been not only the very small scale of actions (considering that the type of actions are time consuming and socially/culturally demanding) but also the lack of sustainability of the approach.

Therefore, as a subsidiary strategy, the partners implemented a training of trainers action tightly connected to actions of institutional building in order to reinforce the institutional context for intergenerational learning through ALICE's approach (intergenerational experiences with use of Creative Languages, therefore, intergenerational creative experiences).

Specifically, the initial project's objectives were:

- To help adults, senior citizen and volunteers to reflect and acquire competences necessary to become effective educators, and the impact their actions can have on future learning of children.
- To provide adults, senior citizen and volunteers with creative languages to generate opportunities for intergenerational learning;
- To train adult's trainers to adopt ALICE methodological approach, becoming aware of the role that adult's as educator can have on social cohesion, and hence, re-considering the value of adult's training institutions.

The objectives regard adults, as the main target of the project, trainers and adults' education institutions/networks.

With regard to adult learning, the objectives were

- To develop knowledge and skills for using the following Creative Languages: **music** as creative language to dialogue with children with impact on adult's acquisition of KC 5 (learning to learn), KC7 (sense of initiative and entrepreneurship) and KC8 (cultural awareness and expression)

**storytelling** as creative language to dialogue with children, with impact on adult's acquisition of KC 5 (learning to learn), KC7 e KC8

**games and social media** as creative language to dialogue with children with impact on adult's acquisition of KC 4 (digital competence) and KC5

- To improve knowledge on **cultural diversity** and values of **European patrimony**, as **the base of creative languages**, with impact on adult's acquisition of Key competence (KC) 8.

With regard to adults' education and adults' education institutions

- To favour **sharing of creative experiences among generations**, as spaces of reflection, awareness and learning on otherness towards commitment and solidarity, with impact on adult's acquisition of KC6 "social and citizenship"
- To empower **alliances among local government, school, elder people centers, cultural associations, private sector, University**, as spaces of implementation of creative experiences for intergenerational learning
- To improve the **perspective of interdependence between the adult as educator and the adult as lifelong learner**, improving the participation of adults to lifelong learning activities.
- To **contrast processes of exclusion and marginalization** of adults-children at risk because of the low competences of the former in caring/educating the latter.

The phases of the project implementation were:

1. To train adults' trainers to understand and implement ALICE's approach.
2. To support trainers' design and implementation of ALICE's approach. Different adults were to be engaged: partners, senior citizen, teachers, volunteers.
3. To launch a testing phase where adults used the creative languages with children. The phase was accomplished with a participatory evaluation (based on adults and trainers reflection) on the educational impact of intergenerational creative experiences.
4. Raising awareness on the model between adults' education institutions.

Across these phases, the project also undertook a strategy of communication to raise awareness within the international scientific community as well as within local policy makers and adults' education providers, on ALICE's strategy and impact, searching for further adoption of the approach.

The project's work programme undertook activities of educational development and experimentation, connected to a methodological reflection as well as other structural, key elements of the project's approach, like the structure of collaboration for the development of educational activities, and the quality assurance strategies. The figure 5 shows the phases to deploy the project's approach.



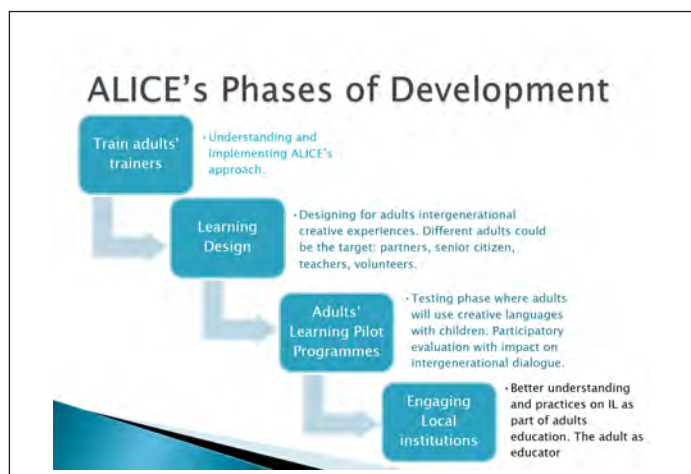


Figure 5 – The project's phases

The participatory methodological approach emphasized the need of promoting opportunities to reflect on learning achievements during the rather informal educational activities, exploring and understanding, from partners to trainers to adults, the educational impact of the pedagogical approach set by the project. Figure 6 introduces the instruments that were the base of the participatory methodological approach.

Methodological Approach SET OF INSTRUMENTS	
<b>WP3 – Training of trainers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainers Logs</li> <li>• Project Work</li> <li>• Self-Evaluation</li> </ul>	<b>WP4 – Adults Learning Pilot Programmes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection</li> <li>• Key Competences self-analysis</li> <li>• Video-registration</li> </ul>

Figure 6 – The set of instruments supporting the participatory methodological approach

Within the methodological approach, it was also crucial the progressive definition of a number of “indicators” to evaluate the professional and key competences achieved by:

1. Trainers operating in intergenerational creative experiences, participating to the Training of Trainers' Programme.
2. Adults engaged in intergenerational creative experiences.

## 2. Project Outcomes & Results

The project's outcomes initially envisaged were:

1. A methodology to implement Adults' Informal Education activities on Creative Languages to promote Intergenerational Dialogue (ALICE's approach).
2. A transnational, European educational Programme for adults' trainers on ALICE's approach, delivered online. The programme should be composed by the following learning units, delivered by high quality experts coming from partners institutions:
  - Module 1: Intergenerational Learning and Strategies to work within the Community: supporting children as Adult's active citizenship– CIRDFa
  - Module 2: Art and Adults' creative interactions with Children –MAS
  - Module 3: Children's Literature and metaphors to enact intergenerational dialogue –FNCC
  - Module 4: Digital Storytelling: intergenerational narratives –SEED
  - Module 5: Games and social media to promote intergenerational learning – TUC
  - Module 6: Producing Adult Learning Units to implement in local realities (Project's Pilots) – CIRDFa
  - Module 7: Sharing training results: use of digital libraries to collect results of training and share to other trainers. Open Educational Resources for Intergenerational Learning (1 area for trainers and 1 area for adults) – TUC
3. Several Local pilot programmes for adults' learning using ALICE's method, developed by trainers previously introduced to it, with the participation of at least three local institutions and at least 30 adults x country counting senior citizens, parents, volunteers. Initially only six local ALPPs were expected; being every Local ALPP constituted by at least four educational events/sessions that created a space for the use of creative language and adults' reflection on their own role as educators and caregivers (spaces of *edutainment*).
4. Printed Educational materials on ALICE's approach, as a training handbook directed to adults' trainers institutions and trainers, and a booklet directed to adults.
5. An open web-repository of cases of good-practices on "use of Creative Languages" and related training competences (for trainers); users will be able to surf the web-repository, but also to interact with contents and authors (expert institutions), becoming authors themselves if interested (enacting a community of users, o European Community of Adults Trainers)
6. An open web repository on Creative Languages to Promote Intergenerational Dialogue, for open adults' use.
7. Social media implementation to deliver cases, materials, projects' activities and news, informal communications on ALICE's approach.
8. The validation of non-formal and informal learning, and further accreditation (ECTS) of adults' trainers implementation of ALICE's adults learning activities.
9. The recognition of adults' educators institutions as qualified institutions to give continuity to the implementation of ALICE's programme, in contact with the partner.
10. The engagement of social/education policy makers in order to raise awareness on the role of the adult as educator, the impact of his/her actions in children's quality of life and future learning, and the impact in social inclusion.

This initial map of expected results was the base to the concrete achievements that we introduce further, that can be considered satisfactory, due to the levels of effectiveness and quality of the activities undertaken, in line with the initial outcomes.

### 2.1. First year achievements: Creating the Space for Educational Innovation in Adults' Education

The first year was crucial to strengthen the partnership and deepen on the training of trainers' approach.

Convinced that adults' trainers must be able of understanding the value of adult as educators and of creative languages to mediate the adult-child interplay, the main concern of the partnership was to develop, during the first year a valuable and appropriate Training of Trainers programme. The hypothesis was that trainers should become *scaffolders of intergenerational dialogue*; they are called to be aware of the educational impact of cultural, informal activities beyond more formal educational approaches, as a way to engage adults that are normally far from formal (University, Further training) and/or non-formal (training on the job) in lifelong learning trajectories.

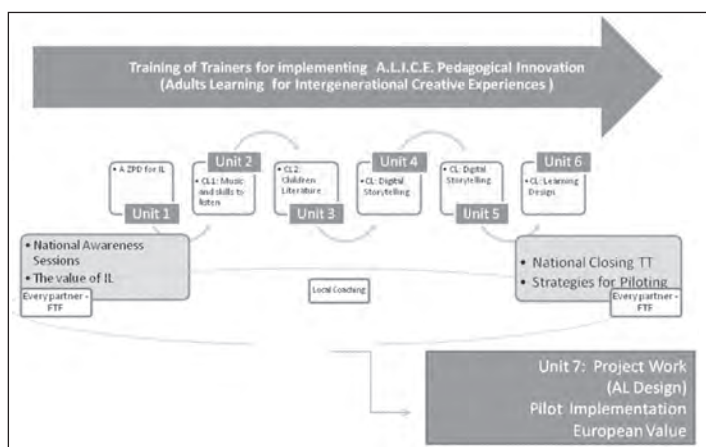


Figure 7 – The training of trainers scheme

Figure 7 shows the scheme of collaboration among partners to deliver an innovative training of trainers programme (discussed and elaborated during the Kick-off Meeting, Venice, January 2012; further developed during the Education Coordinators International Session at Lugano, May 2012). Within this scheme of collaboration, P1 (IT) was the pedagogical expert, giving support to shaping the adults' education profile of activities; P2 (UK), P3 (EL), P4 (CH), and P6 (IT) were experts on specific Creative Languages; whereas P5 (RO) was expert on issues of cooperation for institutional building and networking in the field of adults' education.



**Figure 8 – The virtual architecture: an enlarged cultural context**

The networked learning approach was coordinated by P1, which gave continuing support to National Education Coordinators to maintain the transnational perspective of the pedagogical resources and activities for trainers. Every partner was responsible of the national and local implementation of the training of trainers’ programme, that was to be followed by adults learning pilot programmes. To this regard, National Sessions face to face and local training sessions were implemented in support of the transnational networked learning approach.

Regarding the project’s visibility, the intention was to go a step further the eLearning platform and the website, to communicate on the Project. As figure 8 shows, another important issue, discussed by partners and achieved as approach to the work programme, was the generation of a “virtual architecture” able of generating specific spaces for collaboration and communication across frontiers, supporting the European value of actions. We could conceptualize this virtual architecture following what Margiotta has called the “educational space”, or space of learning while negotiating meanings of practice and hence, transforming the own professional and social reality (Margiotta, 2007). This vision is integrated

with what Raffaghelli (2012) has denominated *enlarged cultural context of learning*: a context of learning that is expanded through the action of negotiating meaning regarding the symbolic borders of the own cultural, professional and existential identity, beyond the local experience.

## *2.2. Second year achievements: Expanding the space for Educational Innovation and discovering the potential of ALICE approach*

The training of trainers' programme was implemented as expected, and by March 2013, at least two trainers per country (10) were prepared to design and implement the own ALPPs. In addition, the training of trainers was a certified course by the University of Venice. Hence, there was a higher number of participants, pursuing individual goals of professional learning beyond the deployment of the experimental activity. In fact, 44 trainers enrolled initially to the course, and 30 received certifications for the accomplishment of the training programme. Most of them are implementing Adults Creative Learning sessions beyond ALICE's project's life, as informed by National Coordinators.

The trainers were invited to produce the own ALPP according to a "creative process" of designing and implementation of five phases (explained in detail in Raffaghelli, this Issue), consisting on:

- A. Contextualize**, where the focus is put on the situation in which the trainer is going to intervene and the driving forces that can support the ALPP or prevent it to go ahead; it is also the moment in which the educational problem is identified. In this phase the trainer was supposed to think about the participating groups and the institutions that can support her.
- B. Plan/Create**, or the moment in which the trainer carefully thinks about the "educational solution" she wants to propose to solve the educational problem identified; it is also time to think about the strategy, which encompasses the adoption of ALICE approach and method, that implying the selection of a Creative Language to mediate intergenerational relationships, and make become adults more competent in their way of supporting children and dialoguing with teens (as educators).
- C. Implement**, the difficult phase in which the trainer is put in to practice her own ideas. The trainer is here supported to think about the risk management; to understand and analyze the critical incidents; to have at hand a Plan B with regard to the problems you encounter; in sum to continuously monitor your work.
- D. Evaluate/Reflect**, this is a crucial phase that is envisaged as the final part of a process of implementation. The idea is to obtain a picture of a whole that is completed with the trainer's reflection about what has been done. Within ALICE, this picture is to be built not only by the trainer, but also by the adults engaged. At least one session should be devoted to dialogue with the participants in order to reflect together on the educational achievements (what did we learn? What did we learn in terms of key competences for Lifelong Learning?) as well as the impact on the participants' life (how are they thinking to use their learning?)
- E. Edit/Share**, the phase that regards packaging and presentation/visibility of the trainer's work. This is the end of the process for the trainer; but within the strategy of ALICE partnership, it should be the beginning of a new loop of experimentation and creation. It is a moment of profound reflection on what

has been done, for the trainer have to create an accessible and knowledgeable “pack” of the own educational concepts, activities planned and implemented, results obtained, evidence of educational success, recommendations for practice. Last, but not least, technological support for the trainer to generate an accessible and shareable educational resource or *open educational resource*<sup>1</sup> is provided.

The project results, taking into consideration the final ALPPs implemented, the number of the beneficiaries (direct and indirect) reached and the type of Creative Languages adopted during the sessions are introduced in Table 2.

	ALPP	Local Seminars	Country	Adults	Children	Adults x Country
<b>Introductory session</b>	13	60	CH-EL-IT-RO-UK	225	0	28
<b>Art/Music</b>	3	23	IT-UK	52	64	102
<b>Children's Literature</b>	3	20	IT-RO	27	57	42
<b>Digital Storytelling</b>	5	14	EL-CH-RO	98	279	31
<b>Games &amp; Social Media</b>	2	3	EL	48	8	22
<b>Implementing results &amp; participatory Evaluation</b>	13	60	CH-EL-IT-RO-UK	136	408	225

**Table 2 – ALICE outcomes in figures**

Countries	CH	EL	IT	RO	UK	TOTAL
<b>Nr of ALPPs Designed</b>	4	6	4	10	2	26
<b>Nr of ALPPs Implemented</b>	2	4	4	2	1	13

**Table 3 – ALICE outcomes – National Distribution**

The process of experimentation ended with the “International Residential Seminar for Trainers” held in Chania, Crete (EL) by June 2013. In these sessions, the trainers shared the own experiences, discussed with peers on ALICE approach into practice, and had the opportunity to have the own ALPPs evaluated by the Scientific Committee.

This was part of the training programme, as space for a *reflective practice, making visible the invisible*.

Reinforcing this approach and towards the exploitation of the project's results, the International Conference, as open space for reflection of academics

<sup>1</sup> Our idea is based on the movement of Open Educational Resources, initiated by UNESCO (2002). To know more: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_educational\\_resources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_educational_resources). We deepen on this aspect further.

and practitioners, started as early as November 2012, and ended with an exciting event the 24-25 October 2013, at Bucharest, Rumania, hosted by P5. This Conference aimed at addressing the discussion about the complex issue of adults' education to engage in rich and caring intergenerational relationships.

### 3. Best Practices Selection

Therefore, the aim of selecting best practices was connected with the need of facilitating the approach's understanding through documented practices, and to offer to new trainers interested on ALICE approach, the possibility to contact real trainers that experienced it. Hence the selected practices respected some criteria that align (and hence promote) practices adopting ALICE pedagogical approach and patterns. The criteria discussed by the Scientific Committee, on the basis of the Education Coordinators analysis and trainers' presentations, were:

*A Best Practice within ALICE consists of ALPPs (Adults Learning Pilot Programmes) that most effectively...:*

- ...*Focused adult's learning prior and during the experiences*
- ...*Introduced properly creative languages and adopted them as a mean to improve intergenerational dialogue*
- ...*Implemented a participatory evaluation based on trainers and adults reflection*
- ...*Targeted adults (within ALPPs) that are relevant for the EU benchmarks the project is aiming to contribute with (i.e. least educated adults, senior volunteers, immigrants, adults excluded from education)*
- ...*Showed relevant learning outcomes in terms of adults' key competences*
- ...*Showed forms of impact on children*
- ...*Showed concrete strategies for documenting the own activity*
- ...*Showed concrete strategies to disseminate and exploit the own approach*

A Best Practice should hence consider:

- Adult's learning prior and during the experiences
- Use of creative languages as a mean to improve intergenerational dialogue
- Effective implementation of participatory evaluation based on trainers and adults reflection
- Targeted adults (within ALPPs) that are relevant for the EU benchmarks the project is aiming to contribute with (i.e. least educated adults, senior volunteers, immigrants, adults excluded from education)
- Learning outcomes in terms of adults' key competences
- Concrete impact (where applicable) in the relationship with children.
- Quality of documented material
- Type of Dissemination
- Type of Exploitation

These dimensions through a peer and self-evaluation process undertaken by National Education Coordinators, being those that better knew the trainers' performances, areas of excellence and weaknesses using an online questionnaire. The National and the Transnational Coordinator were invited to explore the feasibility of this type of evaluation during the 4<sup>th</sup> Partners Meeting at Bucharest, af-

ter presenting “in vivo” the upgrade of ALPPs developed during the project. They considered the approach valid and appropriate, in spite of the difficulty to select few practices (only one) from the own group of ALPPs undertaken.

The questionnaire was accomplished immediately after the International Conference, and further analyzed by the Scientific Committee, that elaborated the final Best Practices report.

### 3.1. *The online Questionnaire*

The Education Coordinators were provided with an online folder with the presentations and reports prepared by all ALICE trainers. They had to choose 1 own ALPP (self-evaluation) and 2 other ALPPs (peer-evaluation), those considered that better aligned to the Quality criteria established by the SC. The questionnaire provided statements and options from 1 to 5 indicating in which extent the Education Coordinator did not agree (1) or fully agree (5). Furthermore, open questions were provided in order to collect comments expanding the sense of the quantitative input given. From their responses 16 were considered valid. Other 3 responses could not be included in the analysis due to the fact that were uncomplete.

**ALICE: Best Practices Questionnaire**

This the questionnaire for self and peer evaluation. Please follow the instructions below.

**\*First step**  
Please read the ALPPs work contained in these two folders:  
TRAINERS' PRESENTATIONS >>> [https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B\\_XV0-5GtmSCZjFEYURUN29GR2M&usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B_XV0-5GtmSCZjFEYURUN29GR2M&usp=sharing)  
NARRATIVE REPORTS >>>> [https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B\\_XV0-5GtmSCWW00UJBuNFV4djg&usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B_XV0-5GtmSCWW00UJBuNFV4djg&usp=sharing)

**\*Second Step**  
Complete the Questionnaire.  
Please accomplish the self evaluation in first place.  
Once finished, please re-open the questionnaire and evaluate at least two other ALPPs. The ALPPs selected should be from another partner institution.

Thank you for your collaboration!

**\*Required**

**Name of the ALPPs \***  
Please indicate the name of the ALPPs that you are about to evaluate.

**Institution \***  
Please indicate the institution that coordinated the ALPPs that you are about to evaluate.

**Is it a self-evaluation or a peer evaluation? \***  
Please indicate if you are about to evaluate your own work (self-evaluation) or another institutions' work (peer-evaluation)

Self-evaluation  
 Peer-evaluation

**1a. The ALPP focused properly adults' learning prior and during the experience \***  
Please indicate the level of appropriateness in focusing adults' learning

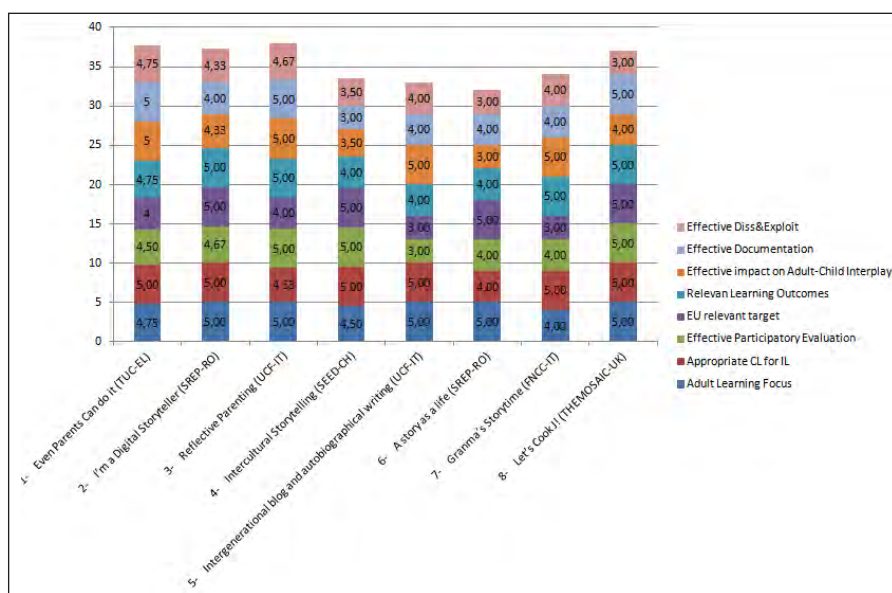
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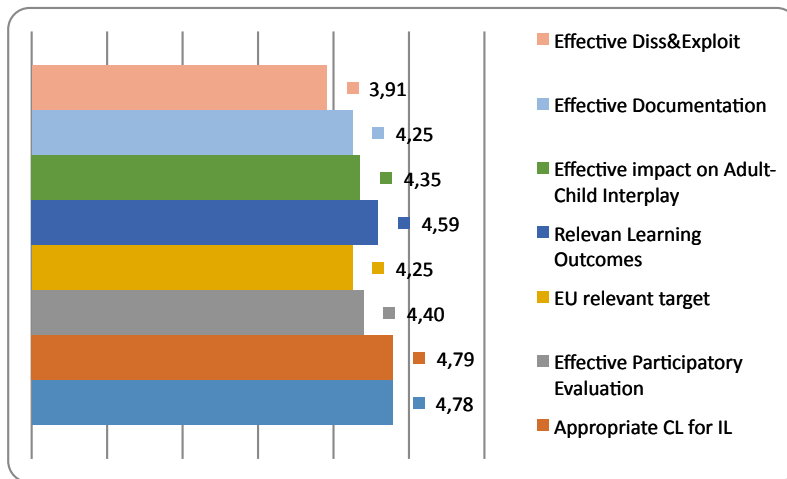


The results were as follows.  
ALPPs selected for Evaluation:

ALPPs title and link of access to the report	Self-evaluation votes	Peer evaluation votes	Total number of votes
<u><a href="#">Even Parents Can do it (TUC-EL)</a></u>	1	3	4
<u><a href="#">I'm a Digital Storyteller (SREP-RO)</a></u>	1	2	3
<u><a href="#">Reflective Parenting (UCF-IT)</a></u>	1	2	3
<u><a href="#">Intercultural Storytelling (SEED-CH)</a></u>	1	1	2
<u><a href="#">Intergenerational blog and autobiographical writing (UCF-IT)</a></u>		1	1
<u><a href="#">A story as a life (SREP-RO)</a></u>		1	1
<u><a href="#">Granma's Storytime (FNCC-IT)</a></u>	1		1
<u><a href="#">Let's Cook ☺! (THEMOSAIC-UK)</a></u>	1		1
<b>Total</b>	6	10	16

As it emerges from the table above, the top three Best Practices were “Even Parents Can Do it”, “I’m a Digital Storyteller” and “Reflective Parenting”. The other 4 practices were appreciated both by peers and by the same partner, as being in any case excellent. Why were they considered effective? Going through the specific questions there are some crucial issues that point to the excellence of these practices, as it is possible to see on the following two graphics.





These results were consistent with other forms of analysis undertaken. The two graphics above, the first one analyzing the ALPPs one by one, the second one as synthesis of the whole ALPPs analyzed, show that the strongest areas of the practices considered were the effective focus on adults learning in spite of the inter-generational approach, as well as the effective use of Creative Languages; furthermore, this approach led to relevant learning outcomes in adults and impact on the relationship between adults-children as perceived by the former. The Practices selected as of excellence, were further effective in the process of documentation, dissemination and exploitation, through the adoption of videos and being transformed in OER reusable by other trainers. This made a crucial difference.

In order to make these best practices more visible, two of them have been selected for the Trainers' Handbook (*I'm a Digital Storyteller* and *"Reflective Parenting"*) while *"Even Parents' Can Do it"* was used as "template" for others' trainers to elaborate the own Open Educational Resources at the Octopus platform.

All the 8 practices object of evaluation are available at <http://learn.ced.tuc.gr/octopus/>, the OER repository. Furthermore, the three best practices are "labeled" as "BP" (Best Practice) at the ALICE website becoming evident for the external visitor.

### 3.2. Comments' on Best Practices Selected

**I'm a Digital Storyteller** was effective for:

It focused appropriate adults' learning and it used Creative Languages for inter-generational learning.

*Even if the problem focused was the difficulty in reading and writing by young people, the approach was intergenerational and there was concern on adults' achievements as educators to promote youngsters' learning.*

*The lack of digital skills in adults and the purpose to acquire them is well focused; the final outcomes are listed in detail, and they relate to young people support.*

*The choice of storytelling by digital tools is made on the basis of a*

*needs inquiry: need for young people to become more articulate and critical through a relationship with older generations; need for the adults to find an open channel to communicate with children, and that in an appealing way*

It adopted participatory evaluation to promote reflection on Key Competences.

*The evaluation was done based on the following evidences: photos taken from the meetings, video recordings, My reflections as a trainers, 3 questions asked to the participants on the basis of the learning map. Analyzing the results of the learning map, it seems that participants improved their key competences such as learning to learn, cultural expression, digital competence.*

It targeted adults that are relevant for EU benchmarks

*The targeted adults were parents, grandparents and educators from kindergartens, schools from IASI surroundings, from rural areas of that region in Rumania.*

The experience promoted new forms of adult-child interplay

*Parents would make the stories more appealing to their children using ICT tools that children handle very well and appreciate. In the same time, during the creation of their own digital stories, parents are supported by their children in their understanding of different ICT tools. Strategies for Dissemination and Exploitation were considered. Strategies for dissemination and exploitation included creating a Facebook groups where other interested people or organizations can join; spreading the information about the creative languages used within the community and the schools and other stakeholders involved in the experience.*

**Even Parents Can Do it!** was effective for:

It focused appropriate adults' learning and it used Creative Languages for inter-generational learning.

*Digital skills were enhanced and music knowledge was developed. The suggestion of using music as creative language was discussed with the adults and they reached a shared view with the trainer on music as a creative language they all liked, and agreed that it is a CL attractive to young people*

It adopted participatory evaluation to promote reflection on Key Competences.

*A specific assesment session was implemented to reflect on the Key Competences. Adults became more aware of music as a creative language that enhances intergenerational communication, as well as acquired skills to produce audiofiles with digital tools, so developing an active and critical approach to digital media*

It targeted adults that are relevant for EU benchmarks

*The adults were parents from primary school with low digital skills*

The experience promoted new forms of adult-child interplay

*Adults and children would come together and listen to music and use digital technologies to make songs*

Strategies for Dissemination and Exploitation were considered

*The experience was considered interesting to be repropounded in a next school year, as part of a programme of parental education.*

**A laboratory for the parenting support through a creative-reflexive approach** was effective for:

It focused appropriate adults' learning and it used Creative Languages for inter-generational learning.

*From the very beginning the trainer's concern was parental education, both from a practical and a conceptual/theoretical perspective. The trainer started with reflective writing (use of diary). Then she adopted art (paper crafts) to support parents' reflections on the own condition, as well as a mean to interact with the own children.*

It adopted participatory evaluation to promote reflection on Key Competences.

*The trainer carefully analyzed the Key competences achieved, also in terms of impact in the whole feeling with regard to parenting and cultivating the own role as informal educator.*

It targeted adults that are relevant for EU benchmarks

*The adults engaged were already well-educated, but in any case they did not have any experience on the issue of parental education and were parents of newborns and very small children 0-3.*

The experience promoted new forms of adult-child interplay

*There was a participatory session that also included activities for children*

## Conclusions

The project's thesis was that adults as reflective educators, through joint creative experiences, are able of generating rich learning environments that are the base for XXI Century Skills: creativity, adaptability, expression of the self and collaboration with others. Along the several ALPPs it has emerged that the adult as reflective educator is able of learning from the own creative experience with the children. Hence, creative experiences have the potential to generate the space for intergenerational dialogue for:

- They decrease the stress of encountering diversity. A generation is a cultural field, and different generations face otherness
- They promote a collaborative, joint venture; the joy of creating together is the opportunity to open the heart, the mind, the soul to the otherness, as well as to self-critique.
- They stimulate self-expression and agency.

ALICE approach is based hence on the Creative Languages as a mean to facilitate intergenerational learning. Some of the initially identified creative languages, and later cultivated, are:

- European and non-European cultural heritage:
- art (music/paintings/theatre);
- elder people stories;
- children’s literature;
- Cooking and storytelling
- Social media to promote sharing of learning results –digitalization of contents created above-
- Games, according to children ages, to stimulate problem solving, creativity, entrepreneurship.

The Quality Challenges faced by ALICE project have been, along the several phases of deployment of activities:

- **To support appropriately trainers** in achieving skills to implement the model **(January-March 2013)**
- Intergenerational learning occurs in highly fluid spaces
- Adults’ education is an ill-defined field of practice
- To support **appropriate ALPPs implementation (June 2013)**
- To go out the school environment or highly structured learning environments, **focusing properly adults’ learnign.**
- To **implement effectively creative languages** as part of the intergenerational/family learning experiences (the ALPPs, Adults Learnign Pilot Programmes)
- To **reach the least educated adults**
- To have concrete impact on **adults key competences**
- To document at several levels the achievements, promoting new professional practices as well as visibility of the project’s approach.
- **To Select, Document, Disseminate and Exploit Best Practices (October 2013)**

The selected best practices was connected with the need of facilitating the approach’s understanding through documented practices, and to offer to new trainers interested on ALICE approach, the possibility to contact real trainers that experienced it. In fact, the key activities foreseen beyond the project’s life regard activities to strenght the adoption of educational products and particularly of the project’s approach, encompassing training of trainers as well as adults’ education. ; It is also considered crucial to keep reinforcing the existing local networks and start sharing the educational products in further transnational, European networks. Furthermore, the project’s participants made a significant effort to document the activity as scholarly publication, in the form of a Special Issue on Intergenerational Learning to be published by the European Journal of Research

on Education and Teaching (1/2014). In sum, consolidating the approach, arisen from pilot experiences towards an educational strategy.

With regard to the Training of Trainers (TT) on ALICE approach, the pedagogical expertise of P1 can be enhanced to launch new eLearning activities, from open courses adopting the resources produced (all licensed as Creative Commons) and local courses/activities by every partner on the specific Creative Language within the ALICE approach. It is envisaged by 2014-2015 the implementation of an Open Course, using the eLearning platform and resources already existing. The resources will be freely accessible, but the business model will encompass the request of a very reduced fee for ECTS recognition.

After the ALPPs, all partners have generated, reinforced or expanded own groups of work on the issue of intergenerational learning. Intertwining these local activities with European/international networks seems crucial. The activities in which the partners have deepened the own knowledge and that could lead to further local activities are:

- Reinforcing the role of Adults as Educators for the LLL society.
- Art and Adults' creative interactions with Children.
- Children's Literature – metaphors to enact intergenerational dialogue
- Digital Storytelling: intergenerational narratives
- Games and social media to promote intergenerational learning
- Implementing Results at the Community Level
- Video-documentation and reporting as reflective practice

In supporting these activities, the partners (and other local institutions interested) can make use of educational resources and exemplar material:

- Adults' Trainers Handbook
- Project's Booklets For Adults' Learning
- Open Educational Resources Repositories
- Papers from the International Conference and the Special Issue.

Both the dissemination and exploitation strategies were based on a progressive approach along the the consolidation of reflections made during the process of experimentation and training. The partners attempted to dialogue with Policy Makers (distribution of Advertising Material and Booklets on Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences), Adults' Education institutions (use of Educational Resources both electronic and printed, use of advertising materials, creation of National networks of practitioners, adults' education institutions, libraries, parents' association, schools) and academics (discussion on the pedagogical approach, analysis of non-invasive, ecological research methodologies for intergenerational learning, etc.); this dialogue is being reinforced and will lead to the above mentioned further educational local and international practices.

As for the specific contribution of ALICE project to the policy context of the European Union, can be depicted considering the following items:

- Learning and Educating in times of crisis (LLP policy context presentation 2011, 2012). This issue indicates the need of strengthen new ways of learning, innovating beyond formal course and institutions. The improvement of key competences through non-structured, cultural events for adults, as ALICE attempted to promote, will surely bring ideas for new practices in adults' education.

- EU as Complex social tissue, where cohesion depends on the interdependences and differences (EU2020). This issue addressed the idea within ALICE of strengthening solidarity between generations, a type of otherness that has been poorly considered in the past (relationships among generations are just given in a cultural context). Furthermore, improving the adults' awareness on the own role as educator, was expected to have mid-term impact on adults participation in LLL, and their children long term impact on their participation to LLL. This is connected with the ET2020 goal "Promote equity, social cohesion, active citizenship" through educational interventions. While the long term impact cannot be measured, the Project Participatory Evaluation strategy led to interesting declarations by the participants, regarding new insights on the own role as educators and in intergenerational relationships.
- Particularly, the focus was strengthening social inclusion & Active community participation through adult learning, as well as Active ageing: learning opportunities for older adults. Experimental activities in the field consisted on simple training activities to understand and reflect about how to pass valuable time with children/teen agers, reinforcing adults' learning to learn, cultural awareness and expression, digital skills...and the pleasure of learn!
- As explained in the former sections of this report, the only way to achieve sustainable innovations in a field of education, is to reinforce adults' training institutions as well as adults' trainers skills, an important focus of ET2020. Therefore, ALICE envisaged a whole part of its work programme devoted to train the trainers: about the role of adults as educators, about creative languages, to design adults' learning sessions to promote adult-child interplay.
- The above mentioned action also encompass adults' training institutions' reflection: indeed, the implementation of the training of trainers programme made emerge the need of developing the adult learning sector – currently the weakest link in the LLL chain; renewing the focus on increasing participation, especially of those furthest from learning (ET2020)

The above mentioned issues are in tight connection with the European added value within ALICE, which is linked to GRUNDTVIG LLP subprogramme in the sense of developing and testing adults learning innovations, through an European approach. Specifically:

- The partnership allowed to exchange experiences and outputs among trainers (European online training and direct mobility will be implemented) and among adults (blogging and seeing other adults' products of learning activities within ALICE), giving an intercultural dimension to our work functional to the transmission of cultural values.
- All the competences and related topics that the project aimed to transmit (intergenerational dialogue, creativity and creation as process of entrepreneurship and learning to learn; combating social exclusion promoting the adoption of creative languages to improve dialogue among adults and children, and adults and school) were enriched by the different inputs coming from the other European cultures.
- European key-competences represent an important challenge for all the European countries and their lifelong learning perspective. The project tried to support adult education providers and trainers in facing these challenges, conferring value and visibility to informal adult education in the context of lifelong learning.

- Because of the partners' extensive networks, through University and Adults' Education Institutions, the results of the project are exploitable on a wide basis beyond the borders of the consortium.
- The main educational materials produced are available in 4 partner languages
- The open educational repositories with educational project's results will be usable at European/international level.

*Our belief, our compass to navigate in the complexities of putting our idea into practice...*

*Adults as educators play an extremely important role in the Lifelong Learning society: Let help them do it!*

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# Parenting: awareness about the own educative role and citizen competences

## Genitorialità: consapevolezza sul proprio ruolo come educatori e competenze per la cittadinanza

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### ABSTRACT

It is since a long time that the European Community highlights how parents – fundamental resource for the education of the “tomorrow’ citizens” – must be supported in the interpretation of their educative role and in the assumption of their whole responsibility with respect to the related functions. This paper presents the results of an ALICE pilot project dedicated to the training of parents with children aged 0-3 and realized as a laboratory of reflection through creative and informal languages. It comes to a formative proposal relative to empowerment interventions, aimed at sustaining parent competences and its conscious use from an educational point of view. Each meeting was organised in two phases: (a) self-reflection as parent and then as son/daughter; (b) realization of creative activities to enhance the educational quality of the relationship with their children. The participation of parents has been constantly active. The feedback obtained through a satisfaction survey and a questionnaire for self-evaluation to compare pre- and post- training has been very satisfactory.

Da tempo la Commissione Europea sta mettendo in evidenza il fondamentale ruolo che genitori giocano in quanto risorsa per l'educazione cittadina del domani. Si sostiene che i genitori devono essere sostenuti nella comprensione e consapevolezza del proprio ruolo attraverso processi formativi che consentano agli adulti l'appropriazione responsabile di tale ruolo. Questo articolo presenta i risultati di una delle attività pilota svolte all'interno del progetto ALICE dedicati alla formazione dei genitori con bambini di età 0-3 e realizzati come laboratorio di riflessione attraverso linguaggi creativi e informali. Nello specifico, si tratta di una proposta formativa basata su interventi di empowerment volti a sviluppare competenze per la genitorialità, trasferite con successo nello svolgimento consapevole del ruolo di genitore. Ogni incontro è stato organizzato in due fasi: (a) auto-riflessione, come genitore e come figlio / figlia; (b) realizzazione di attività creative per migliorare la qualità educativa del rapporto con i figli. La partecipazione dei genitori è stata costantemente attiva. Il feedback ottenuto attraverso un sondaggio sulla soddisfazione e un questionario di auto-valutazione per confrontare pre e post-formazione ha mostrato positivi risultati.

### KEYWORDS

Parenting, Creative Languages, Reflexivity, Informal Education.  
Genitorialità, linguaggi creativi, riflessività, educazione informale.

## Introduction

“Education does not take place only in classrooms, but when the family is seated at the table and its members seek together to make sense of the events of the day” (Bruner 1996). With these words Bruner states the centrality of the educational processes in the family for human training and emphasizes a natural evidence: education occurs not *also*, but *first of all* in the family, and that “first” is both chronological and axiological (Milani, 2008, pp. 13-14). Despite the complexity of the social changes, the family retains the task to help the construction of the identity of the person in development. This identity is the milestone of the future of children, families and social communities, so the goodness of the parent-child relationship is considered – still indisputably – the place *par excellence* of essential personalization, which ensures a quality existential route and “his entry in humanity”, as in the words by Pourtois and Desmet (2000). When Bruner, therefore, uses the image of “being gathered around the table”, introduces the theme of the family as primary place of affections and relationships. And when he explains that around the table the family members can help each other to find the possible sense of the events, he introduces the concept of family as primary source of values, where parents offer “valuable goals” to their children (according to an inspired expression of Erik Erikson), helping them to find the meaning of everyday life.

For this reason parents – as a fundamental resource for the “tomorrow’ citizens” – are to be supported in the interpretation of their educative role and in the assumption of their whole responsibility with respect to the related functions. Also, by giving value to all the knowledge that they possess, often without full consciousness.

The European Community is by long time engaging in this task with appropriate recommendations, guidelines and welfare policies, demonstrating, through its Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) research and action project, how early, intensive child-centred education conducted in designated, adequate facilities, accompanied by a parallel strong involvement on the part of parents who have received appropriate training and preparation, can contribute significantly to the fight against socio-cultural disadvantages by functioning as a preventive measure.

### 1. Supporting parenting in “normal” conditions

In recent decades, studies on parenting have multiplied to the point that they constitute an extremely rich, diversified area of research. This is why the subject of parenting involves various complex distinctions between the many terms used (parenting, childcare practices, parental roles, parenting styles, etc.) and the related constructs. The definition of parenting is neither simple nor unambiguous, and the term – in different languages – can refer to meanings that sometimes do not overlap. Merriam-Webster’s defines “parenting” as “the raising of a child by its parents”, but also as “the act or process of becoming a parent” or “the taking care of someone in the manner of a parent”. Zaccagnini and Zavattini (2007, p. 199) point out that “parenting” does not correspond to “parenthood” (i.e. the state of being a parent). With regard to “parenting”, it is instead essential to grasp – in addition and above all – that it is an act and a creative process and to understand this word not in the static sense of an abstract essence but as an ongoing,

concrete, productive relationship: a dialectical process of becoming “par excellence”. Parenting is thus an autonomous, process-based function of being human, which pre-exists at conception and connotes merely an expression of it, albeit fundamental yet not necessary.

In any case, the analysis of parenting experience is absolutely not simple matter, not only because of the sharp differences which are to be found at the base of individual histories and experiences, but also because of the many aspects which determine it and which require an ecological approach for to be understood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which can take account of the influence of the various contexts concerned. Until around a decade ago most studies focused on analysing cases of dysfunction in parent-child relations, such as those involving child mistreatment or abuse, in order to understand the factors which determine normal parenting processes. However, several studies have by now established that so-called “different” family structures do not necessarily imply a potential dysfunctionality; rather, the origin or cause of problems are mainly the dynamics of relations and the quality of the organisational forms of families. Thus, from a perspective not just of research but also of preventive actions it is necessary to learn about the social, cultural and psychological elements which define the quality of being a parent and of performing parental functions in conditions of normality (biological, psychological, social and cultural), or at least in the absence of evident symptoms, as only a positive overall vision makes it possible to better understand what elements of distress can manifest themselves even under “normal” conditions and what dynamics between the various components may cause them, and to recommend appropriate preventive procedures. What is stressed here is that parenting – whether expressed in terms of functions or skills – on one side significantly impacts not only on the child’s development but also on his/her personality over the entire course of his/her life, on the other is profoundly influenced by culture and also by political choices, which are often much more impactful than what local interventions – albeit targeted ones – are able to do with individuals.

## 2. Reflexivity and self-awareness for to be competent parents

Until the 1930s, in his radio conversations Donald Woods Winnicott said that in the “job of bringing up one’s children, the important things must be done moment by moment, as the events of daily life unfold”, arguing that in order to learn “the job of being a parent there are neither lessons nor specific moments” (Winnicott, 1957). He essentially anticipated the need to focus both on parents’ responsibilities and their role of expertise by presenting a pedagogics based on self-awareness and reflexivity regarding one’s own experiences and backgrounds.

Winnicott’s thinking, which for our purposes comes in rather useful, is that excellent results can be achieved by using what people feel, think or do, and starting from this premise one can build a basis for discussion or for training in order to develop one’s knowledge, awareness, abilities. All of this expresses a very important concept, in that it stresses that the only way to learn to be a mother or a father is to be a parent (Formenti, 2008). Being a parent is always linked to knowledge, but if this knowledge is not recognised, it cannot be expressed as competence. Parental competence is not a quality of the individual alone, it is not removed from the context in which it is put into practice and is not discon-

nected from concrete relations with one's partner, with one's family of origin, with the social support network. In most cases the parent is not aware of being a knowledge bearer and thus needs to discover it, to see him/herself in action, and above all needs to relate and tell his/her story to others. This is the best way to support adults and to clarify appropriate parental functions with regard to their children: functions of which they are capable, at least embryonically. In this way tacit knowledge can flow, and both narrator and listener can find trust in themselves.

### 2.1. *It isn't children that make adults competent parents*

There would not be "families" if in order to become parents it were indispensable to achieve maturity, good self-esteem or the ability to listen empathetically. Such qualities are born within relationships of mutual respect, and are engendered by "right", "fair", "honest" actions. Parents act in a "right" way when they take full responsibility for what they do, thereby offering a model of behavioural integrity to which their child, with regard to his/her thoughts, aspirations and modes of expression may aspire. Such responsibility must be shouldered at the personal level, which entails that one is willing to listen to and take care of oneself, of one's own needs, and at the social level, which entails being willing to acknowledge others and one's ties with others, to cultivate meaningful relationships, to be aware of one's roles and the scripts which we express in various circumstances. From this it follows that the concept of parenting refers to a series of issues such as the representation of being in relation to the inner image of father and mother, the construction of a representation of one's own child, of oneself in the role of parent and of one's own relationship with one's child and has achieved adulthood, that is one's own "autobiographical competence", succeeding in managing one's own personal life path and expressing oneself to the best of one's potential and having the concrete aim of leading the other (*i.e.* one's child) to express the same potential (Demetrio, 1998, 2005).

However a feeling of inadequacy is recurring among today's parents. In particular, this sensation appears encouraged by the proliferation of books, TV programmes and training courses on parenting issues, all purporting to teach parents "how to become competent parents". Childcare rules, theories and practices passed off as optimal which for parents often turn out, in everyday experience, unworkable in the educational relationship with their child. For those who perform educational work with families, "parental competence" is a concept which merits careful consideration: increasingly expressed in strictly psychological, cognitive and/or affective terms, it seems to have lost its original, typically pedagogical connotation, which implicates the specific role of education in the processes of development, in the knowledge and in the actions that characterise the parent-child relationship. The analysis of parenting competencies and identification of adequate professional responses should instead multiply the gaze on the family, by setting at least a dual objective:

- a) on the one hand, to foster a reflective, profound and opened interpretation of the family narrative and elements of competency that it seems to contain;
- b) on the other, to show how learning from experience does not always imply "doing things and talking about what one does", or "accounting for what one does", but even more so means bringing out the tacit, implicit knowledge", in other words, those principles, those rules, those criteria on which we base

our decisions and unconsciously develop models, ideas, appraisals, which go to make up the cultural breeding ground inside which our life is immersed.

In this sense, learning from our own actions means also thinking about the thoughts that have accompanied our actions, our experiences, our lived (Mortari, 2003).

### 3. The ALICE project pilot on reflective parenting

We are sure that parental knowledges are fed with the personal history and experiences, first as a child and then as a parent. We believe that an idiographic (descriptive) and autobiographical (narrative) approach to parenting could be effective, because it allows us to recover in memory styles, attitudes, behaviours, resources and capabilities of our parents on the basis of which have been constructed – in agreement or in opposition – our knowledge and the parenting competences.

In view of these and the previous considerations, in the context of the Grundtvig LLP ALICE Project “Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences” (Margiotta, 2012; Raffaghelli, 2012), we developed a pilot project for parents with children aged 0-3, titled “*Parenting: thoughts and creations to explore a new, although ancient, identity. A laboratory to listen themselves, to listen others, to reflect*”.

The laboratory has been led by the author with Monica Gazzato (preschool teacher with training in steinerian pedagogy) and developed in collaboration with the Association “Progetto Nascere Meglio” of Mestre – Venice in November/December 2012, during six weekly meetings of two hours each.

#### 3.1. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework inside which the training proposal has been put involves different theorisations that jointly offer possibility of understanding and interpretation of the – more and more composite and flexible – processes through which the parenting identity is built (Zambianchi 2012a):

- the *personalism’s construct* originated by the humanistic vision of Maritain, which place at the centre the individual, view as a person (full rights person) in growth, and for which education constitutes the “human awakening” to valorise him/her in his/her anthropologic and axiological integrity;
- the *construct of apprenticeship and practice* that brings to the learning concept as developed by Wenger (1998), starting from the social theory on training developed by Vygotskij and then by Bruner, that allowed to explicit the training as a form of participation to expert practices, taking part to a community;
- the *construct of transformative learning* as developed by Mezirow (1991), derived from the thesis of Bruner (1998), according which the adult, in order to build his/her professional identity, has the need to deconstruct and reconstructs the knowledge – through a reflective approach to him/herself and world knowledge awareness – that the previous state of novice and apprentice allowed him to develop, but not always functionally to the context, neither without distortions;

- the *reflexivity's construct* derived surely by Mezirow, but specially (a) by Mortari (2003), that by taking from Edith Stein contributions, she recognise that the individual learns by experience and acquires consciousness of herself and of the world when he begins to reflect on what happens in order to find a meaning and (b) by Margiotta (2011b,c) that, beginning from the Dewey reflexions, reaffirm the pedagogic significance of the correlation between reflective thinking and educational processes;
- the *enactive construct*, due primarily to Merleau-Ponty (1945) and taken up by Varela et al. (1991), for which knowledge is acquired through the action into the environment and on the environment (embodied cognition), becoming enactive, i.e. generative, (a) of a transformation for the individual and (b) of a contestual co-evolution of the individual-environment system. The importance of this construct is in its ability to explain the educational relationship in terms of “intersubjective process that allows the self-formation” (Margiotta, 2013).

### 3.2. Goals, contents, methodology

In accord with ALICE's guide lines, we think that creative and informal training situations should carry parents to reflect on the own role as educators, and hence, to become early promoters of a lifelong learning strategy. For this reason, we have arranged the educational path “*Parenting: thoughts and creations to explore a new, although ancient, identity. A laboratory to listen themselves, to listen others, to reflect*”, integrating the tools of dialog and autobiographic narration, the informal and creative languages, the use of reflective thinking. This educational path tried to offer to parents a simple but essential help through forms of analogical expression in order to reinforce and expand the caregiving competences present or potential, and to strengthening the practices of reflection critics on the educative tools owned but about which there is not consciousness or is questioned the existence. This pilot project is a formative proposal relative to empowerment interventions (Zambianchi, 2012b), aimed at sustaining parent competences and its conscious use from an educational point of view. The training has been structured as a creative workshop with a general invitation to speak about themselves by playing, writing, painting and modelling, in search of forms and words to externalise the personal experiences – in an intergenerational perspective – and to realize how much everyone learns and has learned by the ones (cfr. Pasini, 2010).

Each meeting was organised in two phases:

- a) the first as a self-reflection as parent and then as son/daughter;
- b) the second as a realization of creative activities to enhance the educational quality of the relationship with their children.

Among the techniques used: self-description, narration, group discussion, emotional resonance, role playing, use of evocative material, expressive forms for individual and/or collective creations, including the realization of a tactile book dedicated to own child, so to generate a texture of emotions and thoughts, or to express “what had not been told”. Every occasion was been functional to reflect on some crucial questions: tales of birth, self-exploration as a child, models and preconceptions about parents in action, becoming a parent between stories,

memories and generations, educational relationship. In support to reflexivity has also been adopted a “reflective diary” (Mortari, 2006), devoted to the tracking of thoughts on themes around “generating a good life”, and “accompanying towards a good life”, believing that writing of the life of own mind could be an effective approach in order to keep alive the process of evolving of our thoughts and allow – by attributing a sense to the object of the thinking – to establish a reflectively critic relation with themselves, characterising this as tool with significant educational capability (Mortari, 2002).

From the methodological point of view we have adopted a perspective based on “doing”, that is operating through workshop-based activities centred around the practice of storytelling, of autobiographic narration, of dialogue and listening, of production. The method tied to “doing” is of practical use to the aims of the ALICE project for various educational/learning priorities that we got to experience objectively (see the results) in our work with parents as it:

- a) more than any other method it meets the goal of involving all parents, especially those who need the strength of social support networks as a means for improving social cohesion;
- b) it also allows parents to be brought together more easily, so that they can benefit from dialogue with others in order to reflect by activating and involving the various dimensions of their becoming (affective, cognitive, social and ideological) and by focusing – through the narrative experience – for a re-examination of their own inner representations, with a transition from investment in themselves to investment in the child;
- c) it enacts informal learning processes which can strengthen and develop key competencies for lifelong learning. Specifically:
  - it encourages learning to learn, through shared critical reflexivity, thinking about one’s thoughts and sharing with a community of parents (KC5);
  - it fosters civic and social skills: through the practice of critical thinking parents can become aware of differences between experiences and be active citizens through the concrete expression of empathy and solidarity (KC6);
  - it encourages a sense of initiative and enterprise, since the decision and willingness to put themselves to the test stimulate impulses towards concrete action in parents, that is to say, enabling them to translate thoughts into actions immediately, to foster their understanding of the risks of parenting, and to further their ability to anticipate possible events in the educational relationship (KC7);
  - it elicits awareness of one’s own culture and encourages its expression, through the sharing of the personal reflections which each parent brings to the dialogue and to other people’s observations, arguments and judgments (KC8).

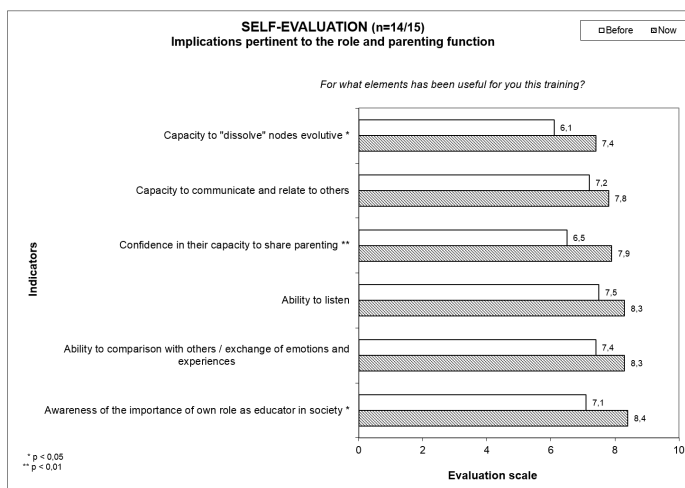
### 3.3. Results

Synthetic reports of activities carried in the pilot project devoted to first parenting can be found at the ALICE Blog <http://www.alice-llp.eu/blog/?p=214> and from here to the next page, click on next. Instead in figure 1 we report a few pictures to document some laboratorial activities.



**Fig. 1 – The ALICE Pilot project “Parenting: a laboratory to listen ourselves, listen, reflect”;** some activities brought forward in the meetings with parents and children: some laboratorial activities.

The participation of parents to every laboratory proposal has been constantly active and we can affirm that the educational proposal has gained a more than satisfying response. The diagram in figure 2 reports the appreciation judgment expressed by parents in a scale from 0 to 10, relatively to the relevance and satisfaction for some indicators, here aggregated in wider categories. The questionnaire has not been given by the formers.



**Fig. 2 – Level of appreciation expressed by parents on relevance and satisfaction of the indicator specified.**



The critical point reported by parents concerns the satisfaction for the duration of the laboratory (M=6.9), i.e. the number of encounters (5 plus one with children), considered too limited in order to reelaborate emerged awarenesses or to examine knowledge in profundity. The parents have suggested that the ideal number of encounters, given the age of children (0-3) and of their necessities, is around 7/8.

We remember that the final goal of the experimentation was the one of sustaining a reflective parenting, by offering to parents the opportunity to review themselves through the critic exploration of their experience and of their personal life-lived in an exercise of comparison of themselves as sons and as parents, by contributing in this way to the explicitation and to the transformation of their implicit knowledges, that frequently became sudden awarenesses.

We think that the use of the “reflective diary” – where to collect the reflections regarding the own thoughts on concepts of “good quality of life” “having care of the life”, “good parenting”, “nourishment for a good parenting” (cfr. Mortari, 2006) – has had precisely this “maieutic function”. Here there are two narrations taken from the “reflective diaries” (whose phenomenological analysis was reported in the PhD thesis of the second author):

*Yesterday it was nicer than usual, ... this night I had the brain agitated ... I woke up at 3 am for the baby and from then I had a “mental pensive diary” until the 7 am ... crazy, it was long time in my life that did not occurred ... and I understood at what all this serves...!!! Writing is for us!!! To learn to feel the mind ... And I reached the goal!!! Thanks ... but I now am really tired!!! (Si.)*

*... In my life I reminisced only some tales of my infancy and to only 2-3 persons. And later I asked to myself: “but who do you want that interest your story?” or “there is lot of worse!”. Not counting the guilt feelings and the hidden shame ... and I searched for a sense ... For a lots lots of time I thought, rethought, reviewed and studied my experiences, but I never did it in a group. I felt naked, but it is good so ... really I am living a big moment of growth ... today I am the person that I am also thanks to what has been, and I will be a mum much “pensive” ... And if my path, my experience could be in some way helpful to others I will be really happy. Thanks!!! (Na.)*

The following graphics report the pre- and post- self evaluation on the parenting training about the perception of change for some indicators related respectively to the role and parental function (fig. 3) and some personal implications (fig. 4). The questionnaire has not been given by the formers. As can be observed, the participants have globally valued a positive change with respect to every indicator analysed and, in some cases, the difference between averages pre- and post-intervention compared with the t Test (.I) results statistically relevant. Specifically, the parents believe that has been significantly improved:

- the capacity to face and dissolve the personal emotional/evolutive blocks;
- the trust in the personal action capacities;
- the awareness with respect to the relevance of the own role as educator in society;
- the knowledge and awareness of themselves;

- the capacity to take care of themselves, supporting the hypothesis behind the present educational proposal according to which the more effective support to parenting is obtained not much on “empowerment of the role” (*what* should know to do an adult to become a parent) but instead on the awareness of him/herself (*who* should be an adult in order to act also an adequate parenting function).

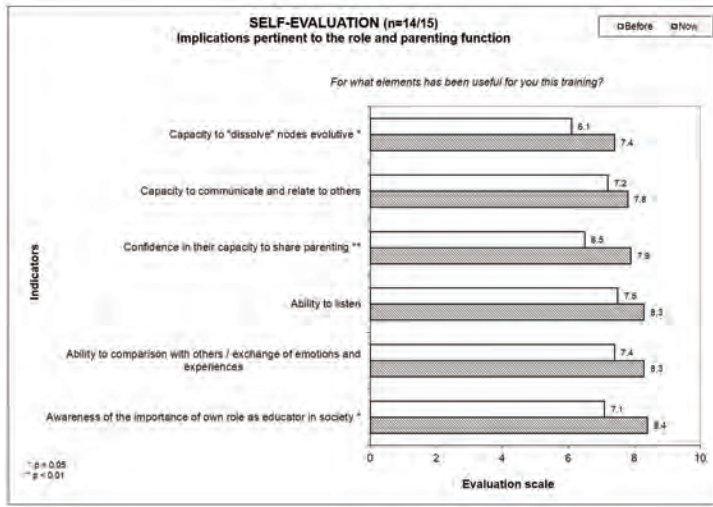


Fig. 3 – Self-evaluation pre- and post- training with regard to the perception of change for some indicators related to role and parenting function.

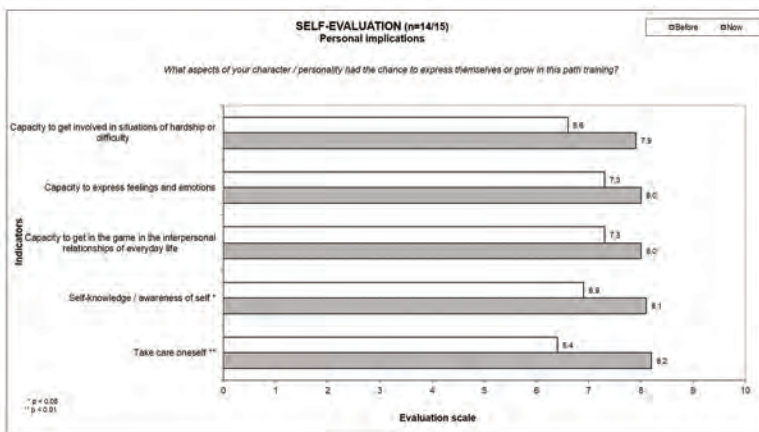
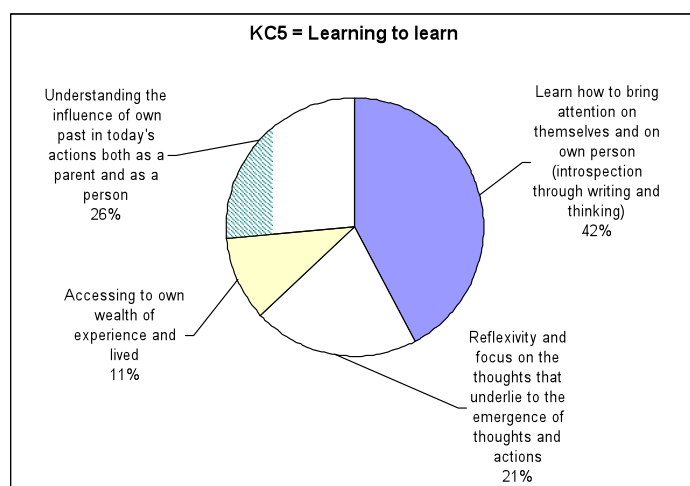
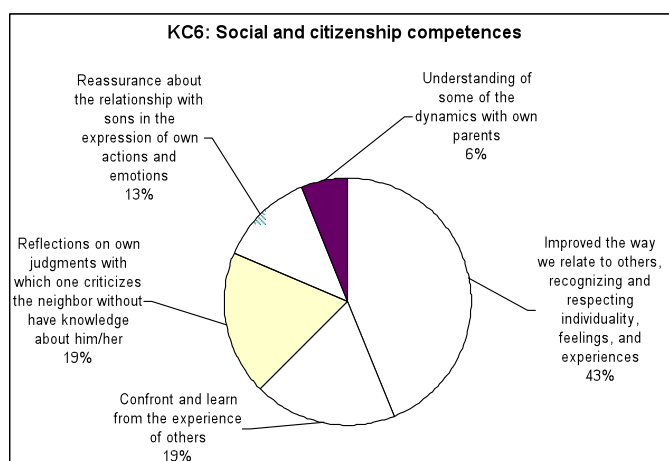


Fig. 4 – Self-evaluation pre- and post- training with regard to the perception of change for some indicators related to personal implications.

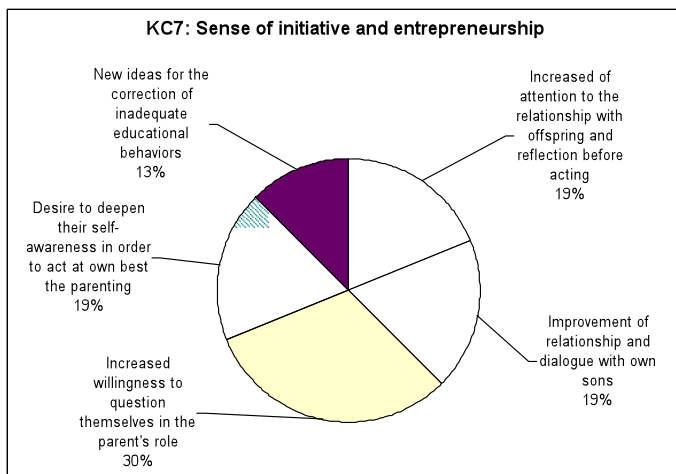
Finally, in accordance with the intentions of the ALICE project, we wanted to understand the possible strategic impact of this formative proposal on the development of key competences in the parents. Therefore, during the last meeting a semi-structured interview was conducted, in order to test the eventual modification, enhancement, awareness about the possession of a few key competences provided by the pilot project. The graphs in Figure 5 to 8 show part of the results obtained from the answers to the questions by which have been explored the key skills, that we combined into macro- categories.



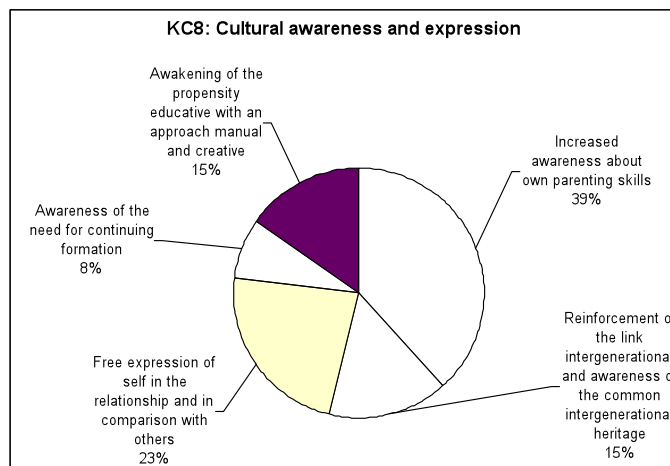
**Fig. 5 – Learning to learn (KC5):** Dear parent, according to your opinion, the training path has changed in some way the manner you reflect on the events, on your life moments, on your feelings? Have you changed the attention that you generally put in the creation of your thoughts?



**Fig. 6 – Social and citizenship competences (KC6):** Dear parent, according to your opinion, the training path has in some way changed the criteria through which you relate to the others, or you consider the diverse other modalities to act, express sentiments, life moments, to adopt different value metrics? If the answer is yes, how?



**Fig. 7 – Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (KC7):** Dear parent, according to your opinion, the training path has in some way changed your habitual willingness and decisions regarding to your “to be” as parent, for instance through changes in the relational and educative practices with your son/daughter, by considering the “possibilities” and the “risks” of parenting, in understanding your effective capacity to know to anticipate events in the educative relation? If the answer is yes, in which way?



**Fig. 8 – Cultural awareness and expression (KC8):** Dear parent, in your opinion the training path has reinforced or increased in you the awareness of your knowledges, practices, capacities in action that you own, and you have been favoured in expressing it? If the answer is yes, in which way?

The correspondences appear to us in the expected direction, as parents have perceived an increase in:

- their ability to learn to learn (KC5), thanks to the activity of critical reflection and collegial to think his own thoughts;
- their civic and social skills (KC6), thanks to the exchanges of thought in a community dimension informal free from judgments, able to foster an awareness

- of the differences in the experiences and personal ways of acting, as well as the authentic expression of feelings of empathy and solidarity;
- their sense of initiative and resourcefulness (KC7), in that the decision and the desire to get involved encouraged them in the operativity, promoting their understanding of the risks of the actions, but also their ability to anticipate events in the educational relationship with their children and to translate thought into action immediately;
- the awareness about their own culture and the ability to express it freely (KC8), thanks to the sharing of personal reflections that each is able to offer in comparison to others in terms of comments, arguments, evaluations.

## Conclusions

The general goal of this experimentation has been the one to stimulate in young parents a reflective practice in a intergenerational view, through the critic exploration of their experiences and their life moments as son and as parents, by contributing to the explicitation – and sometimes also to the transformation – of their knowledge in order to help them to recognize, reinforce and enhance the parenting resources already present in them and to develop new educational strategies in the relationship with their children (see Margiotta, Zambianchi, 2013). The parenting support proposal was based on an essentially preventive, promotional approach, removed from care provision of the psychological kind, so that parents' needs regarding education can be better met. The underlying logic has been the one of caring for families, by reinforcing the competences and coping abilities of their members and by leveraging existing resources, the strengthening of latent potential and the motivation to acquire new relational competencies and tools for interpreting reality. In other words, the ultimate aim has been to support reflective parenting, by contributing to the elicitation, development and transformation of parenting skills, placing value on the resources of the family unit and providing parents with the chance to reflect upon their choices through critical reflection (*reflexivity*) on their own experiences and backgrounds, in order to set out on the path towards a genuine *adulthood* (Demetrio, 2005).

The use of narration and autobiographical practices and of artistic/creative languages as a means for reflecting upon and acquiring awareness of one's own experiences and interrelations, has created the "transitional space" – so named by Winnicott – which has helped to contact and to express feelings, to transform them, generating new knowledge. In fact, we believe that in order to favour for parents in possibility to tell their story and express themselves it is essential that the space proposed be of quality such as, for example, the one which is co-constructed when people converses with peers, lives informal moments, plays together, shares a reading or speaks about himself through different languages such as writing and symbolic, artistic and expressive activities. Those activities enable a mutual trust and a common willingness to take risks, to put oneself to the test collectively so that an individual's problem or capacity becomes everyone's problem or capacity.

The conversation with himself/herself and with others has promoted and strengthened the "reflective posture", favoured not only attraverso experiential work in a small group – very fruitful in the paths of parent training, since the comparison with peers encourages the introspection – but also with the adoption of the "reflective diary", devoted to the "care of own mind" for jotting down

their thoughts generative of own thoughts, ideas and beliefs about the meaning of “generating a good life” and “accompanying to good life”.

An analysis and understanding of the ways in which parenting knowledge and skills are built, developed and evolved cannot do without the support of a structured, multidisciplinary theoretical background which combines and integrates different and pluralistic views in order to read and interpret, in the most complete manner possible, the composite and complex ground from which the parental identity takes shape. Parenting is certainly constructed through experience and the dialogue that takes place by participating in social practices; nevertheless, we should not ignore the fact that it has its roots in the “apprenticeship” in the family of origin, in the experience of having been sons and daughters. In parenting support work, therefore, it is also important to critically explore educational models implicitly passed down from generation to generation, at least for two complementary reasons: on the one hand because “through reflective tools it is possible to deconstruct and construct parental identity, by transforming implicit, unconscious skills into critical, validated skills” (Fabbri, 2008), and on the other because “becoming aware of the underlying pedagogical model is the first step towards the weakening its binding power” (Gigli, 2007).

The active response and positive of parents to every proposal of the laboratory make us to believe that the educational paths in support to parenting are as more relevant as more they are enactive, i.e. generative of knowledge, as intended by Maturana and Varela (1987; see also Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 1991).

Margiotta (2011a,b,c; see also Olivieri, 2011, pp. 78-90) interprets the enaction/generativity as that process able to “make emerging of significance” and to “give shape” to the human action systems, believing that the main device able to produce it lies in *reflexivity* (Margiotta, 2012b). On the view of this vision and the results of the experimentation, we think that typologies of support to the parenting based on an approach both reflective and creative could contribute to make the parents conscious of the “enactive weft” of their relational capabilities and to reinforce their role as educators.

Indeed, by believing that the more effective support to parenting is based on the awareness of their own self (“who” try to be in order to act also an adequate parenting function) we tried to understand if the awareness from the part of parents of the power enactive/generative of the educative relation could contribute to modify (in a improving sense) the conception that they have as themselves as educators. We believe to be able to state that in a short time (about 12 hours) this educational typology has provided to parents (a) a stimulus to critic reflexivity on the educative tools already owned but still not owned with full awareness and (b) a concrete support to reinforce and increase the competences of caregiving possessed or potential, by making clear the possibility for a better use of them.

In our opinion a such result has been reached thanks to the integration of several educational tools: from the autobiographic approach (narration and writing), to the creative stimulation with picture and plastic tools, until dialogue and comparison in the community, that jointly have favoured the exercise of a reflective competence firstly on themselves as person and then on themselves as parents. Indeed, it is well known that the narrative device is particularly effective in the clarification and understanding of events, experiences, human situations characterized by strong intentionality and in focus of the units of analysis also very complex, where human subjects, their stories, the options of culture, of ethics, of values, but also their intentions, motivations, choices and interpersonal relationships that weave both on a cognitive / emotional level, on a cultural / relational, play a central role (see Bruner, 1986).

If we believe that the parenting knowledge is fed by each parent's personal history and by his/her experiences firstly as a child and then as a parent, than an approach to parenting of autobiographical kind – whatever level it is applied at – seems to be wholly convincing as it makes it possible for people to recall the styles, attitudes, behaviours, resources and capacities of their own parents (or those acting on their behalf) on the basis of which people construct – whether on a shared or opposing basis – their own. Inevitably this process of acquisition is based on reflective competence, which can be developed by practising it and which serves not only to critically recover the past but also and above all to reflect on the present and, specifically on parenting practices. In the reflective approach, self-knowledge and self-care (Mortari, 2009) go together, as instruments for adult education, for reconsidering experience, for re-comprehension of it. The baggage of experience which each of us bears may thus become a resource for change (see Formenti, 2001). Parenting behaviours, in fact, are inspired by more or less implicit theories, doctrines and knowledge systems, which merit bringing to full awareness. This maieutic and educative operation is certainly encouraged by conversation with oneself and with others, and it is precisely for this reason that small-group work is resulted particularly appropriate, as it interactive dialogue has stimulated the introspective labor.

Thus parents have the opportunity to better understand what they have learned from others – first and foremost from their own parents and original cultural background – what comes from their personal background, what they have developed thanks to interaction with their partner and with their children and what still remains to be explored in order to enrich their knowledge base (Fabri, 2004, 2008).

Similarly, the acquisition of reflective competence is facilitated by the autobiographical approach, which constitutes a significant process of individual training nourished by reevaluation and valorisation of the individual's personal history. Therefore, early measures with actions to promote parenting – for example in the context of services dedicated to very early childhood (post-natal care, nursery) and also including pre-natal services for expecting couples (preparation for the birth) – are inserted in an educational perspective of prevention that, starting from the potential of the families and their resources, tempt to support them in the overcoming of their momentaneous difficulties.

To conclude, we believe that the interventions in support to parenting, acted in the general perspective to accompany to reflexivity through informal and creative tools, allow parents to:

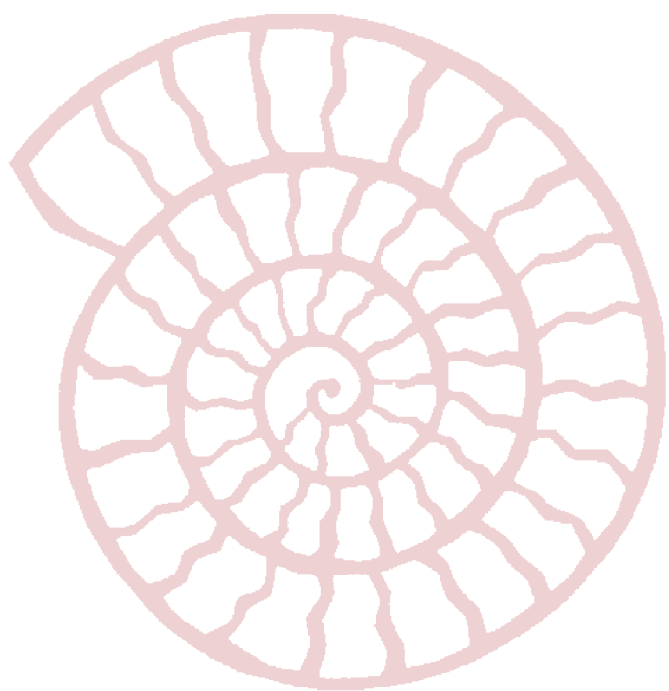
- finding the possibility to express themselves and increase the awareness through the exploration of the inner self by analysing the own action modalities;
- finding a welcome/care space in their own “being a person” even before being parent;
- renew the own modalities for the analysis of problems and search of solutions;
- go through diversified educative strategies, mainly thanks to the exchange of practical experiences in the context of a “practice community”;
- reinforce and enrich the own positive educative inclinations;
- identify tools to improve the communication inside the own family group.


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# Intergenerational Learning and creative experiences to foster reciprocity between generations

## Apprendimento intergenerazionale e creatività per ricostruire la reciprocità tra generazioni

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### ABSTRACT

The creation of intergenerational learning experiences pathways can generate knowledge if it takes place within the ambit of a relationship of reciprocity.

In a context that is non-self-referential, the elderly and adolescents may be formed through creative experiences to search for an authentic communication, to foster intergenerational reciprocity, in an ever-changing reality, dominated by individualism and competitiveness.

The article underlines the necessity for the Educational system to be rethought in a more creative way, on the basis of the results of research of a relational approach as well as on the awareness of the interdependence between generations.

La creazione di percorsi di apprendimento intergenerazionale può risultare generativa di conoscenza, se avviene nell'ottica di una reale reciprocità.

In un contesto teso a fugare tendenze autoreferenziali, anziani e pre-adolescenti possono formarsi attraverso esperienze di creatività, volte alla ricerca di una comunicazione autentica con l'alterità, al fine di ricostruire la reciprocità tra generazioni in una realtà continuamente mutevole e sempre diversa, dominata dall'individualismo e dalla competitività.

L'articolo mette in luce quanto risulti vano parlare di invecchiamento attivo, se non si riformula il sistema educativo dentro una prospettiva più creativa del Lifelong learning, fondata sulla ricerca della relazione con l'altro e sulla consapevolezza della interdipendenza generazionale.

### KEYWORDS

Intergenerational learning, creative experiences, elderly people, reciprocity, active ageing.

Apprendimento intergenerazionale, creatività, anziani, reciprocità, invecchiamento attivo.

## Introduzione

Nell'ultimo decennio l'Europa si è trovata di fronte ad un rilevante cambiamento strutturale, per quanto concerne l'età della sua popolazione, e ad un accentuato processo di invecchiamento.

In realtà, risalgono già agli anni '90 dello scorso secolo le prime considerazioni sui problemi determinati nei Paesi industrializzati dalla bassa natalità e dall'incremento della vita media, nonché lo studio degli impatti del fenomeno, sia sul mercato del lavoro, che sui sistemi di sicurezza sociale.

Allo scopo di promuovere la discussione e la formulazione di Piani di Azione volti all'incremento dei livelli di salute e dell'invecchiamento attivo, la World Health Organization pubblica nel 2002 un'ampia trattazione dal titolo «*Active Ageing: a Policy Framework*». Partendo dal concetto che l'invecchiamento globale rappresenta, da un lato un successo, ma dall'altro una sfida, il testo definisce Invecchiamento attivo «*il processo volto ad ottimizzare le opportunità di salute, di partecipazione e di sicurezza allo scopo di migliorare la qualità della vita in funzione dell'incremento dell'età*» e prende in esame i fattori determinanti tale processo, dalla cultura al genere, dai livelli dei sistemi sociali per la tutela della salute ai comportamenti, dai fattori personali a quelli ambientali, dai problemi in campo etico (le disuguaglianze sociali ed economiche sia tra i sessi, che tra le età), a quelli economici.

Si fa strada l'idea che sia necessario sviluppare una nuova sensibilità atta a creare le condizioni per cui gli anziani si trasformino, da target passivo dei sistemi socio-sanitari, a risorsa per la società.

Anche l'Unione Europea e i Paesi membri approcciano il problema dell'invecchiamento<sup>1</sup> sostenendo l'urgenza di una strategia globale per il ciclo della vita attiva, che faccia leva sulla partecipazione dei *seniores*, sull'importanza delle relazioni intergenerazionali, sulla costruzione di una nuova solidarietà<sup>2</sup>, in modo da garantire equilibrio tra le generazioni.

Proprio negli stessi anni si comincia a parlare di Lifelong learning, spostando l'attenzione dalla prevalente dimensione istituzionale del percorso educativo, al soggetto che apprende, alle sue necessità e caratteristiche, seguendo un percorso di avvicinamento al soggetto iniziato con esponenti di filosofie educative, politiche, o teorie dell'apprendimento anche molto diverse: dal progressismo della Nuova Educazione di Dewey (1938), ai teorici dell'*experiential learning* (Kolb, 1984 o, in ambito organizzativo, Schön, 1978), passando per gli approcci cognitivisti (Piaget, 1932; Lewin, 1951; Bruner, 1965), costruttivisti (cui si possono ricondurre gli stessi Dewey e Piaget, oltre a Vigotsky, 1978), umanisti (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1969; Knowles, 1970) e trasformativi (Mezirow, 1991).

«In questo quadro l'educazione permanente viene presentata come principio di coerenza e di continuità della crescita del processo educativo e della formazione. Non dunque un semplice prolungamento verso l'età adulta dell'educazione tradizionale, ma un nuovo approccio alle dimensioni di vita degli individui, un quadro di riferimento per af-

1 Cfr. Comunicazione della Commissione: «*Libro Verde: Una nuova solidarietà tra le generazioni di fronte ai cambiamenti demografici*» del 16.03.2005; Conferenza Ministeriale di Leon (Spagna) «*A Society for all Ages: challenges and opportunities*» del 2007; Conferenza Ministeriale sull'invecchiamento di Vienna del 19 e 20 Settembre 2012.

frontare la necessità di soluzioni a molte e inedite sfide nella vita culturale, sociale e professionale, individuale e delle moderne società, inerente la dimensione dello sviluppo umano cosciente, volontaria, dotata di competenze» (Alberici, 2002, p. 44).

Nella Conferenza di Amburgo del Luglio 1997 vengono identificate le caratteristiche di una formazione permanente tesa al superamento delle divisioni tra educazione formale, informale e non formale, al fine di oltrepassare la netta demarcazione tra i diversi ambiti della conoscenza e tra i livelli e i settori dell'istruzione, spesso causa di esclusione per molti dalla partecipazione ai processi stessi di apprendimento.

Una formazione volta a sostenere la centralità dell'esperienza in quanto dotata di pari dignità rispetto all'educazione di tipo intellettuale; l'apprendimento come processo di attribuzione di significati alle proprie esperienze lungo tutto l'arco della vita; la rilevanza della motivazione di chi apprende, della sua autonomia (*self-directed learning*), del suo bisogno di realizzarsi completamente (approccio umanistico); l'importanza dei processi di apprendimento non formali per la coscientizzazione degli adulti.

Eppure, nonostante l'esperienza e la sua interpretazione, da un lato, e la dimensione critica, dall'altro, si fondono in quest'ottica, conferendo rilievo anche alle pratiche individuali e ad ogni aspetto della vita come luogo di apprendimento, in una prospettiva sia *lifelong* che *lifewide*; nonostante molte politiche pubbliche siano indirizzate a garantire la qualità della vita ad ogni età; da alcune ricerche (Buzzi, Cavalli, De Lillo, 2002; Provincia di Como, 2003; Baschiera, 2011) svolte sul territorio italiano è emerso che nel nostro orizzonte culturale persiste una rappresentazione degli anziani che, senza tenere conto dei cambiamenti avvenuti negli ultimi decenni, li dipinge come persone dipendenti, solitarie, tristi, prive di interessi e passive e attribuisce alla vecchiaia caratteristiche di disimpegno e declino<sup>3</sup>, senza coglierne il «*potere educativamente finalizzante*» (Moscato, 2012, p. 116).

Sembra che noi postmoderni abbiamo smarrito la prospettiva di pensare per generazioni; abituati a concepire il mondo sociale come composto da singoli individui, tutt'al più accomunati dalla stessa età della vita o dalla stessa condizione sociale, abbiamo reso la comunità più simile ad un aggregato contingente, piuttosto che ad una *communitas*, in cui mettere in comune significati, conoscenze e pratiche.

«Una delle ragioni più tragiche della perdita di qualità nella vita contemporanea è stata la rottura tra vecchi e giovani; la continuità dell'esperienza è stata interrotta e quindi ognuno deve cominciare daccapo. I vecchi, non sapendo più a chi comunicare il loro patrimonio di esperienza, inaridiscono; mentre i giovani non crescono o crescono male, perché non hanno un'esperienza con cui confrontarsi». Nella loro risolutezza, le affermazioni del filosofo Natoli (2006) evidenziano come sia venuta meno la reciprocità tra le generazioni; dato che emerge significativamente anche dal "parco" stereotipi che si è andato via via diffondendo e consolidando negli anni, relativamente alle diverse età della vita.

2 Cfr. Conferenza "Intergenerational Solidarity for Cohesive and Sustainable Societies" del 26 e 27.04.2008.

3 Cfr. Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Centro nazionale di documentazione e analisi per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza (2009). *Relazione sulla condizione dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza in Italia 2008-2009*, Firenze: Istituto degli Innocenti.

D'altronde, se si è reso necessario, «attraverso un evento importante di lungo periodo quale un anno europeo, promuovere un modo attivo di vivere lo stato-condizione della vita rappresentato dalla vecchiaia e promuovere rapporti di scambio solidaristici tra generazioni» è evidente «che tutto ciò non è sufficientemente presente nel contesto attuale, o quanto meno non è sufficientemente visibile o adeguato alle caratteristiche e alle necessità dei tempi. In questo senso l'anno europeo può essere considerato un tentativo di prospettare una condizione auspicabile, ma non ancora esistente, più che la celebrazione di una condizione presente o l'enfatizzazione di un processo in corso di sviluppo» (Tramma, 2013, p. 18).

Si sente spesso dire che gli anziani “non apprendono, né cambiano in meglio”, che “invecchiamento e demenza sono grosso modo la stessa cosa”, che “da vecchi si diventa egocentrici, testardi e fastidiosi”, che “ad una certa età è meglio morire, che penare per tanti anni”, come se ad un certo punto della vita umana non fosse più dato apprendere, come se le persone anziane non fossero più in grado di poter attivare il proprio potenziale formativo, come se l'expertise sviluppata nel corso della vita, indipendentemente dal titolo di studio o dalla professione praticata, cessasse di avere valore con il pensionamento.

Lo stereotipo della vecchiaia, come fase di declino in cui l'insufficienza umana e sociale è data per scontata, non rende però ragione di una condizione che nella realtà dei fatti è molto più diversificata: gli anziani non sono un gruppo omogeneo. «I volti della vecchiaia sono tanti quanti gli anziani e ogni persona prepara il modo di vivere la propria vecchiaia nel corso di tutta la vita. In questo senso la vecchiaia cresce con noi e la sua qualità nell'arco della vita, dipende dalla nostra capacità di coglierne il significato e il valore» (Baschiera, 2013, p. 196).

Le neuroscienze, poi, ci dimostrano che gli anziani sono educabili, che possono trasformarsi, continuare a mantenere il controllo della propria esistenza ed invecchiare restando attivi. Mediante la concreta partecipazione alla vita comunitaria possono cambiare e crescere a livello cognitivo, affettivo, relazionale; costruire benessere per sé e per altri, resilienza (Baschiera, 2012).

Come restituire, allora, alla vecchiaia il suo valore? Come equilibrare la distanza tra generazioni, salvaguardare le identità delle età, nel dialogo fra le età (Pinto Minerva, 2012)? Come integrare modi d'essere differenti, rispetto alle altre età della vita, in una visione improntata alla partecipazione attiva e creativa alla vita comunitaria, sociale e culturale?

In che modo offrire alle persone anziane, tramite la formazione permanente, la possibilità di esercitare il diritto alla cittadinanza (Woodward, 1991), in termini di coinvolgimento e impegno a diversi livelli e con ruoli differenti? Se «*the environment is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes and capacities to create the experiences which is had*» (Dewey, 1938, p. 42), quali contesti educativi, quali metodologie esperienziali di apprendimento adulto (Margiotta, 2012) utilizzare, per disegnare percorsi intergenerazionali rispettosi dei diversi tempi e modi di apprendere?

## 1. Apprendimento intergenerazionale e creatività

In linea con la Strategia Europa 2020, con le Raccomandazioni dell'OMS e la Risoluzione del Parlamento Europeo del 22 Aprile 2008 sul ruolo del volontariato nel contribuire alla coesione sociale tra le generazioni (2007/2149(INI)), appare necessario per la ricerca pedagogica disegnare e promuovere nuovi modelli formativi volti alla co-costruzione di apprendimento tra anziani e adolescenti.

Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, which promotes greater understanding and respect between generations and may contribute to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational learning is a process, through which individuals acquire skills and knowledge, but also attitudes and values, from daily experience, from all available resources and from all influences in their own life worlds (EAGLE, 2007).

Kaplan (2002, p. 306) sostiene che la realizzazione di programmi intergenerazionali nelle scuole, non solo migliori e rafforzi il curriculum formativo, ma contribuisca alla crescita personale, allo sviluppo di competenze sociali, in quanto «social vehicles that create purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning. In a nutshell, it is about intergenerational engagement – the full range of ways in which young people and older adults interact, support, and provide care for one another».

Whitehouse et al (2000, p. 762) discutono il concetto di scuola intergenerazionale, proponendo che le comunità di discenti «represent a conceptual and organizational response to the challenges that rapid cultural and environmental change and resultant alienation are posing for human societies».

Hatton-Yeo & Ohsako (2000), così come Granville & Ellis, (1999a); Rosebrook, (2003); enfatizzano la reciprocità come caratteristica imprescindibile nei programmi di apprendimento intergenerazionale (*tutoring e mentoring*) finalizzati ad una reale condivisione e costruzione della conoscenza, ad una convivenza migliore, alla ricomposizione di «*quella trama solidale tra le generazioni che, apprezzando ogni età, non ne perde nessuna*» (Toffano Martini, Zanato Orlandini, 2012, 247).

Nel ribadire l'importanza della solidarietà tra generazioni, l'Unione Europea indica l'opportunità di progetti che coinvolgano ragazzi e anziani in «forme di co-apprendimento (grandmentoring nelle scuole, tutoring digitale ecc.), atte a valorizzare le risorse degli uni e degli altri e ad aprire la possibilità di una migliore reciproca comprensione» (Toffano Martini, et al., 2012, p. 251).

D'altronde «un buon rapporto intergenerazionale rappresenta una delle condizioni perché nella terza e quarta età si possa trovare una finalità non solo assistenziale e/o terapeutica, [...], ma anche una finalità utile alle giovani generazioni, aperta ancora al futuro, ricca di speranza e di desiderio della vita» (Chiosso, 2012, p. 56).

Si tratta di lavorare perché, nel rapporto tra le generazioni, l'intreccio trovi il giusto equilibrio tra distacco (autonomia) e coinvolgimento (solidarietà); favorendo la consapevolezza che ogni generazione, così come è chiamata a conservare qualcosa di quelle precedenti, ha da apprendere anche da quelle seguenti (Bellingreri, 2012, p. 92).

È il caso di attuare, per quanto possibile, una formazione condivisa, fatta «*in contesti, secondo traguardi, itinerari e tempi inusuali, rispetto alla formazione tradizionale, comunque sempre basata sull'esperienza, sulla competenza e sugli interessi*» (Rossi, 2012, p. 70) di entrambe le generazioni e volta ad offrire opportunità di apprendere la cura di sé, in ogni contesto di vita, non formale e informale. Si tratta di mettere a disposizione luoghi in cui sperimentare e sviluppare la propria singolarità, in cui fare pratica della propria tipicità cimentandosi in attività creative che, soprattutto per gli anziani, possono «costituire un'opportunità per chiarire e completare la propria storia, reinterpretare e innovare la propria

vita, [...] migliorare la propria condizione esistenziale, aprire nuovi differenti orizzonti, darsi nuove ragioni di vita» (Rossi, 2012, p. 68).

Bruner, parlando di creatività, sostiene che essa sia un processo generalizzato, comune a tutti. Quindi, se potenzialmente tutti gli esseri umani sono creativi, la creatività va educata.

Essere creativi significa considerare tutto il processo vitale come un processo della nascita e non interpretare ogni fase della vita come una fase finale. Molti muoiono senza essere nati completamente. Creatività significa aver portato a termine la propria nascita prima di morire. [...] Educare alla creatività significa educare alla vita (Fromm, 1972, p. 70).

Mencarelli (1982), definisce la creatività come «un diritto personale, cioè il diritto alla attuazione [...] del potenziale umano che appartiene a ciascun essere umano (che è potenziale di motivazioni, affettività, pensiero, linguaggio, socialità ecc.) [...]». Una profonda esigenza sociale, cioè la condizione necessaria perché una società possa crescere su se stessa, evitando depressioni ed emarginazioni, alienazioni e strumentalizzazioni». Essa, quindi, rappresenta la tutela dell'autenticità dell'uomo, che è dignità, originalità, potenzialità (Mencarelli, 1977). Nell'estendere il concetto di creatività, da aspetto cognitivo della persona, a necessità sociale, intesa come modo di vivere per l'affermazione di sé, si comprende come la creatività esiga l'educazione piena della persona, momenti di espressione libera e originale. Se, come afferma il pedagogo le conseguenze implicite nel concetto di Lifelong Learning si sintetizzano nella capacità di alimentarsi continuamente e in quella di guidarsi consapevolmente, la creatività coinvolge il potenziale educativo, nella sua duplice componente di potenziale di sviluppo e di potenziale umano. «Risulta pertanto investita tutta l'azione educativa che si opera nella scuola e fuori dalla scuola: nella famiglia, nei gruppi, nelle associazioni giovanili e degli anziani, [...] attraverso ogni canale di comunicazione e di relazione umana» (Serio, 2012, p. 24).

La creatività, colta nella sua duplice etimologia: quella latina, *creo*, come capacità immaginativa, e quella greca *Kraino*, nel senso di compiere, realizzare, non è solo talento, ma implica anche la capacità di mettere in pratica le idee. È insieme libertà e responsabilità, capacità di realizzare se stessi e abilità di connettersi agli altri, di fare rete.

Se, in quanto connessa al concetto di persona e alla sua realizzazione, essa presenta una valenza fortemente soggettiva, è anche vero che, come strumento di innovazione, crescita e progresso, ne manifesta una fortemente interattiva tra il soggetto e l'ambiente, considerato come quell'insieme di persone e contesto di relazioni, in grado di offrire stimoli e riconoscimenti.

Per Gardner (1994) la creatività sembra dipendere essenzialmente dall'incontro tra il tipo di intelligenza individuale prevalente e le condizioni culturali e sociali che ne permettono il manifestarsi.

Per Rogers (1954) rappresenta l'espressione più piena della tendenza a realizzare se stessi, a maturare e ad attivare le capacità dell'Io, sino al loro completo accrescimento e alla consapevole valorizzazione.

Come opzione formativa fondamentale e principio regolativo della crescita umana, l'educazione alla creatività necessita, allora, di essere condotta permanente, per tutta la vita, a tutte le età (Mencarelli, 1976).

Se il comportamento umano è «*intrinsecamente, ineliminabilmente creativo*» ed è questo aspetto a costituire «*un tratto comune, anzi, il tratto più specifico dell'essere umano*» (D'Angelo, 2012, p. 7-9), allora mediante esperienze creative



di apprendimento intergenerazionale, gruppi di età diversa hanno la reale opportunità di agire le proprie capacità in base ai propri obiettivi e valori (Sen, 1992), ma anche di valorizzare i propri talenti e potenziali; di «scegliere liberamente quali traguardi realizzare, quali piani di vita perseguire», attribuendo un valore non solo strumentale, ma intrinseco alla promozione della libertà individuale (Biggeri, Bellanca, 2011, p. 16).

## 2. Apprendere tra generazioni: il progetto e la sperimentazione

Alla luce delle precedenti considerazioni, nel corso degli anni 2011-2013 è stato dato realizzato il progetto “Generazioni assieme per un mondo che cambia” destinato, all’interno del progetto europeo ALICE (Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences), ad una ventina di anziani di età compresa tra i 65 e gli 85 anni afferenti alla struttura residenziale Opera Immacolata Concezione di Padova e ad altrettanti studenti tra gli 11 e i 13 anni della scuola secondaria di primo grado “I.C. Don Lorenzo Milani” di Venezia-Gazzera.

In questo percorso formativo sono stati costruiti diversi contesti di apprendimento legati alla realizzazione di attività creative, al fine di promuovere lo scambio intergenerazionale, creando un *continuum* di benessere, generativo di legami significativi e di motivazione all’agire solidaristico e responsabile.

### Obiettivi formativi:

- favorire la partecipazione della popolazione anziana a programmi di educazione permanente;
- sviluppare la creatività in soggetti di diversa età;
- favorire l’aggregazione e il dialogo intergenerazionale;
- creare una maggiore solidarietà e reciprocità tra generazioni;
- sviluppare e valorizzare il potenziale formativo e generativo delle generazioni coinvolte;
- creare partnership tra Università, centro anziani, scuola, famiglie, all’interno del contesto territoriale di riferimento.

Al fine di dare corpo ad una partecipazione attiva delle due generazioni, sono stati costruiti diversi *setting* per sperimentare esperienze creative, sia in presenza, che a distanza, in modo da dare la possibilità anche ai più anziani di intervenire nel processo formativo. I laboratori sono stati così suddivisi:

- a) Laboratorio di creazione di giocattoli con materiale riciclato, nel quali gli anziani, all’interno del loro centro, hanno fatto da tutor ai ragazzi in visita per due mattine;
- b) Laboratorio di scrittura autobiografica intergenerazionale all’interno di uno spazio dedicato nel *blog* degli anziani, creato per potenziare la mobilità virtuale, favorire la conoscenza e il dialogo intergenerazionale, promuovere e disseminare l’esperienza realizzata nel corso dei due anni di sperimentazione;
- c) Cineforum intergenerazionale e dibattiti, realizzati all’interno del centro anziani nel corso di tre pomeriggi domenicali, per la condivisione delle tematiche emerse nel corso del laboratorio autobiografico, con la partecipazione delle famiglie dei ragazzi.

Di seguito l'analisi:

a) *Laboratorio di costruzione del giocattolo*

Il gioco è considerato uno straordinario fattore di maturazione poiché «*contiene tutte le tendenze evolutive in forma condensata ed è esso stesso una fonte principale di sviluppo*» (Vygotskij, 1966). Realizzare giocattoli utilizzando materiali di riciclo rappresenta un'esperienza ricca di stimoli, capace di catturare l'attenzione, attivare e motivare anche le persone con qualche difficoltà motoria (anziani) e con BES (adolescenti), un modo per esercitare la creatività ed attivare l'originalità, la flessibilità, la fluidità ideativa, il pensiero critico, la metacognizione, in un contesto cooperativo.

Gli anziani sono stati formati ad assumere il ruolo di tutor, durante due incontri pomeridiani, e a strutturare le attività secondo cinque fasi (Margiotta, 2007):

- attivazione dei saperi naturali;
- mapping (rielaborazione della mappa cognitiva grazie alle nuove informazioni);
- applicazione (consapevolezza di abilità e concetti da padroneggiare)
- transfer (contestualizzazione di abilità e concetti in situazioni nuove);
- ricostruzione del percorso.

Hanno così avuto modo di: dare spiegazioni; motivare ad apprendere, a riconoscere le sequenze delle azioni e delle loro priorità, a ricercare analogie; a facilitare l'interazione tra pari; a guidare i ragazzi nella scoperta e nel *problem solving*; a sostenerli nella ricostruzione procedurale; a dare nuovi compiti rielaborativi, lasciando sperimentare quanto appreso. In ogni fase la metodologia proposta è stata quella *ILV* (informazione, laboratorio e valutazione), secondo le indicazioni del gruppo pedagogico dell'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia.

I longevi, nella fase progettuale delle attività, sono stati sollecitati a tenere presenti le seguenti domande guida: A chi voglio insegnare? Cosa voglio insegnare? Come voglio insegnare? Quali criteri posso utilizzare per co-valutare gli apprendimenti assieme agli insegnanti? Di cosa ho bisogno per implementare l'attività?

In questo modo hanno potuto esercitare non solo abilità cognitive, ma anche meta cognitive, nelle fasi di progettazione, realizzazione e autovalutazione del percorso, e relazionali, nel fungere da *scaffolding* (Wood, Bruner, Ross, 1976, p. 89-90) per le generazioni più giovani, non solo su un piano formativo, ma anche emotivo ed affettivo, in modo da portare alla luce *zone di sviluppo prossimale* (Vygotskij, 1980), lasciando comunque forte spazio alla responsabilizzazione autonoma.

b) *Laboratorio di scrittura autobiografica intergenerazionale*

L'autobiografia risulta avere un ruolo centrale in quei momenti di crisi, trasformazione e ristrutturazione del sé, quali l'adolescenza o alle soglie della terza età; gli individui che si costruiscono come biografia mediante un processo di comprensione, si appropriano del proprio passato e tessono la trama della propria apertura di vita verso il futuro.

Coltivare il sapere narrativo all'interno di un contesto intergenerazionale ha richiesto di utilizzare l'interrogazione come prassi personale; la negoziazione, la condivisione, l'aggregazione come processo cognitivo, personale e sociale; la riflessione come analisi dell'azione e ricostruzione di senso.

Scrivendo la propria storia le due generazioni si sono aperte e hanno problematizzato i dati della memoria e dell'introspezione, dando luogo ad un intreccio non lineare tra memoria/tempo/senso.

La pratica della scrittura autobiografica ha permesso di ripercorrersi e ripensarsi, di «*assegnarsi un'identità ed un senso nuovi e ulteriori rispetto a quelli del reale, cronologico, empirico*» (Cambi, 2002, p. 23), di leggere le tracce del proprio vissuto, ordinarle, selezionarle ed enfatizzarle, di ridurre ad unità e coerenza la soggettività individuale, di inaugurare un *iter* formativo ermeneutico. I partecipanti si sono mossi attraverso differenti strade e velocità, in un clima di condivisione e scambio reciproco.

In uno spazio di relazione, di incontro, di confronto e di cura, le narrazioni autobiografiche hanno avuto il potere di unire, di fare da transito tra generazioni (Dato, 2012). Grazie al racconto di sé i longevi hanno dato risignificazione alle esperienze, alle relazioni; i pre-adolescenti hanno attivato processi di riflessione sulle categorie del tempo.

Lo spazio autobiografico ospitato nel *blog* degli anziani è risultato un inedito e significativo *setting* di dialogo intergenerazionale. La dimensione creativa e interattiva della scrittura digitale ha permesso di narrare, riflettere, raccontarsi mediante immagini, video e documenti (Baschiera, 2012), mantenendo viva la tensione affettiva, critica, cognitiva, creativa e valoriale.

Rileggendo le tracce scritte da anziani e pre-adolescenti in una prospettiva metodologica analitica ed ermeneutica di attraversamento dell'esperienza formativa, si può affermare che l'esperienza di apprendimento creativo, vissuta tramite la circolarità del dialogo autobiografico, abbia permesso uno scambio ricorsivo, ontologicamente significativo, tra anziani e ragazzi; «da una parte come possibilità di ascolto, scoperta di conoscenze nuove pronunciare al passato; dall'altra come costruzione di storie condivise in grado di comunicare valori, sogni e desideri pronunciati al futuro» (Tigano, 2012, p. 237).

### c) *Cineforum intergenerazionale*

La giovani generazioni sono sempre più disponibili a navigare nel web, a transitare nelle agorà telematiche, a nutrirsi di realtà virtuali, a consumare con gli occhi mondi ed esperienze narrati dentro la cornice dello schermo televisivo o cinematografico, ma spesso lo fanno senza capacità selettiva, critica, analitica, trattenendo solo frammenti, piccoli particolari.

L'impiego del linguaggio filmico nel corso del progetto ha presentato numerosi vantaggi, tra cui la sollecitazione a riflettere sulle modalità di costruzione e trasmissione delle informazioni e dei messaggi, sulle innumerevoli interpretazioni della realtà, sviluppando così senso critico, sollecitando i meccanismi di elicitazione e anticipazione, aumentando il coinvolgimento e le possibilità di partecipazione e interazione tra le generazioni. La visione di un prodotto audiovisivo, quale strumento di mediazione simbolica, ha favorito anche la riflessione sulla propria storia personale e, attraverso l'oggettivazione, l'apertura nei confronti di storie "altre" (Agosti, 2001).

I film, selezionati sia dai longevi, che dai ragazzi, per discutere il valore della reciprocità intergenerazionale, hanno favorito l'immedesimazione nelle situazioni e nei personaggi, promuovendo la consapevolezza di sé e il decentramento cognitivo e l'instaurarsi di un dialogo ricco e costruttivo.

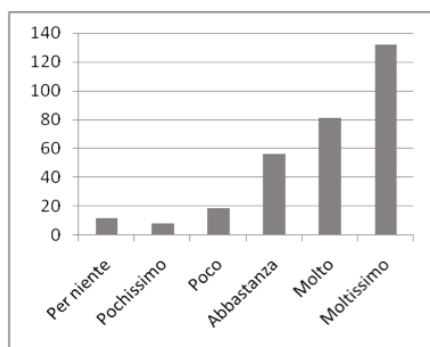
Il coinvolgimento delle famiglie dei ragazzi è stato fondamentale ai fini dell'interazione, della condivisione di concezioni e condotte, per triangolare l'osservazione, creare uno spazio di confronto, potenziare la partecipazione. Una esperienza che si è costruita nella reciprocità dell'«*esserci per l'altro*», in un modo e in un mondo intersoggettivo «*che è per tutti e i cui oggetti sono disponibili a tutti*» (Pinto Minerva, 2012, p. 50).

### 3. Discussione e conclusione

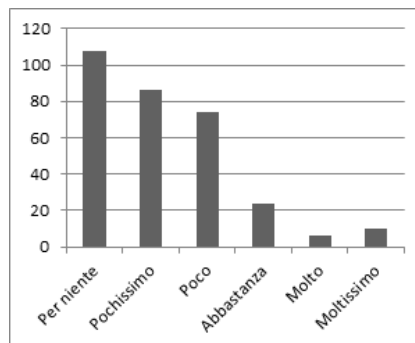
La verifica dei risultati del progetto è stata fatta in itinere e in situazione, considerando tutte le produzioni realizzate nelle varie fasi dell'attività da tutta la comunità di ricerca (blog) e dai singoli (post test).

La valutazione ha tenuto conto dei momenti riflessivi di autovalutazione sviluppati da anziani, allievi, docenti, genitori, durante i vari livelli dell'esperienza educativa. Inoltre, si è contato sull'attività di monitoraggio e di osservazione diretta mentre anziani e ragazzi erano al lavoro, ed anche dei feedback ricevuti dall'esperienza di didattica.

Di seguito si riportano due grafici relativi al disagio e alla curiosità provate dai partecipanti nel corso delle attività di apprendimento intergenerazionale.



Graf. 1 Curiosità



Graf. 2 Disagio

I risultati emersi dimostrano la portata dell'agire creativo, vissuto nella reciprocità dell'apprendimento intergenerazionale, in un contesto sociale, educativo, tecnologico in continuo divenire.

L'atteggiamento creativo sviluppatosi in una situazione ricca di stimoli e idonea a valorizzare il più possibile le potenzialità individuali, è risultato una modalità privilegiata perché anziani e adolescenti potessero realizzare se stessi, le proprie aspirazioni, fiduciosi della possibilità di rinnovarsi (Serio, 2012, p. 27).

La creatività, infatti, non può prescindere dall'incontro tra la persona e le persone e l'ambiente; è da questo incontro che deriva l'apertura nei confronti dell'esperienza e la possibilità di comprenderla e di padroneggiarla, per poi operare cambiamenti. Dato che la creatività coinvolge tutti gli aspetti della personalità, compresa la sfera affettiva, l'ambiente fisico e virtuale fortemente empatico in cui le due generazioni si sono relazionate, è apparso determinante per favorire la produzione del nuovo. Le ha spinte ad una curiosità verso la realtà che non conoscevano e ad un desiderio di indagare, ad un interesse per le attività che svolgevano, rivestendole di una intensa carica affettiva.

Il processo creativo non è indipendente dalla relazione, è un'esperienza di gruppo, attivata nell'interazione.

Per sostenere la creatività ci vogliono supporti formativi continui, che accompagnino la persona, nel suo percorso di vita, durante il periodo di scolarità, del lavoro e la senescenza. Se accolta in questo senso, la formazione può davvero costituire uno degli investimenti più significativi per garantire una qualità della vita, personale e professionale, a misura d'uomo.

Quanto finora emerso permette di affermare che la creazione di percorsi di apprendimento intergenerazionale può risultare generativa, se avviene in un contesto di reale reciprocità. In un contesto volto a fugare tendenze autoreferenziali, anziani e pre-adolescenti possono formarsi attraverso la ricerca di una comunicazione autentica con l'alterità, tesa a stabilire trame di interdipendenza positiva in una realtà continuamente mutevole e sempre diversa, dominata dall'individualismo e dalla competitività.

Nella relazione di reciprocità intergenerazionale esperita, le parti coinvolte hanno sentito la necessità di promuovere le proprie conoscenze e abilità, mettendo in atto processi che, letti secondo la teoria maussiana del dono, potrebbero essere interpretati come una moneta di scambio (Mauss, 2002), come un contro-dono da offrire. La promozione di sé generata dalla prospettiva di futuri scambi avrebbe, così, fatto nascere nei partecipanti al progetto, la certezza di poter governare la circolazione dei doni, di poter contraccambiare, vincendo la diffidenza o la ritrosia a chiedere.

L'accogliere il racconto autobiografico, il *counselling* e il *tutoring* dell'altro da parte delle due generazioni, avrebbe rappresentato, insomma, un dono di considerazione delle altrui epistemologie, a cui fare seguito con un contro-dono. Una tale circolarità ha così arricchito il patrimonio di conoscenze in chi ha accolto narrazioni, insegnamenti, esperienze, ma ha offerto al tempo stesso un contributo metacognitivo di sé a chi ne ha fatto dono.

Assieme alla crescita delle potenzialità umane, imparare costituisce un aspetto strutturale sempre più permanente nella vita degli individui e della collettività, un obiettivo individuale e sociale la cui realizzazione appare sempre più interrelata ai concetti di educazione permanente e apprendimento intergenerazionale.

Ecco allora che la grande sfida educativa per l'invecchiamento, è la ricomposizione e la ricorsività dei processi di Lifelong learning per la dimensione comprensiva (Morin) delle età della vita tra esistenza, affetti, professione, cittadinanza e socializzazione.

Risulta vano parlare di invecchiamento se non si riformula il sistema educativo, scolastico, professionale, dentro una prospettiva più creativa del Lifelong learning; una prospettiva in cui siano riportate a tema le connessioni, i legami tra gli individui, fondata sulla ricerca della relazione con l'altro e sulla consapevolezza della reciproca interdipendenza generazionale.

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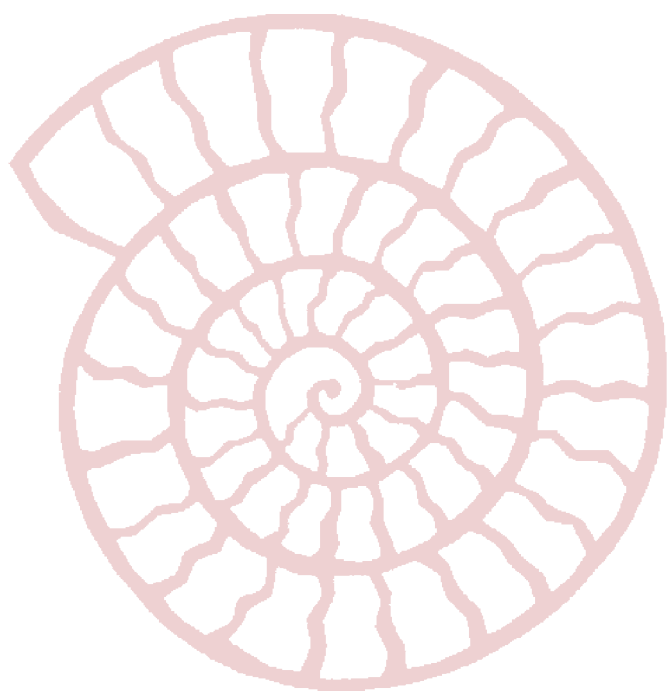
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# Intergenerational digital storytelling: four racconti of a new approach

## Digital Storytelling intergenerazionale: Quattro racconti per un nuovo approccio

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### ABSTRACT

Digital storytelling has been slowly penetrating the world of education and social development since a while. Intergenerational learning seems a promising and somehow natural domain for digital storytelling, as it offers a perfect venue to bring together memory and wisdom with digital media skills and vibrant communication. This paper presents the efforts made by Associazione seed to transfer digital storytelling to intergenerational learning, based on its previous work with the Digital Storytelling for Development model in many fields.

Negli ultimi anni, il “Digital Storytelling” ha penetrato lentamente il mondo della formazione e dello sviluppo sociale. L’apprendimento intergenerazionale sembra un ambito promettente e in qualche modo naturale per lo sviluppo di esperienze di Digital Storytelling, in quanto offre il luogo ideale per riunire la memoria e la saggezza con abilità per l’uso dei media digitali e la capacità comunicativa. Questo documento presenta i risultati di lavoro dell’Associazione SEED per il trasferimento del Digital Storytelling nel campo dell’apprendimento intergenerazionale, sulla base di un precedente modello creato dallo stesso gruppo di lavoro SEED e testato in diversi campi, ovvero il Digital Storytelling per lo sviluppo.

### KEYWORDS

Digital storytelling, narrative, digital media, intergenerational learning.  
Digital storytelling, narrativa, media digitali, l’apprendimento intergenerazionale.

## Introduction

Telling a story means much more than reporting facts. It implies selecting relevant experiences and conveying a meaning that forms a consistent whole out of characters, events and locations. Telling a story is difficult, and learning to tell stories is a powerful way to learn to understand personal experiences and how to communicate it to others. Sharing a story also means connecting with others.

The evidence that our societies are rapidly aging raises new social, economical, education and ethical issues. Can we harvest the potential of storytelling to tackle them?

Associazione seed (seed), a Swiss NGO based in Lugano, invested in storytelling as an approach to create social change and generate meaningful learning and integration opportunities in development projects (seed, n.d.). Thanks to digital media, seed developed a novel approach to engage vulnerable children in the development of expressive competencies, and labelled this approach Digital Storytelling for Development (DSD; Botturi, Bramani & Corbino, 2014it). DSD was developed over three years of social and international development projects, and eventually refined through PINOKIO, a European project within the Comenius Lifelong Learning Program (PINOKIO, n.d.). In particular key projects for the development of DSD were conducted in special education and in international development work in Eastern Europe and Central America. The ALICE project (ALICE, n.d.), a more recent Lifelong Learning project (2011-2013), represented an additional challenge to bring this experience, including both classic and digital storytelling, to the benefit of intergenerational learning.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section offers a short overview of storytelling, also focusing on its encounter with digital media, and on its potential in intergenerational learning. The following section presents a few experiences in digital storytelling for intergenerational learning, and conclusions and outlooks close the paper.

### 1. Storytelling: an ancient practice meets digital media

#### 1.1. *Storytelling and education*

Storytelling is a cornerstone of society, a basic form of sharing experiences and values (Farmer, 2004). Experiencing narratives, either as audience, author or teller, fosters the process of becoming part of the greater society and at the same time builds children's literacy and communication competencies (Engel, 1999). Pre-primary and primary school teachers use stories (for example, fairy tales or folk tales) to teach reading and writing skills, to convey grammar and math rules, or to present concepts. Dramatization, including the ability to embed information into a narrative setting, is also part of their skills.

In his seminal work *Teaching as Storytelling*, Egan (1986) claims that all teaching, included curricular topics from History to Science, could take the form of a story, thus constructing learning on narration and exploiting the engagement and motivational power of compelling stories. His line of argumentation moves from the recognition of stories as basic medium for communicating experience, and for making sense of an apparently disordered world (Bruner, 1990; McKee, 1997). Indeed, stories have been, and still are, a basic form of teaching (Pedersen, 1995; Bruner, 1990; Gils, 2005; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Cognition and Tech-

nology Group at Vanderbilt, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Young, 1993). The appeal and power of stories is widely acknowledged in the entertainment world, where many products are based on storytelling or exploit storytelling features (McCloud, 1994; Brathwaite & Schreiber, 2009), and such awareness is flowing back to the education domain.

## 1.2. Storytelling and digital technologies

While stories have always been part of the educator's toolbox, digital storytelling is a relatively recent trend in education (Meadows, 2003).

Digital storytelling can be defined as *"the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. Digital stories derive their power by weaving images, music, narrative and voice together, thereby giving deep dimension and vivid colour to characters, situations, experiences, and insights"* (definition by Leslie Rule of Digital Storytelling Association; in Sadik, 2008, p. 490). In other words, digital media offer new instruments for revisiting storytelling, blending multimedia, interactivity and the web into traditional storytelling practices.

Digital storytelling has recently become a topic of its own in the education domain. The core idea is simple: digital technologies, and especially individual media production applications, allow teachers and students to create short digital narrations weaving images, movies, audio, text and music with virtually no infrastructure costs (Ohler, 2006).

The development of a story requires creative work, writing, drawing, technology skills, teamwork, etc. (Robin, McNeil & Yuksel, 2011). Moreover, there is no good story without research and learning key facts (McKee, 1997), which at school means working on the curriculum. Some studies indicate that digital storytelling can offer an opportunity to develop second language competences (Tsou, Wang & Tzeng, 2006), to understand values and increase communication skills (Combs & Beach, 1994), to learn problem solving and algorithms (Schiro, 2004) and to acquire computer science and programming skills (Papadimitriou, 2003).

Educational researchers and practitioners engaged in digital storytelling projects have developed different storytelling approaches (a review is available in Robin, McNeil & Yuksel, 2011). Some of them have focused on technologies, indicating how to smoothen and make efficient the media development process involved in digital storytelling (cf., Robin, n.d.). However, most methods follow the principle of "story first, technology second", putting the development of the narrative structure in the foreground, and exploiting technologies to support the process. The steps provided by the Digital Clubhouse Network (quoted in Farmer, 2004) go in that direction, and so do also the guidelines presented by Ohler (2006; 2008). Following the same approach, the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS, n.d.) provides a reference method (Lambert, 2010), presented at workshops along with various tools, including the Digital Storytelling Cookbook, which is currently a key reference point in digital storytelling. More recently, Lambert has redefined this approach as the 7 steps of storytelling (Lambert, 2013).

Broadly, digital storytelling methodologies can also be grouped according to their usual type of story. The largest tradition in this domain works with biographical stories: storytellers are invited to give shape to their own stories (or their family's), narrating an important event, a place or object, etc. This process creates a space for meaning-making and for deep sharing, and has a deep transformative value. Another approach proposes the development of fictional stories, stimulat-

ing imagination and connecting with the fairy tale tradition. Such an approach creates a “safe space” in which difficult topics can be given voice through the projects on another world, thus achieving a new perspective.

## 2. Digital storytelling for development

Over the years, Associazione seed has developed an original DS model specifically tailored to social development, called Digital Storytelling for Development (DSD). At its core, DSD is a DS process embedded in a community learning setting, and is focused on the development of fictional stories: narrative discourse is not based on giving meaning to experiences, but on projecting difficult or “wordless” topics onto an imaginary story. This approach makes it possible, for example, to discuss family with the children of disrupted families, or friendship in a violent youth group, etc.

The actual storytelling activity in DSD is in line with Lambert’s approach and consists in the following 5 steps: (a) writing the story; (b) developing the storyboard; (c) developing illustrations; (d) recording narration and mixing audio; and (e) editing the final video product. Such an activity, however, is only a step within a wider process that includes (Figure 1):

Teacher training, i.e., the empowerment of local people (teachers, educators, social workers, etc.) to manage the whole project with their own resources.

Co-design, i.e., the shared design of the activity with children, defining topic, schedule, techniques, resources, and setting particular expectations.

Listening to stories, i.e., activation exercises that connects the project to the narrative worlds and styles in the local culture.

Valorisation, i.e., sharing the outcomes of the project with the broader community through sharing the digital stories, for example during a public screening event.

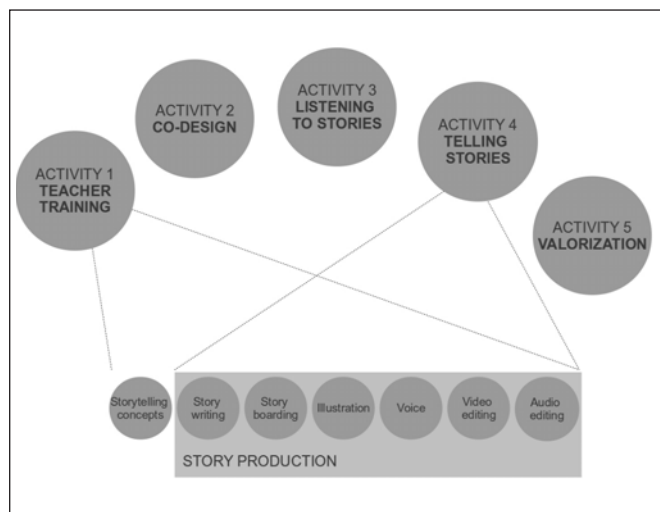


Figure 1 – The Digital Storytelling for Development approach

### 3. (Digital) storytelling, intergenerational learning and (inter)cultural encounters

In any culture, elderly people represent wisdom and memory of origins. Often, such wisdom is too deep and complex to be simply “transmitted”, so that it is more often conveyed through effective stories. Telling stories around the fire, or looking to a picture album, or during holidays are the imaginative landmark of memory reliving through the elders. For this reason, intergenerational learning is somehow a natural domain for the development of storytelling projects, also exploiting digital media. Indeed, this is also a very promising research and experimentation field (Flottesmesch, 2013).

First and foremost, connecting generations in a (digital) storytelling project means creating a space where value is given both to the elders – the source of memory and of wise stories – and to younger “natural born” digital artists. In fact, even if critiques have been raised against the very idea of digital natives (for the concept of digital native cf., Prensky 2001; 2006; for its critiques cf., Schulmeister, 2008; 2009; 2010; Bullen et al., 2009; Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008), young people are fascinated by digital technologies and see them as an attractive and powerful expressive means.

Second, the development of a digital story provides a setting in which the digital competences of elderly people are stimulated in a playful way, and, through the excitement for production with digital media, a meaningful experience of family connectedness can be carried out.

So far, intergenerational learning becomes the setting in which digital storytelling acts as a catalyst. But intergenerational learning can also be the topic of a digital storytelling project: reflecting on how children and young people perceive adults and elderly people is crucial to support educators and families in fostering and promoting an inclusive society.

On the other hand, the art of telling stories does not belong to a given culture or a particular continent; on the contrary, storytelling is, in every society around the world, the preferential way in which human beings transmit their culture to the next generation. This makes storytelling projects a great method also to create dialogue spaces among people coming from different cultures. The value of storytelling for fostering intercultural dialogue is twofold: first of all it allows the expression of one’s own values and beliefs, encouraging a discussion on commonalities and differences; and secondly it allows, when two cultural groups work on the same story, the negotiation of a common ground, where each starting point of view is taken into consideration, adopted or modified in the creation of a homogeneous story.

### 4. Intergenerational digital storytelling in practice

This section presents four different ways – called *racconti*, one of the Italian words for story – in which both “classical” and digital storytelling can meet the challenges of intergenerational learning and intercultural dialogue. Each of them is illustrated through a sample project from the experience of *associazione seed*.

#### 4.1. Preserve and transmit a common past

Elderly people are the owner of the treasure of memories – a treasure that can easily get lost if we overlook them. It is therefore important to teach little chil-

dren to recognize and give value to such memories. Digital storytelling can be used to transmit local legends and traditional stories, as well as historical facts experienced by elders. Instead of looking for stories in books, such a DS project leverages on the hearts and minds of those who lived them.

#### 4.2. *Primo racconto: Ancient legends*

A class of 5<sup>th</sup> graders (10 years old) spent one day in Val Colla, a valley near Lugano, where they visited the medieval church and some of the surroundings. Although impressive, the stones alone do not convey their meaning. The meeting with a hundred-years-old man of the village (Figure 2) offered the opportunity to learn about the life of a schoolboy one century ago, and also to learn the hidden stories of the building they visited. So, the church was discovered to be connected with the richness of the village, coming from the *Alpi* nearby (the high fields), who were donated by a Countess 300 years ago. Why? This was the subject of the story that the old men told, the legend of the *Fat Countess*.



Figure 6 – Intergenerational dialogue as telling stories

Back to school, the class wrote the story and developed drawings for it. They then met another element from their almost forgotten tradition: clay modelling (Figure 3). A local clay artist helped the children create the 3-D figures to illustrate the story. Digital pictures and voice recordings were taken, and the results was a DVD telling the story, while the original work of art remained on display in the school. During the process, three children from a special education school were also integrated in the class.



Figure 2 - Discovering traditions: children at work with clay modelling

In this project intergenerational dialogue was made vivid thanks to digital storytelling, which offered a perfect venue to connect the children with their tradition.

## 5. Intergenerational Learning meets Intercultural Issues

When we approach social issues, we tend to separate challenges and take them one by one, following the ancient “divide et impera” Roman motto. Actually, that motto might work well for warfare, but this does not imply adequacy to social development challenges. The following three experiences effectively tackle at the same time intercultural communicational and intergenerational communication.

### 5.1. *Secondo racconto: Cooking storytelling*

The concrete challenges at hand were (a) helping a family of Tibetan immigrants to develop community social bonds, and (b) creating an opportunity for children to experience diversity.

The idea followed a very common approach: encountering cultures through food, not only by tasting, but sharing the cooking itself. A 5 hours activity was then set up, involving 13 adults and 4 children, blended cooking, learning about ingredients, and of, course, telling the stories of the food, of the traditions and of the people (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – People preparing the intercultural dinner

All participants contributed according to their ability and children could cook, ask and learn while enjoying as in a sort of a game, thus becoming more involved in the activity. Under the pretext of explaining some recipes, what was actually passing was a set of cultural issues and stories linked to a way of cooking, of using particular tools or methods.

Digital media helped capturing the story of that evening, also engaging the little ones who were in charge, in some moments, to take pictures to be shared with their friends, and making it an event that could be reprised afterwards. In using the camera, they were, some cases, even more expert than adults, thus overturning the roles of teacher and learners.

### 5.2. *Terzo racconto: Children's tales?*

Storytelling is powerful in itself, even when digital media is kept aside, and when no story creation is at stake. Another, possibly less common, angle from which storytelling can be explored, is focusing on the simple narration of tales as an object of work.

This third experience was developed within a social integration program for a group of Muslim immigrant women, of different age (between 20 and 50), coming from different countries and with different mother languages; Most of them are married with children. One key goal of integration is of course language learning, and language best develops when played in realistic situations. In many integration programs, this is often translated in simulations of professional or daily life situations. While such an instructional choice is of value, other learning settings can open new spaces, especially when finding a job (or even deciding to find one) is not a realistic perspective for the near future. Consequently, women were first involved in socialisation activities in order to express themselves, to tell about their tradition and values and establish relationships with each other. Thanks to this context, it was much easier to make them feel ready to get language, cultural, and communication skills to actually encounter the local tradition. The storytelling activity was part of those socialisation activities.



Figure 4 – Muslim mothers act out a children's story



The idea was to spend an afternoon learning to tell a story in Italian to their own children (Figure 5). One of the problems of immigrant women in fact is that their children go to school and so they get more easily and quickly integrated than their mothers. So mothers are more and more afraid not to keep pace with their children. The storytelling activity was an initiative to show to the children that their mothers have the desire to be part to the local reality that they live every day.

Telling a story has not “right or wrong”, and is also an activity where deep affections and emotions are activated. Also, it brings everyone back to her infancy, thus connecting with deep meanings.

In 3 hours a collective narration brought to life a traditional tale – digital media being simply the activator of the process through the display of pictures and the recoding of voices.

Indeed, the result was stunning: the group of women, usually very shy and closed, revealed great energy and an incredible potential, both in expression and in language learning: one of the women told during the evaluation: “I’ve found that I can speak with someone and feeling confident”; an other one: “Interpreting the story allows us to show what was in ourselves”. Moreover, not only women became aware of how they learn, but also of how pleasing collaborative work can be. Now they can share what they have learnt, they evaluate their experience and they are curious to look for opportunities to learn and applying what they have learnt.

### 5.3. *Quarto racconto: Brazil vs. Italy for a win-win twinning*

This last project investigates intergenerational learning as the topic of the story developed by two teams of children living on the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

A twinning project involving two classes of an Italian primary school (7-9 years old) and a group of children (8-10 years old) Brazilian Association working in a disadvantaged environment aimed at exploring the relationship between children and adults. The intergenerational topic was chosen by Brazilian educators and Italian teachers involved in the project, in order to let children explore how they perceive adults, and to express their feelings regarding this relationship.

The project, which lasted three months, was structured in three phases; the aim of the first phase was to build a mutual knowledge between Italian and Brazilian children and included a preparatory work to present to the other group the school/institution and the local environment. This phase ends with a Sykpe videoconference where children had the possibility to interact, to present themselves and their environment and to ask questions about the other group’s presentation (Figure 6).

The second phase of the story was the actual digital storytelling activity, each group had to invent a sequence of the story, then the other group was in charge to draw the sequence invented by their colleagues overseas and to create the next sequence. At the end of this table tennis process the story was composed of 6 sequences. The collaboration between the two teams was excellent, so that it is almost impossible to notice which sequences Italian children have drawn and which by Brazilian ones. The output of this phase is a digital story translated in Italian and Portuguese. The story is about the friendship of a young girl and an old man (Figure 7).

The third and last phase of the project consisted in disseminating the experi-

ence among parents. Two events were organized, one in Brazil and one in Italy, presenting the methodology of the twinning and including a videoconference with children overseas.



Figure 5 – Italian young storytellers meet Brazilian colleagues



Figure 6 – Marisa and Mario, the main characters in the joint story

A transversal phase was the underground work done by Brazilian educators and Italian teachers to prepare the steps of the project and to reflect on how to prepare the intercultural encounter and how to tackle intergenerational issues after the creation of each sequence.

This twinning project allowed combining both intergenerational and intercultural issues: on one hand, the relationship between children and adults was the topic of the digital story, enabling teachers and educators investigating how children see adults and in particular to work on the issue of trust; on the other hand the project, developed as a twinning, enabled children have one of their very first intercultural experience, exploring how people of their age live on the other side of the ocean.

## Conclusions

The four *racconti* presented in this paper highlighted four features or facets of classic and digital storytelling in intergenerational and intercultural learning.

First, storytelling creates a venue where connecting with traditions becomes easier, even funny, and rewarding. Each participant has something to share: the stories, the wisdom, the visual skills, etc. The tradition, far from being “dusty books” becomes the material that helps building something new and supports creativity. The first project clearly shows this, also thanks to the integration of digital technologies, but this is also a trademark of the two other projects.

Second, storytelling projects tend to be holistic: more issues can be tackled at the same time, without fear of making it too complex, or following the analytic need of “one job at a time”. This is true especially in the second project, where intergenerational and intercultural issues are at stake at the same time.

Third, working on stories connects to our deep meaning, even when we work on already well-known fairy tales – because telling a story is an ancient activity that goes to our root, whatever culture, whatever generation.

Fourth, digital storytelling can be a powerful method to investigate how children perceive adults, allowing educators to work on intergenerational relations and on the issue of trust; while, at the same time, opening a window on other cultural perspectives.

All experiences have something in common: they stimulate the development of communication and – in the case of digital storytelling – media skills, they help us connect with our deep meaning and with our cultures, and they are fun for the participants. All of them are good reasons to continue exploring in this direction.

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# Intergenerational learning through creative methods: The Romanian perspective

## Apprendimento intergenerazionale attraverso l'uso di metodi creativi. La prospettiva rumena

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### ABSTRACT

The ALICE project was implemented in Romania by the Romanian Society for Lifelong Learning which selected trainers from different parts of the country to participate at the initial online training for trainers. The aim of the adult trainings later organized by SREP was to instil a greater interest in reading and storytelling and provide older adults with an educational alternative for how they can spend their leisure time with their children/grandchildren.

In our organization's daily work in the educational projects we implement, we meet young people who express themselves very difficult and have serious problems in correctly speaking and writing. In the same time, rupture between generations is also very high, many young people do not communicate with parents, and parents spend less time with their children. Also new technologies make the gap between generations even bigger. The idea of learning from each other through new technologies emerged also from the implementation of projects by our organization which addressed both parental education, and family learning, projects that have a real interest among adults and children.

Il progetto ALICE è stato attuato in Romania dalla Società Rumena per l'Apprendimento Permanente (SREP), che ha selezionato formatori da diverse parti del paese per partecipare alla formazione iniziale online proposta dal progetto ai formatori. A partire da questa formazione, l'obiettivo dei corsi di formazione per adulti organizzati più Avanti da SREP è stato quello di infondere interesse per la lettura e la narrazione e fornire un'opportunità formative per gli adulti più anziani su modi per trascorrere il tempo libero con figli e nipoti.

Nel lavoro quotidiano della nostra organizzazione incontriamo giovani che indicano la propria difficoltà e mancanza di competenze per l'espressione orale e scritta. Nel contempo, la rottura dei legami tra generazioni è molto elevato, con molti giovani che non arrivano a comunicare con i genitori, e genitori che trascorrono sempre meno tempo con i propri bambini. In questo contest, le nuove tecnologie sembrano rendere il divario tra generazioni ancor più grande. L'idea di imparare gli uni dagli altri attraverso le nuove tecnologie è emersa anche a seguito dell'esecuzione di diversi progetti formativi da parte della nostra organizzazione sia per l'istruzione dei genitori, la famiglia e l'apprendimento degli adulti, di genuino interesse per adulti e bambini.

### KEYWORDS

Adult learning, creative languages, intergenerational learning, storytelling. Formazione degli adulti, linguaggi creativi, apprendimento intergenerazionale, narrazione.

## Introduction

In recent years, children read far too little. The computer, the TV, the Internet and tablets occupy the children's time devoted to reading. This issue stands out among teenagers, where 2 out of 5 have trouble understanding the text they read.

In this context their language and vocabulary have much to suffer. Many young people are not able to express themselves properly.

Always stories told by parents and especially grandparents occupy a special place in the children's hearts. Interest for books, for information, also reading skills grow since early years of life when children are fascinated by the images from the story books, and more by the way adults talk to them about various characters, good and bad, which fight, in the end good defeating evil.

You always try to guide children through stories to discern good from evil, learn to be fair and to protect fundamental values: truth, justice, honesty, fairness, etc.

In recent years the value system suffered greatly in the Romanian society. If in the stories good and evil are clearly distinguished, in today's society a young man finds it difficult to discern what is good and evil, being subjected to an excessive media exposure, most often giving confusing and contradictory information. The young man must adjust to his environment and have the strength to keep his individuality and personality in his own entourage.

### 1. Piloting of the first adults learning programme (ALPP)

Every year fewer children are interested in reading and that's why their vocabulary is increasingly poor, and their ability to understand texts and stories are poorer.

At the same time children are more attracted to new technologies since early childhood coming in contact with smart phones, computers, video games, etc.

In our organization's daily work in the educational projects we implement, we meet young people who express themselves very difficult and have serious problems in correctly speaking and writing. In the same time, rupture between generations is also very high, many young people do not communicate with parents, and parents spend less time with their children.

Also new technologies make the gap between generations even bigger. The idea of learning from each other through new technologies emerged also from the implementation of projects by our organization which addressed both parental education, and family learning, projects that have a real interest among adults and children.

In this sense, the ALPP completes the already developed activities in other projects.

The ALPP meets school and family needs to help students and young people to develop an interest in reading and writing skills.

ALPP ran in a parent extracurricular activity designed to help them become a better teacher and learning companion for children, but also to give them the chance to learn new things with their child.

The ALPP aim was to instil a greater interest in reading and storytelling and provide older adults with an educational alternative for how they spend their leisure time.

The importance of this aim for the people engaged was to provide better communication and cooperation in the family, between generations, to provide the necessary support to adults to help children in their efforts to evolve.

The creative language adopted was Digital Storytelling and Intergenerational Storytelling.

The people engaged in the activities proposed by the ALPP expected to gain skills/knowledge on storytelling and creative writing. The impact is an intergenerational relationship, to be able to teach adults how to interact better with children and how to lead them to develop language and passion for books.



**Fig.1 – A session of the ALPP**

In our organization's daily work in the educational projects we implement, we meet young people who express themselves very difficult and have serious problems in correctly speaking and writing. In the same time, rupture between generations is also very high, many young people do not communicate with parents, and parents spend less time with their children.

Also new technologies make the gap between generations even bigger. The idea of learning from each other through new technologies emerged also from the implementation of projects by our organization which addressed both parental education, and family learning, projects that have a real interest among adults and children.

In this sense, the Intergenerational Storytelling Project completes the already developed activities in other projects.



**Fig. 2 – Adults' Reflections**

This strategy is very useful in the context of the intergenerational education, which combines with the digital story being well received by both parties, children and adults can each cooperate with experience and competence, both benefiting.

To motivate adults to attend classes, meetings were conducted with them in the school, when the importance of these courses and their effect on the good upbringing of their children will be explained, as a result they can communicate better and more effectively with their children.

To be more effective we developed an appropriate program for the adults' needs so they have the opportunity to fully participate, depending on their work program.

Also children were engaged in collateral activities, allowing the adults to attend.

The proposed activities were meant to support adults in gaining skills and knowledge in digital storytelling and creative writing. The use of digital technologies is new to the adults and it is considered very important in order to communicate better with their children/ grandchildren known as more attracted to new technologies since early childhood.

The activities developed during the ALPP focused on presenting the alternative of digital stories to written ones by showing the strong impact that images, music, voices have on children rather than just reading from a paper. Participants were asked to create their own stories by writing or drawing. Participants learned through the activities to create their own digital stories using storyboards and audio mixing programs.



**Fig. 3 – Children drawing as part of the activities**

The skills that participants gained during the ALPP had a strong impact on their children building a stronger relationship and sharing their knowledge.

Parents would make the stories more appealing to their children using ICT tools that children handle very well and appreciate. In the same time, during the creation of their own digital stories, parents are supported by their children in their understanding of different ICT tools.

The ALPP was very much engaging for both the participants and the trainer. The participants enjoyed very much all the warm up exercises, all the stories presented, working in teams, discussing among each other the importance of digital storytelling and the right choice of stories for their children/ grandchildren.



The ALPP turned out to be a group meeting with parents/ grandparents sharing their experiences about children and what methods are appropriate for them to be closer to their needs. That is why digital storytelling was considered to be one idea as children are very much into new technologies and involving parents and children altogether in the creation of a story using the new technology will bring them much closer.

## 2. Piloting of the second adults learning programme (ALPP)

Reading and writing are basic skills for everyone. Young children are taught since school to express and narrate. Kindergarten is the first environment in which children are asked to communicate and tell to which group he belongs.

The fascination which stories have upon children must be kept also later on, so that they become literature consumers not only of the movies, adaptations of books.

Unfortunately, fewer and fewer grandparents tell stories to their grandchildren, as it would have been done in past generations when the most beautiful stories were told by grandparents.



Fig. 4 – Intergenerational activities

Children's of today are increasingly attracted to new technologies. Lack of reading makes them have a poor vocabulary, not allowing them to fluently express themselves.

A book is difficult to read, given the poor grammar, while new technologies are intuitive and do not require too much knowledge.

Also the lack of genuine value systems increases the confusion of the new generations, which can be decreased by adults with creative languages and metaphors from books and stories for children.

The importance of this aim for the people engaged will be to provide better communication and cooperation in the family, between generations, to provide the necessary support to adults to help children in their efforts to evolve.

Goals: The people engaged in the activities proposed by the ALPP can expect to gain skills/knowledge on narration, connect textual reality with their own reality and to become more analytical, open minded.

The impact could be an intergenerational relationship, to be able to teach adults how to interact better with children and how to promote educational and moral values as well as ideological issues, through children's literature. Reading and writing are basic skills for everyone. Young children are taught since school to express and narrate. Kindergarten is the first environment in which children are asked to communicate and tell to which group he belongs. The fascination which stories have upon children must be kept also later on, so that they become literature consumers not only of the movies, adaptations of books. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer grandparents tell stories to their grandchildren, as it would have been done in past generations when the most beautiful stories were told by grandparents.

Children of today are increasingly attracted to new technologies. Lack of reading makes them have a poor vocabulary, not allowing them to fluently express themselves. A book is difficult to read, given the poor grammar, while new technologies are intuitive and do not require too much knowledge. Also the lack of genuine value systems increases the confusion of the new generations, which can be decreased by adults with creative languages and metaphors from books and stories for children.

The creative language adopted was **Children's Literature and metaphors to enact intergenerational dialogue**. This strategy is very useful in the context of the intergenerational learning; given the known desire of children to sharpen the stories told by adults, as well as adults need to have at hand means of educating and mentoring of children.

To be more effective we developed an appropriate program for the adults' needs so they have the opportunity to fully participate, depending on their work program. Also children were engaged in some of the activities, allowing the adults to attend.

An online network was developed in which parents, teachers, grandparents discussed about their findings and shared their good stories, books etc.

The aim of this network was to increase the interest of parents, grandparents and teachers of using children's literature (both virtually created and non-virtually created – by means of books).

The network should be a space of further communication for the target group involved and for others to share new tools for storytelling, sources of books. The network can be also a community, in which other institutions can offer their support, promote other workshops for the target group involved, enhance knowledge on children's literature etc.



Fig. 5 – Social Networks promoting the project

The ALICE community on Facebook called *Creative intergenerational activities* is full of people and institutions using creative languages and share their opinions and work (with more than 100 members).

In these sessions, children were present and together with their parents enjoyed the organized activities. They were present to share their opinion on the chosen stories, the parts of the stories they liked and the parts they disliked; they give feedback on the style of narration and how interest is raised when telling a story.



Fig. 6 – Digital Storytelling and intergenerational Learning

The second ALPP organized by SREP raised awareness on the need to use children's literature as a tool to help children make a difference between good and bad and an activity to bring adults together with their children in a pleasant way.


Participants enjoyed all the activities especially the part in which they had to re-tell the stories they have already known by heart and considered to be well known by the children.

## Conclusions

There is a growing need for bringing closer children with their parents and grandparents through different intergenerational activities meant to shape children's personalities and also to acquire abilities necessary for a better and pro active communication within a family. These programmes that were developed during the project are just examples of intergenerational activities, more and more can be created and used for the same purpose.

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# Creative collaborative experiences with interactive shadow theater

## Esperienze creative e collaborative con il teatro d'ombre

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### ABSTRACT

Storytelling is a very common educational practice that is used in every level of education. It has a positive impact in children's learning and creativity. Often the educational use of storytelling is based on national storytelling traditions such as Shadow Theater which is very popular in many countries including Greece. In this research we present eShadow, a storytelling tool inspired by the Greek traditional shadow theater and how it has been used in a number of Adult Learning Pilot Programmes (ALPPs) implemented within the context of the ALICE project in Greece.

In these ALPPs, intra-family communication scenarios were investigated as well as scenarios related to enabling children develop their own digital stories using eShadow. Furthermore, eShadow was used in a live interactive performance event combining Music and Digital Shadow Theatre. The evidence gathered during the implementation of these ALPPs confirms that such kind of approaches can indeed enhance intergenerational bonding and create an engaging learning space for children to develop important key skills. Our findings illustrate that eShadow is very easy to use, attracts the interest of both children and teachers and has a positive impact on the development of children's creativity.

Lo storytelling è una pratica molto comune in ambito formativo ed educativo, utilizzata ad ogni livello di istruzione. Ha un impatto positivo sull'apprendimento e la creatività dei bambini. Spesso l'uso didattico dello storytelling si basa su espressioni narrative ben conosciute a livello nazionale, qual è il caso del teatro delle ombre, molto popolare in molti paesi tra cui la Grecia. In questa ricerca presentiamo i risultati dell'implementazione di uno strumento digitale, "eShadow", ispirato al tradizionale teatro delle ombre greco, nel contesto di un certo numero di attività pilota per la formazione degli adulti (Adult Learning Pilot Programmes, ALPPS) attuate nel contesto del progetto ALICE, in Grecia.

In questi ALPPS, gli scenari di comunicazione intra-familiari sono stati studiati così come scenari che consentono ai bambini di sviluppare le proprie abilità per il lavoro con lo strumento digitale eShadow. Inoltre, eShadow è stato utilizzato in evento interattivo che univa presentazioni di Musica e Teatro con la presenza di teatro delle ombre "digitale". Le prove raccolte nel corso di questi ALPPS conferma l'ipotesi degli autori che questo tipo di approcci può infatti migliorare i legami intergenerazionali e consente di sviluppare importanti competenze chiave sia negli adulti che nei bambini. I nostri risultati mostrano che eShadow è molto facile da usare, attira l'interesse di bambini e insegnanti e ha un positivo impatto sullo sviluppo della creatività dei bambini.

### KEYWORDS

Education, shadow theater, creative languages, intergenerational learning, games  
Formazione, teatro d'ombre, linguaggi creativi, apprendimento intergenerazionale, giochi.

## Introduction: Storytelling and intergenerational learning in the digital age

Storytelling is a very common educational practice that is used in every level of education. In particular the use of storytelling in children education can have important impact in children's learning and help them develop their creativity skills. Furthermore, in many countries world-wide do exist storytelling traditions that address not only children but adults as well. Due to their inherent intergenerational character, those traditions can offer a firm culturally-situated ground for intergenerational interventions such as the ones targeted by the ALICE project.

One of these storytelling traditions that is deeply rooted mainly in Eastern cultures is Shadow Theater. The diversity of possibilities provided by playing with shadows (for example when children play with hand-shadows) has impressed humans throughout history. This fact is what made traditional Shadow Theater so popular in many countries and over time. [F. Lu, F. Tian]. Traditional Shadow Theater remains very popular even after the invasion of cinema, television and, lately, the Internet in many in many countries around the world like Greece, China, Taiwan, France, India, Turkey, Malaysia and other. More specifically in Greece, Shadow Theater is a very popular form of entertainment. For older generations Shadow Theater was the only form of entertainment available to them. That was a time before cinema and television became available to the general public. Furthermore, Traditional Shadow Theater is a common link across generations: Children in Greece still watch traditional shadow theater plays, learn about Shadow Theater in school and also play with shadow theater puppets.

Starting from these important facts, we have been exploring for the last four years the possibility to develop digital tools inspired by the Greek Shadow Theater tradition with the aim to offer an infrastructure that will allow the set up of engaging learning spaces for both children and adults. The result of these investigations is eShadow, a digital storytelling tool that can be used from both adults and children in order to create, record, share and watch digital shadow theater plays. It provides alternative methods for controlling the virtual puppets either through mouse or through a motion sensing controller and enables real-time collaboration over the Internet (e.g. between grandparents and grandchildren living in diverse geographical locations). With eShadow new possibilities emerge: The enactment of intra-family communication scenarios that promote intergenerational bonding and playful learning. Such kind of new opportunities for intergeneration bonding that overcomes the physical separation of children and their grandparents is important for children's development and contributes to the well being of the elderly as well.

### 1. Shadow Theater in education

The impact that Shadow Theater has on children, allowed for its use as a learning tool. Especially in primary education it is used as an alternative way of playing and learning. One basic criterion for selecting it as a learning tool is that children relate to its main character Karagkiozis in many ways.

Karagkiozis has the ability to motivate children and expand their creativity. Children find their own ways of mimicking plays, create their own improvised dialogues, express their emotions and create their own stories with unique characters. Additionally children get familiar with the research process and with collecting and using information about different shadow theater plays. Traditional plays were written in difficult times for Greece. They all contain historical infor-

mation about life and many sarcastic elements about the conquerors/authorities of those times.

Another aspect of the plays that has not yet been analyzed is music. Every play has a musical theme that is, in many cases, unique. Each shadow theater performer used local traditional musical themes for his plays. By examining the music from different plays, children can learn about musical tradition across the whole country.

When creating their own plays, children work in groups. Each group is assigned to a different task of the play creation process. The most common assets of a play are: scenario of the play, dialogues, music, characters and sceneries. Children cooperate in order to create the scenario and dialogues, find the appropriate music for each part of the play and draw the figures or sceneries. With the active participation in the above process, children are engaged in a collaborative fun process that allows them to express their creativity.

Except from the creation of a play, watching one is another activity that offers collaborative learning experiences for both children and adults. Many traditional plays have educational characteristics. The most common topics that they address are: equality (gender and social equality), environmental protection, people with special needs and many other social issues that are common to every society.

## 2. eShadow and the ALICE project

eShadow is an on-going project about an electronic shadow theater application inspired by Greek traditional shadow theater. The main goals of eShadow are:

- To adapt traditional shadow theater in modern times.
- To preserve traditional art as much as possible and make traditional shadow theater more popular.
- To create a learning tool for both children and adults.

With eShadow users can create, record, share and watch digital shadow theater plays. It provides alternative methods for controlling the virtual puppets either through mouse or through a motion sensing controller. eShadow also offers the ability to video chat for enhancing collaborative creation and watching of plays. Besides it can accommodate virtual puppets inspired by fairy tales or children narratives, legends or historical figures as well.

It supports intra-family communication scenarios that promote intergenerational bonding and playful learning. For example, a child, who lives in the United States of America, could present a shadow play story to his/her grandparents in Greece. The grandparents are able to watch and encourage him/her or even try to cooperate with him/her by controlling other virtual puppets on-line. They also have the ability to watch and communicate with their grandchild through the video chat facility which is embedded in eShadow. Such kind of new opportunities for intergeneration bonding that overcomes the physical separation of children and their grandparents is important for children's development and contributes to the well-being of the elderly [R. Vutborg, J. Kjeldskov].

The bottom line is that eShadow provides an engaging educational environment that promotes creativity and establishes a bridge between generations where adults and children can collaborate, create their own stories or use classic shadow theater scenarios in order to create their own shadow theater plays.

The project “Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences” (ALICE) focuses on the idea of Intergenerational Learning as key to reinforce the role of adults (grandparents, parents, volunteers) as educators. New opportunities for intergenerational learning need to be based on new languages: creative languages, beyond just transmitting information from one generation to another.

The combination of the creative languages, used in ALICE, with eShadow creates a plethora of possibilities. These possibilities were further explored within the context of other activities implemented within the context of the ALICE Adults Learning Pilot Programmes (ALPP) in Greece.

The stakeholders that participated in the Greek ALPPs and used eShadow were mostly elementary schools. In the elementary school curriculum there are learning modules in several courses devoted to Greek traditional shadow theater and storytelling. By instructing teachers and parents to use a new storytelling tool, children are benefited by:

- Providing a new way for children to express their creativity and learn
- Teachers can make related classes much more interesting and engaging for children
- Children learn to use games in a safe way in the school environment

The aim of the implemented ALPPs was to offer new experiences and tools that could help children create and visualize stories. eShadow is very easy to use and learn by both teachers and children. The workflow that has been developed consists of creating a story, creating figures and sceneries and digitizing the story.

Teachers were encouraged to guide their students through the creation of a story based on the children’s interests. After the creation of the story they developed a corresponding script with dialogues. The script had a specific plot and characters. The final step was to visualize the story with eShadow and produce the video of the play.

The participating children were able to better understand how Shadow Theater plays are structured, how they are performed and also create their own play. In parallel, they exercised their creativity by developing their own figures and sceneries as well as their own scenario. Another skill targeted by this activity, was the ability to cooperate within a group: all scenarios and plays were created cooperatively.

### 1.1. Sessions with eShadow

The first ALPP sessions that used eShadow were held in Athens in the context of the exhibition titled “The Triumph of Shadows”. The participants were members of the EcoFans Club. The EcoFans Club is a program designed to raise and promote environmental awareness and consciousness through an educational process combining ecology and English language learning. The EcoFans Club main group consists of students attending the Hellenic America Union English Language program, their parents, friends and other people that wish to participate in the EcoFans activities.

From these sessions one shadow theater play was produced by the children with the support of their teachers. The play is available on the link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VB\\_jn0WkG1Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VB_jn0WkG1Y).

The next two sessions of this ALPP were implemented with children and



adults with special needs. The participants of the first session were children with physical disabilities. Totally six children and six teachers participated in this session. The outline of the session was the following:

- The participants are welcomed to the session and a brief introduction is made
- The participants watch a play that has been created in cooperation with a professional shadow theater performer
- The participants are instructed on the use of eShadow and create their own shadow theater play

The participants of the second session were adults with mental disabilities. Six adults and six trainers (each adult had his/her own trainer) participated in this session.



**Fig. 1: Children with special needs at the ALPP session**



**Fig. 2: Adults with special needs at the ALPP session**

Within the context of the exhibition, a panel discussion was organized on December 1st, 2012. The panel brought together artists, performers, and academics to discuss about the history and the art of Greek Shadow Theater and its modern versions. During this event, eShadow was presented along with information

about its use in ALICE intergenerational activities as well as a short presentation of all the Greek planned ALPPs.

The final sessions that explored the use of eShadow targeted teachers, parents and children. eShadow was presented in local events targeting schools and several teachers were interested in eShadow and were trained to use it for creating digital stories with their students.

One of these sessions took place in a primary school and the aim was to enhance the co-operation among children and between children and adults. Furthermore it aimed to familiarize children with Greek traditional shadow theater through eShadow as well as to trigger their imagination. The importance of this aim, for the people engaged, was to have better understanding with each other and then realize that with co-operation between generations can have surprisingly better results due to combination of each generations strong points! The result was an actual Greek traditional shadow theater play which was created with eShadow and is entitled “Karagiozis and the IMF”. This play is available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXP-3ruCrv>

This shadow play was a part of students’ creations exhibition that took place the other ALPP where it was available for watching by children and adults as you can see in the following image.



**Fig. 3:** Students watching a play created with eShadow during the sessions in Chania

### 1.2. Evaluation and evidence

The evaluation of the ALPPs that explored the use of eShadow was mainly done by evidence that were produced during the sessions of the ALPPs. Debriefing was done immediately after the sessions, in order to document feedback from the participants while we took into account the conversations that were taking place during the sessions. The evidence that were produced from the sessions are:

- The script of the play that was discussed and produced from the participants during the information phase of the session
- The figures and sceneries that were produced from the participants during the lab phase.
- The scenes of the shadow theater play that were produced from the participants during the lab phase

- Photos taken during the sessions
- Notes that were taken by the trainer during the discussions in different phases of the session
- The Learning map that was discussed with the participants during or after the session
- An ALICE blog post that described the session/sessions

The play that the EcoFans group created already has over 600 views and it can be found on the following link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VB\\_jn0WkG1Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VB_jn0WkG1Y)

More information and photos for this action can be found on the EcoFans official website: [http://www.hau.gr/?i=environmental\\_education.en.ecofans-past-events.2961](http://www.hau.gr/?i=environmental_education.en.ecofans-past-events.2961)

### 1.3. *Publicity, impact and reflection*

The exhibition received considerable visibility in Greek mass media. The following addresses point to some indicative articles in major Greek news sites, magazines and newspapers:

- <http://www.elculture.gr/exhibitions/thriamvos-skion-2012-428004>
- <http://news.pathfinder.gr/greece/news/828260.html>
- <http://tinyurl.com/bvzfzzo>
- <http://www.tanea.gr/news/culture/article/4769865/?iid=2>
- The exhibition was attended by 1900 people in total. Here are some more detailed statistics:
- Number of people attending the exhibition: 1900 people
- Exhibition (11/12 – 12/15/2012): 1308 people (Opening: 70 people + 1238 during exhibition)
- “Shadows in light” panel discussion (12/1): 40 people
- Screenings (12/3 & 12/4/12): 40 people
- Traditional shadow theater performances: (11/14, 11/23, 12/10 & 12/11): 140 people
- Educational program: 341 children and 24 teachers.
- 12 adults from a center for people with mental disabilities

### 1.4. *Impact on adults and children*

Depending on their role, adults participating in this ALPP benefited in a different ways:

- Adults that are parents benefited by exploring new ways of playing and coming closer to their children. Many parents do not know how to approach their children in the digital world and this ALPP by combining tradition with the digital world provides a common ground for both parents and children.
- Teachers were familiarized with a new tool for digital storytelling. Such a tool suitable for use in the classroom by teachers did not exist. By instructing teachers to use a new storytelling tool that revolutionizes Shadow Theater we expect them and children to benefit by making related classes much more interesting and engaging for their students and acquire extra digital competences. In Greece many teachers are not very familiar with computers so this is a good skill to learn.

Children benefited most from the sessions of this ALPP. In particular, they were able to:

- Develop cooperative skills
- Express their creativity and learn in a playful way
- Learn about environmental issues (the play that was created by the EcoFans group is about environmental protection)
- Develop digital skills and competences

### *1.5. Reflection on the ALPP implementation*

The implementation of the sessions of the ALPPs proved to be a big challenge. It took a lot of planning and organizing in order to coordinate all the sessions with the exhibition in Athens. The most promising fact of all was the great feedback that we received almost from all the participants. Especially the feedback from teachers that we talked to after the sessions was great and even they were sometimes surprised with the attention that the children gave to the sessions. Furthermore the children's reactions when they saw their own puppets move and after viewing their first recorded scene were enthusiastic.

## **2. Exploiting eShadow in a live online educational event**

eShadow was used in “AKPITΩN MOYΣIKH (Akriton Mousiki)” which was a live interactive performance audiovisual event combining Music and Digital Shadow Theatre and took place on April 2013. Akriton Mousiki was part of Distance learning Music Agoge (DMA) and it was its fifth implementation.

Akriton Mousiki was a more ambitious implementation of DMA in two ways:

1. It was the first time in the program that 5 Greek remote areas were connected at the same time.
2. It was the first time that real time music visualization was used and it was achieved through eShadow.

## **3. Distance learning Music Agoge (DMA)**

Distance learning Music Agoge (DMA) is a pilot project attempting to set the foundations for the exploitation of teleconference and live streaming capabilities used as tools for supporting music education in Greek remote areas. It was funded by the e-services action of the Operational Program Information Society (O.P.I.S./ES 6875) and it operates under the auspices of Ellinogermaniki Agogi Private School, the Department of Research & Development and the School's Music Department. DMA is the first project of its kind in Greece.

- Satisfying its short-term objective the project already broadcasts online low and medium scale music events of specific interest especially from remote places without advanced ICT infrastructure (first successful event : May 2010 via mobile broadband).
- Medium-term objective is to have remote communities collaborating towards

the development of a live online music event. This objective seeks to help remote sites to exchange cultural content through music activities as a result of a training process that combines creative music-technology and music-teaching. Blending teleconference and live streaming tools towards this task is part of this current objective. Two such trilateral (multiple-site) links have already been accomplished:

- the first in June 2010 (between Western Achaia, Boeotia, Crete)
- the second in January 2011 (between Attica, Boeotia, Western Achaia).
- In March 2013 in collaboration with Stord Haugesund University-Norway and the “Write A Science Opera” project, DMA achieves the second interstate effort and the first cross-country-link (“linkcast”) towards the creation of a live-performance educational event in the history of European Music Education. The event linked Greece, Norway and Cyprus.
- Long-term objective is to develop and promote advanced and innovative videoconference capabilities used as tools that can link together remote communities in areas where access to music educational practice is scarce or impossible.

#### **4. Building an advanced objective... Akriton Mousiki**

Up to this current stage the project is adopting the digital environment of the Adobe Connect Pro v7.5 platform to both the needs of distance learning courses and the needs of multicasting music events. For the distance learning courses it is essential to mention that no virtual web-platform is capable of replacing actual and in person face-to-face lessons.

The ultimate objective of this project is not to substitute traditional teaching methods but to encourage users to start building a relation with music not only as listeners but as active performers from the area in which they live. Peer to peer videoconference combined with diverse streaming capabilities, that allow links with more-than-two users simultaneously, enhanced by diverse audiovisual content can only be a part of music-instrument teaching using ICT.

At the moment higher education in music performance to individuals cannot be established through streaming media but can be significantly enhanced mostly in territories where specialized music tuition is impossible. Other webcast platforms are also tested towards this task as long as physical body action is captured and transmitted through live video image. In this direction the capabilities of connections (links) and direct multimedia streaming (live webcasting) are combined and tested in low-infrastructure-conditions that constantly vary according to the actions which the program covers. The term “Linkcast” may describe the above effort.

The experience gained day by day builds the foundation for the future development of a live & interactive network of remote web-channels available to the world of music-education in Europe.

#### **5. eShadow and Akriton Mousiki**

“AKPITΩN MOYΣIKH (Akriton Mousiki)” was a live interactive performance audiovisual event combining Music and Digital Shadow Theatre. The performance was inspired by Greek Acritan heritage and included the collaborative prepara-

tion, co-creation and realization of an online event between multiple distant schools linked together via videoconference. During the linkcast (webcasted videoconference) pupils from four acritic schools presented a virtual-stage role-playing educational activity by moving digital figures (e-shadow platform) accompanied with shared live Music performance.



**Fig. 4: Adobe Connect Pro, screenshot. Cyprus and Gavdos perform a scene from the play. Karpathos and Athens are watching**

The blueprint of the linkcast scenario was derived from the “Let Us Share The Music” activity recognized as good practice from the Pedagogical Institute Good-Practices Database. The scenario involved pupils from Gavdos, Karpathos, Kastelorizo and Cyprus. An early version of the scenario was as follows:

1. The school in Gavdos begins the event by presenting the Acritic heritage in general.
2. A music theme from classical music inspired by the acritic tradition is performed in Athens.
3. The school in Cyprus continues with the acritic song of Digenis Akritas. At the same time pupils from Crete move figures of «Digenis in the Marble Threshing Fields”.
4. Karpathos presents “sirmatika” (traditional songs from Karpathos) and excerpts from the song of Armouris. At the same time pupils from Cyprus move e-shadow figures inspired by the song. [ Samuel Baud-Bovy, Chansons du Dodecanese, t. 2, Societé d’Édition “Les Belles Lettres”, Paris 1938 / Samuel Baud-Bovy, “La chanson d’ Armouris et sa tradition orale”, Byzantion, v. 13 (1938)]
5. The school in Crete presents Kypridimos from the scene of joust contest with Erotokritos (epic poem by Vicenzos Kornaros).The school in Gavdos move figures from this scene.
6. The linkcast closes with classical Music from Athens.

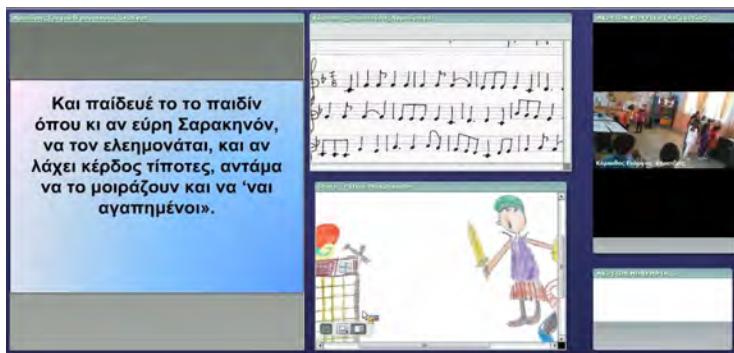


Fig. 5: Karpathos during a rehearsal

The final scenario scenario was based upon the educational needs of every site that took part on the event following the phases of the good practice. This scenario consisted of four aspects of interaction: the flow of sites succeeding each other (1<sup>st</sup> column) and three columns representing a sequence of online events:

- Yellow column: the flow of the e-shadow theatre events
- Purple column: the flow of Powerpoint events
- Cyan column: the flow of audio events

This final scenario included advanced interaction between five remote sites through live physical-instrument music performance and digital images movement. Part of the dialogues performed by the students were arranged and prepared specifically for the event and they were based upon the Byzantine epos of Digenis Akritas digitized by the University of Crete "Anemi" Database.

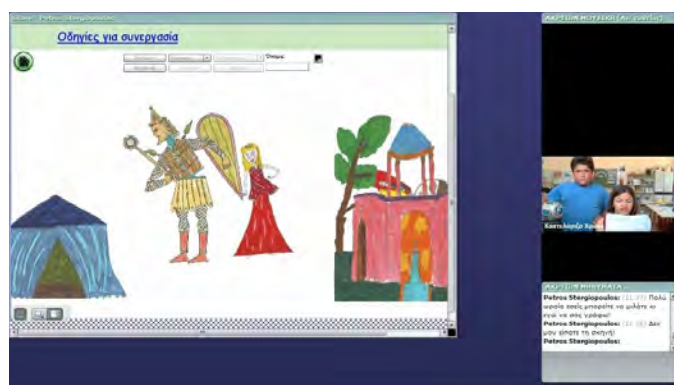


Fig. 6: Kastelorizo during a rehearsal

The planning of this event involved, trials, studying – finalization of the final scenario and rehearsals with teachers and students emulating as much as possible the duration of the final event.



**Fig. 7: Gavdos and Athens performing a sequence of music themes live. Karpathos turns the pages of the sheet music**

For the Digital Shadow Theatre part of the event, children were asked to draw their own acritan figures in order to be used in eShadow. So the scanned children's drawings, with the use of an image editing program, were converted into two part figures and then imported to eShadow. When children saw their drawings moving like actual puppets, they were very excited, as their teachers stated. All the training of the teachers was accomplished through video-conference since physical presence was not possible.

## 6. Music as a performance art

With music being a universal language and live performance being the most crucial part of music as an art, live audiovisual web-streaming and teleconference capabilities can expand our concepts for both music education and define our every day connection with music as an Art. Communities such as professional soloists, music teachers and music trainees can obtain ways of becoming "music protagonists" by creating audiovisual live-links across Europe or even worldwide.

A clear and open ICT-in-music window within Europe must not be limited to the current digital communication practices whose usefulness has not yet been focused upon the needs of both the formal and informal music education. Satisfying the key feature of Music as an Art, which is: "being conducted on a specific place and time", video conferencing and live multimedia streaming can profoundly support and enhance music performance, along with music education. Music, as an art of time, requires the co-existence of the listener (receiver) and the artist (transmitter) at the same place and time in order to become reality. This characteristic could also be reflected in the relationship between a teacher and a student during the music education process.

This necessity, which has so far been satisfied mainly by automatic web tools (on-demand internet web2 applications or stored resources of audiovisual content) can now expand to blended synchronous and asynchronous communication methods that engage true and actual live human tuition and collaboration.

The participation of many remote users who are able to co-create a cultural event fulfills the basic and primordial characteristic of music creation that is the "Sympraxis" (=cooperation) of different people and cultures in order to create Music.



## Conclusions and future work

eShadow leverages on the rich tradition of Shadow Theater to create an engaging storytelling environment to promote intergenerational learning and creativity. It builds upon a storytelling tradition that is very popular among all generations in Greece and directly related to intergenerational activities.

The findings from the ALPPs that used eShadow are absolutely aligned with the goals and purpose of the ALICE project. These findings confirm that digital storytelling supported by eShadow can be combined with many of the creative languages that the ALICE project targets.

Further activities, beyond the lifetime of the ALICE project, are already underway: Within the context of the Open Discovery Space project (<http://www.opendiscoveryspace.eu/>) local schools use eShadow to develop educational stories in mathematics that could be used as teaching resources. eShadow is also used within the context of local safer internet contests where students are invited to develop their own stories addressing internet safety. Finally, a pilot study in selected pre-primary schools has started on October 2013 with the aim to explore innovative ways to address multiliteracies in kindergarten.

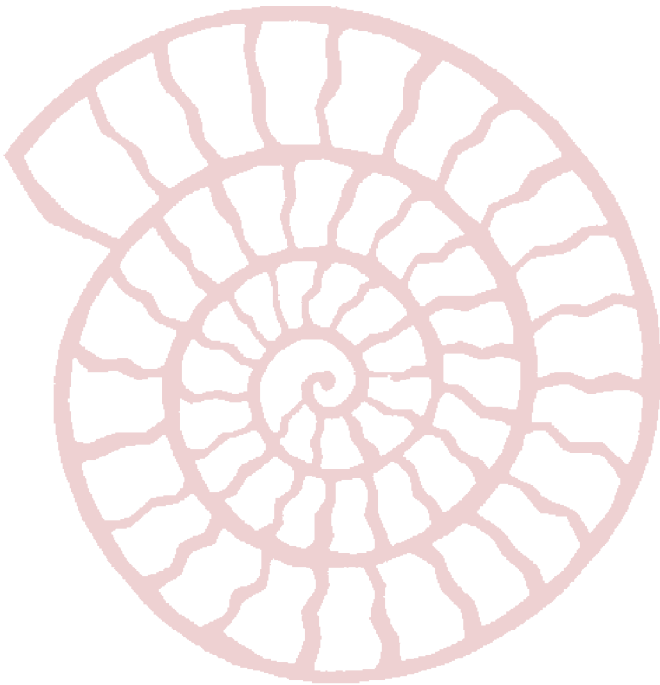
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# Let's Cook Together: Empowering intergenerational communication through cooking

## Cuciniamo insieme: rafforzare la comunicazione intergenerazionale attraverso la cucina

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents the implementation and results of an Adult Learning Pilot Project (ALPP), which was organized as part of the A.L.I.C.E (The Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experience) Grundtvig project and put into practice at St Luke's Community Centre in London, UK. It especially tries to justify which settings and language best promote the communication between generations and whether *COOKING* together and personal storytelling can be used as creative languages to empower intergenerational communication and learning. Findings suggest that even though food and cooking together are fundamental parts of daily routines, they can create a positive, non-formal setting for parents, children and elderly people and bring people from different cultures together. Cooking together can serve as an 'ice breaker' to build dialogues while creating rapport and furthering the communication. Food and cooking together enabled the participants in this study not only to go back to their families of origin and value and tell their personal stories but also to listen and appreciate other real life stories.

Questo articolo presenta l'attuazione e i risultati di un'attività pilota di formazione degli adulti (Adult Learning Pilot Programme, ALPP) organizzata nell'ambito del progetto ALICE (progetto Grundtvig) e portato avanti al Centro Comunitario Saint Luke di Londra, Regno Unito. Il lavoro cerca di analizzare quali settings e quali linguaggi possono promuovere migliori forme di comunicazione tra generazioni. Specificamente, ha tentato di valutare se il linguaggio creativo della cucina congiunta può avere significativi risultati per l'apprendimento e la comunicazione intergenerazionale. I risultati suggeriscono che anche se il cibo e la cucina sono parti della routine giornaliera, sono elementi che possono diventare positivi ambienti informali per genitori, bambini e persone anziane, e non solo: possono anche far congiungere persone da diverse culture. Cucinare insieme può servire pertanto per rompere il ghiaccio e promuovere dialogo e ulteriore comunicazione tra generazioni. In quest'esperienza, il cibo e l'attività di cucinare ha reso possibile tornare indietro nella memoria delle proprie famiglie e origini, valorizzando la propria storia personale, ma anche ascoltando e apprezzando le storie altrui.

### KEYWORDS

Intergenerational communication, intergenerational learning, life long learning, creative languages, cooking together.

Comunicazione intergenerazionale, l'apprendimento intergenerazionale, l'apprendimento permanente, linguaggi creativi, cucinare insieme.

## Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing body of literature focusing on the communication between elderly and younger generations to create a healthy society (for overviews, see Harwood 2007; Nussbaum & Coupland 2004; Williams & Nussbaum 2001). In literature intergenerational communication and intergenerational activities have been defined in a number of different ways. The term “intergenerational communication” applies to interactions involving individuals who are from different age cohorts or age groups. Families provide ready examples of individuals whose communication would be classified as intergenerational: parent and child, grandparent and grandchild, aunt and niece, to name a few. These interactions stand in contrast to intergenerational communication or communication between individuals from the same generation or age cohort, such as siblings. Intergenerational communication occurs outside the family context as well. Any interaction between a child and an adult, a young person and one, who is middle-aged or older, or a middle-aged person and an older person fits the definition of intergenerational communication (Williams & Nussbaum 2012). Recently, a considerable attention has also been given to the critical role of culture in understanding intergenerational beliefs about intergenerational communication (Giles et al. 2007; Giles 2004; Pecchioni et al. 2004).

The year 2012 was the European year for Active Aging and Solidarity between generations and among its aims was to remove barriers between generations and encourage intergenerational learning. Moreover, in line with the goals of the EU 2020 Strategy, it seems necessary to promote a social model that combines citizenship education and intergenerational learning;

*Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, which promotes greater understanding and respect between generations and may contribute to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational learning is a process, through which individuals acquire skills and knowledge, but also attitudes and values, from all available resources and from all influences in their won ‘life worlds’.* (EAGLE Consortium, 2008)

Kaplan (1998) who is concerned with intergenerational transmission defines intergenerational initiatives as activities, events and programs that increase cooperation, interaction or exchange between elder people and younger ones. More and more opportunities need to be created for intergenerational learning and practices in order to understand the importance of the interaction between older and younger generations (Williams & Nussbaum 2012). Thus, for the purpose of this study the following definition of intergenerational learning is used:

*Intergenerational learning offers a means for skills, values, and knowledge to be passed between generations, as well as an opportunity to foster mutual understanding and support wider objectives of community cohesion.* (Learning for Active Ageing & Intergenerational Learning, 2012)

Intergenerational learning can take place in formal and informal settings such as workplace, educational settings and settings outside the formal classroom. However, to ensure intergenerational learning the setting and language that nourishes the dialogue between generations must go beyond the language tra-

ditionally adopted in an educational setting. Using creative languages might be a powerful tool for facilitating this dialogue. It gives the opportunity of “being together” in non-traditional ways, sharing creative activities with feelings of enjoyment, exploring, trying out and self-expression (Margiotta 2012; Raffaghelli 2012).

This paper presents the stages and results of an Adult Learning Pilot Project (ALLP), which was organized as part of the A.L.I.C.E (The Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences) Grundtvig project and put into practice at St Luke’s Community Centre in London, UK.

In broader terms, the ALLP aimed to:

- contribute to Intergenerational Learning (IL) which is an important part of lifelong learning in which generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge that enrich all parties;
- bring together people from different generations in a purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations;
- to develop intergenerational awareness in order to build up an understanding and respect between generations, which leads to the development of competences and inclusion;
- build on positive resources that both the younger and older generations have to offer each other and those around them;
- promote greater learning and understanding and respect for all participants in the exchanges of the program and contribute to balance the gap (if any) between generations;
- create a caring environment in which generations are at an equal level and encouraged to contribute to communication and learning.

The impact on participants engaged in the several activities proposed by the ALPP was to:

- get to know each other in a non-formal but caring learning environment that aggregates the different ages of life where teenagers and elderly can meet and exchange knowledge and take care of each other;
- contribute to intergenerational learning and dialogue;
- create a space for speaking and sharing;
- support reflexive parenting by valuing the resources of the family unit;
- provide opportunities to reflect upon their choices through critical reflection on their own experiences and backgrounds;
- foster conversation;
- raise awareness that leads to understanding and respect between generations.

## 1. Background to the study

We focused on two main questions:

1. How does creative languages (food, cooking together and story telling in our case) influence intergenerational learning?
2. How can we raise awareness of adults in their role as educators, particularly in parenting?

Firstly, we needed to find a setting where everybody from the community could easily find access to this place. Secondly, it had to be a non-formal setting where younger and elderly people could come together, share and learn from each other. Keeping this in mind we made a small-scale research regarding what was available and after discovering St Luke's Community Centre we decided this community centre was the right place.

St Luke's Trust is an old and well-established charity that owns a large community centre that provides services and facilities to the communities of south Islington, City of London and surrounding areas, making this often deprived inner-city part of London a better place to live, work, learn and play. This building provides a space for local people to gather and socialise, and is a place that enables them and other organisations to deliver services and activities to the local community. The aim of this community centre is to improve the conditions of life for the people living in the area of benefit. It not only helps break down barriers within the neighbourhood but also contributes towards the area being welcoming, safe, healthy, alive with activity, and neighbourly. Accordingly, this community centre provides and hosts over 65 weekly activities ranging from after-school clubs to social care for the elderly, from community gardening projects to corporate volunteering for City employees. It is a place loved by thousands of local people who visit it regularly (<http://www.slpt.org.uk>).

However, even though this community centre is providing a wide range of activities and services for adults, children and young people, these activities are usually designed for one certain group of participants and have little room for intergenerational learning. The community centre also confirmed this and was very enthusiastic in supporting and hosting our ALLP. We put a banner in the community centre and distributed flyers in the neighbourhood (see Appendix I). The community centre also advertised our project online through their Facebook page and with the help of the community centre staff the event was immediately booked out. Approximately 36 participants (20 younger, 16 elderly) participated in our ALLP project. Due to health and safety reasons we were not allowed to accept more participants in the kitchen.

As the next step, we designed an ALLP that used COOKING and FOOD, and STORYTELLING as creative languages to empower intergenerational communication using the professional KITCHEN in the community centre for the first 2 sessions; the hall and the kitchen for the lunch session and finally a seminar room for the follow up 2 sessions for personal storytelling and reflection. We believed that FOOD and COOKING together is a very basic activity that can serve as a positive non-formal environment for parents, children and elderly people and bring together people from different cultures especially in a multicultural community like London.

During the cooking sessions a professional chef introduced a meal and younger and elderly participants had to collaborate and produce the same dish. Meanwhile, they had to communicate, share responsibilities and cooperate to achieve a task (MEAL) while respecting each other's decisions, sharing responsibilities and trusting each other. The trainer, chef and food anthropologist were walking around and encouraging the participants to cooperate.

During the lunchtime, everybody shared the food and ate together. The younger participants conducted a mini survey, asking questions to the adults.

After lunch, participants together with the children, teenagers went upstairs and watched a video extract. Afterwards, they talked about the importance of sit-

ting and eating together as family and sharing a personal story of their childhood. Everybody shared their experiences and feelings about being together at the dinner table and discussing the daily experiences.

In the second half, the younger participants started a drawing activity while parents started a discussion.

## 2. The sessions

### 2.1. Overall outline of the sessions

#### **Session 1-2: In the lovely kitchen of the Cookery school at the Community Centre**

- Introduction to the ALLP: Let's cook together
- General introduction and the aim of the day
- The importance of food and communication
- Hands on: cooking

#### **Session 3: In the kitchen and hall of the Community Centre**

- Lunch time

#### **Session 3-4: In the seminar room of the Community Centre**

- Input of intergenerational communication and its importance
- Importance of cooking together and eating together
- Personal stories shared during/after lunch and dinner times
- The importance of sitting together and sharing
- Raising awareness in the importance of parenting (see Appendix II for pictures of the sessions)

#### **Number of Participants for each session:**

- Session 1-2:** Cooking  
16 Adult – 20 Children
- Session 3:** Eating together (lunch)  
22 Adult – 20 Children (staff from the community centre joined the group)
- Session 4-5:** Storytelling  
Adult – 10 children (some had to leave after lunch)

### 2.2. Session description

#### **Session 1-2:** (Duration: 2 hours)

##### *Trainer activity:*

- Opens the session with a general introduction and aim of the day.
- A food anthropologist explains the importance of food and cooking together.
- The professional chef and 2 assistants give the demo cooking and help the participants in groups with the cooking.

##### *Learner activity:*

- Participate actively, follow the steps, cook, discuss and reflect.

##### *Steps:*

Warm-up: The trainer gives a general introduction and asks questions to involve the participants and elicitate their answers. 1. How much time do you spend with

your children/ son/ daughter/ father/ mother.... At home? 2. Who is cooking at home? 3. Do you help each other? Why/ why not? 4. Why is it important?

- The professional chef describes the dish of the day and shows the stages of how to cook.
- Participants follow the stages and try to produce the same dish. During this process they have to collaborate, help and speak to each other.

**Session 3:** In the hall of the Community Centre (Duration:1 hour)

Lunch time

*Trainer activity:*

- Sets the task for the lunchtime.

*Learner activity:*

Enjoying the lunch, which was prepared as a result of cooperation, while discussing the questions given by the trainer. The younger participants are responsible for conducting the mini questionnaire (Reflections Sheets, see Appendix III) and are taking notes.

*Steps:*

Everybody takes the food that was cooked together to the hall and set the table. The trainer gives a small card (reflection sheet) with the following questions:

1. What did you like most about cooking together?
2. What have you learnt today from each other?
3. Are you planning to cook together in future?

Meanwhile everybody is enjoying the lunch and chatting informally.

**Session 4-5:** In the seminar room of the Community Centre (Duration: 2 hours)

- Input of intergenerational communication and its importance
- Importance of cooking together and eating together
- Personal stories
  - The importance of sitting together and sharing
- Personal reflection on parenting

*Trainer activity:*

The trainer clarifies the aims of the session and asks the participants to watch a video extract. (see Appendix IV)

*Learner activity:*

Watch and reflect on the video extract. Participate and share their personal stories. Reflect on parenting. Children are separately drawing a picture.

*Steps:*

- The trainer asks the participants (adult and children) to watch a video extract in which SAV tells her personal story about food, her childhood, how they spend time together at the dinner table etc.
- The trainer wants the participants to listen to the story and reflect by thinking about their experience and sharing their feelings regarding food and cooking. Both parents and children reflect about their personal feelings. In the second half of the session, the children together with an assistant went to the far corner of the conference room and did a drawing activity regarding a message they want to give to their parents. Meanwhile parents sat together in the other end of the seminar room and discussed the following topics



- parents as educators
- awareness and reflections regarding own experiences as parents
- importance of intergenerational communication
- the impact of parenting on their children

At each stage we aimed to use different type of evaluation tools to enrich the evaluation process such as;

**Session 1-2 COOKING:** Audio/video recording  
 Pictures  
 Feedback of the chef and food anthropologist  
 Trainer's log

**Session 3 EATING TOGETHER:** Audio/video recording  
 Pictures  
 Reflections sheets  
 Trainer's log

**Session 4-5 STORYTELLING** Audio/video recording  
 Pictures  
 Questionnaire (see Appendix V)  
 Drawing and Presentation  
 Trainer's log

### 2.3. General information about the evaluation process

The video recordings clearly showed the engagement of the participants. Both the chef and the food anthropologist gave feedback on the process and reactions of the participants. It was especially a positive decision to use reflection sheets and give the task to the children as some participants did not want to be filmed or their pictures taken; thus, in this way the children were able to ask questions and get feedback from their parents/adults.

In session 4-5, at some point it did not feel right to film as a participant got very emotional and started to cry when she remembered her childhood and family. Therefore, we decided to stop filming and focused on the individual's need. In session 5, adults were discussing parental issues while children were drawing pictures regarding messages they would like to give to their parents. Later the children presented their pictures one by one. At the end of session 5, we handed out a general questionnaire regarding participants' experiences and suggestions for future applications.

Throughout the process, a trainer's log was kept.

#### 2.3.1. The Key Competences

The European framework for key competences for lifelong learning, released at the end of 2006, identifies and defines the key abilities and knowledge that everyone needs in order to achieve employment, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship in today's rapidly-changing world. Here are the key competences achieved with this study.

**KC2- Communication in foreign languages:**

For some participants English was not their first language; in fact we had two participants who could not speak English at all. Some children were better in using the shared language (ENGLISH) and helped their parents to express themselves. It was a nice experience to develop skills such as motivation and intercultural understanding through teamwork.

**KC5- Learning To Learn:**

The adults have discovered the interest of the creative language (FOOD AND COOKING) and are willing to implement ideas in the own life, understanding how to deal with a new language and how to create rich and caring environments with it. The participants also critically reflected on their own experiences sharing with other members of the community.

**KC6- Social and civic competences:**

Through the practice of critical thinking, parents became aware of the differences between experiences and showed empathy and solidarity through the cooking experience.

**KC7- Sense of initiatives and entrepreneurship:**

The decision and willingness to participate in cooking stimulated concrete actions in parents and children. There was a great teamwork where they had to translate thoughts into actions immediately. Everybody was on an equal basis to learn and further their ability to anticipate possible events in future.

**KC8- Cultural awareness and expression:**

The adults have discovered the interest of cultural differences in childhood with regard to food and cooking and would like to create/collaborate in the creation of experiences enhancing the potential to learn about languages/cultural differences, traditions, daily routines.

*2.3.2. Reflection sheets*

Here are some comments of the participants:

**1. What did you like most about cooking together?**

- I made new friends
- It was fun.
- Spending time together and cooking with the whole family especially on Father's Day.
- Mum liked meeting new people and learning new food.
- I liked cooking together because it means we could work as a team.
- We understood and learnt more than I knew.
- It's the first time that I do something like that with my mum. We had to work together. Great!
- I am impressed with everybody's cooperation.
- More communication and learning new food. You get to share ideas and you learn more skills.
- Nice people, good teamwork, sharing idea, Mum liked me seeing cooking.
- My mum liked using the rolling pin.

## 2. What have you learnt today from each other?

- My mum learnt to do team work.
- How to make humus.
- We had to read and understand the recipe together. When we did not understand we asked other people. Great help.
- We communicate very well; people around us are very polite and more skillful than us so we learn more from them.
- Both elderly people and children can actually do something together.
- I think my mother has realized that I'm not too bad in cooking, maybe next time she trusts me.
- How to cook with the finest ingredients.
- Cooking food from different cultures.
- That we can do anything together.
- That my daughters are good cooks.
- How to make flat bread.
- Young or old you can cook.

## 3. Are you planning to cook together in future?

- I am not sure. I would love to.
- YES, especially with daddies.
- Why not!
- Definitely, because you can learn more things.
- Yes, definitely. Cooking is my life.
- YESSSS.
- Yes, we would love to come in future and learn more ideas and more skills. We would like to work with Hülya and Nafsika.
- We are planning to cook together once a week.
- Don't know if my mother let me. I would love to.

### 2.3.3. Questionnaire

11 adults stated their views in the questionnaire and here are some of the results;

- 7 participants found it very enjoyable, 4 enjoyable
- All of them would like to attend similar activities.
- 9 participants indicated that they have not previously attended any projects with their children

#### **What did you find most interesting, useful, challenging, new... of today's event?**

- Learning new things
- Everything, spending quality time with my son
- Sharing, meeting new people from other countries
- Meet other parents and share similar problems
- Mix of cultures
- My daughter, not wanting to join first but later happily participating
- Sharing tasks, learning new skills with new people
- Being patient, trusting each other
- The video, we are all the same
- Listening to other parents and their feelings
- Useful, fun.

## Conclusions

Intergenerational communication develops a better understanding between generations, reducing discrimination and increasing social inclusion. Food and cooking together can be used as an effective tool for creative languages that promote intergenerational communication. Cooking together can serve as an 'ice breaker' to build dialogues while creating rapport and furthering the communication. Food combines people and strengthens social bonds; it touches everything important to people; thus, it is an effective tool for intergenerational communication and learning. Moreover, intergenerational learning activities can provide an opportunity to develop a better understanding and reduce generalizations of 'the other' especially in a multicultural society like London. Food and cooking together enabled the participants in this study to go back to their families of origin and value their personal stories but at the same time listen and appreciate other real life stories. Food and cooking together created an environment where there was mutual respect, understanding and a greater sense of empathy towards each other and the will to interact and form social relationships. Participants felt bonded through the first three sessions (preparing the food and eating together) and thus found it easier to share personal experiences regarding parenting in session 4-5.

Our project created an informal but structured setting for an intergenerational learning where older and younger participants were motivated to share knowledge, skills and collaborated together for a shared outcome. Through basic routines like eating and cooking participants were on equal levels and everybody contributed to the intergenerational communication and learning with positive resources that both the younger and older generations had to offer each other. During the 5-hour project older and younger generations not only collaborated and worked as a team but also had a chance to work and discuss within their age groups. In the first three sessions as mentioned earlier all the participants bonded and formed a certain rapport with each other. In the last two sessions participants were able to reflect upon a personal story (Savi's story) sharing afterwards their own personal stories. This provided a basis for reflecting on their own experiences and backgrounds and their choices through critical reflection. Adults are not just caregivers but also educators whose actions have consequences for their children's future life and life long learning in general. Raising awareness and helping adults to reflect upon their own parenting experiences was very crucial and we believe we achieved this through personal stories regarding family life, food, cooking together, daily routines and the importance of spending effective time together.

Overall, we believe that this project was a great success and could contribute to intergenerational communication. Participants indicated that they really enjoyed spending time with not only their own children but also seeing other elderly and young people cooperating together. They further said that they would love to join other programs with younger people

Some parents indicated that there is a need to come together with other parents and children to share experiences and learn from each other. Despite the limitations of this study, we believe using food and cooking together as a creative language can contribute to intergenerational communication and learning.

## Acknowledgment

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## Appendix I



Project Number: 518106-LLP-1-2011-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP



# Let's cook together

Let's spend a day cooking, enjoying food and  
storytelling together!

Sunday 16 June 2013 - from 11.00 until 16.00  
St Luke's Community Centre - 90 Central Street - London EC1V 8AJ



Parents, grandparents and all those adults interested in experiencing  
intergenerational learning through 'cooking, eating and storytelling'  
are invited to the workshop.

They can come with their kids.

To enroll please book directly from St Luke's reception or call 020 7549 8181.

Workshop facilitator: **Dr. Emine Çakır**

**Free entrance**

Lunch is offered by the workshop organizers

Partnership



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**Appendix II**



**Session 1-2**



**Session 3**



**Session 4-5**

### Appendix III



#### Reflection Sheets ☺

1. What did you like most about cooking together?
2. What have you learnt today from each other?
3. Are you planning to cook together in future?

### Appendix IV

Savi's Story Please click on the link below:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xbav1p0gedm3qo5/Video%2012-06-2013%2020%2047%2018.mov>



## Appendix V



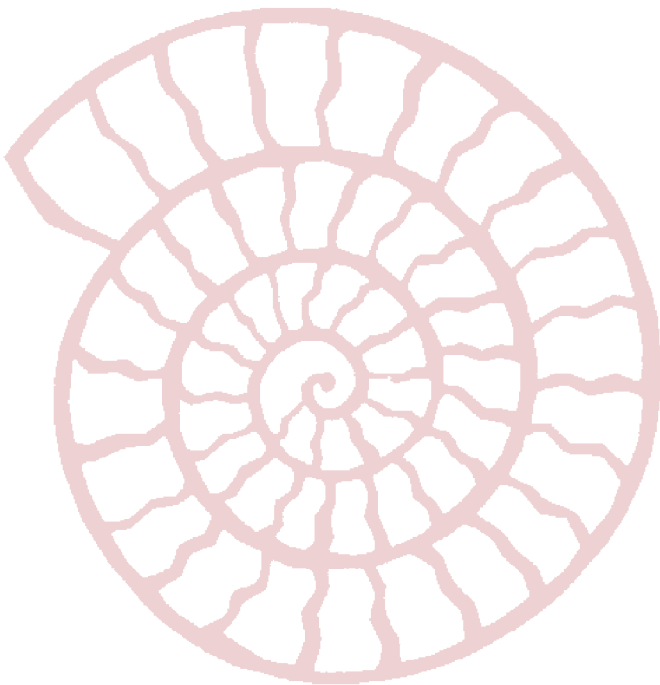
### Let's cook together ☺

We hope you enjoyed the event at St. Luke's Community Centre today.  
We fully appreciate all feedback provided.

Please spare a couple of minutes to fill out the form below  
as we would love to hear you thoughts about the event.

1. How did you hear about today's event?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How would you rate your experience today here at the community center?  
 Very enjoyable  
 Enjoyable  
 Fair  
 Poor  
 Very poor
3. What did you find most interesting, useful, challenging, new... of today's event?  
Please write three points:  
\*  
\*  
\*
4. Have you attend other events with your child/relative before?  
 Yes                       No  
If YES, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
5. After experiencing today, would you be interested in attending further events with your child/relative?  
 Yes                       Not sure                       No
6. What type of topics or events would you like to see in future projects regarding intergenerational communication?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking your time to complete this form





# Learning Design as the base for adult educators' professionalism in the field of intergenerational learning

## Progettazione formativa come base per la professionalità dei formatori degli adulti nell'ambito dell'apprendimento intergenerazionale

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### ABSTRACT

The educational interventions dealing with the ill-defined educational problems frequently found in the field of adults' education require high professionalism. Intergenerational Learning, a trend of growing importance for lifelong learning, is a case that illustrates particularly well this situation. Emerging strategies and technologies like Learning Design could support educators' professionalism, aiming to work in a more effective way. In this article, the following research question was explored: Can the process of design for learning, intended as forward oriented and creative process, support the achievement of adult educators' professionalism? The research consisted on a case study based on an European training programme, the "ALICE (Adults' Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences) training of trainers". The programme adopted several means, from more traditional residential and online training activities, to the deployment of an experimental idea based on the ALICE educational framework, the ALPP (Adult Learning Pilot Programme). Learning Design was introduced as concept entailing a set of tools along the whole process of implementation of the ALPP. The phases of this creative process (contextualizing, planning, implementing, evaluating and sharing) were analyzed through a holistic and mostly interpretivist (yet mixed methods) approach. As a result, the connections between learning design as forward oriented process and the adult educators' professionalism were observed, documented and discussed.

Gli interventi formativi che hanno a che fare con problemi poco definiti, come quelli relativi alla formazione degli adulti, richiedono un'alta professionalità. L'apprendimento intergenerazionale, una tendenza di crescente importanza nel contesto del apprendimento permanente è un caso che illustra particolarmente questa situazione. Alcune strategie e tecnologie emergenti come il Learning Design (progettazione formativa con uso di supporti digitali per la visualizzazione di specifiche dimensioni didattiche e pedagogiche) potrebbero diventare un valido supporto per lo sviluppo professionale degli formatori degli adulti, mirando a migliorare l'efficacia del loro lavoro. In questo articolo, la seguente domanda di ricerca è stata esplorata: Può essere il processo di progettazione formativa supportato da tecnologie, inteso come processo creativo e orientato ai risultati, un valido supporto per lo sviluppo professionale dei formatori degli adulti? La ricerca ha focalizzato un caso di studio all'interno di un programma europeo di formazione dei formatori nel contesto del progetto ALICE (Formazione degli Adulti per la generazione di esperienze intergenerazionali creative). Il programma ha adottato diverse modalità per la formazione, dalla più tradizionale attività in presenza e le attività di formazione in rete, all'implementazione di una sperimentazione formativa consistente in attività pilota informali con adulti (Adults Learning Pilot Programmes, ALPP). La progettazione formativa supportata da strumenti digitali è stata introdotta attraverso una serie di strumenti digitali da utilizzare dalla pianificazione all'implementazione degli ALPP. Le fasi di questo processo creativo (contestualizzazione, pianificazione, implementazione, valutazione e condivisione) sono state analizzate attraverso un approccio olistico e interpretativo dei dati (ma basato su metodi misti). Come risultato, sono state osservate, documentate e discusse le connessioni tra progettazione formativa supportata da strumenti digitali e lo sviluppo professionale dei formatori.

### KEYWORDS

Learning Design, adults' educators, professionalism, case study  
Progettazione formativa, formatori degli adulti, professionalità, case study.

## Introduction

Educational projects for adults' education require careful reflection and planning with regard to the resources, the roles and forms of communication between the trainer and the participant. In fact, adults' education has been considered one of the less structured, ill-defined fields in terms of professional practices and competences required to operate effectively (Research voor Beleid, 2008). In some particular areas of adults' education, even the fact that an initiative is part of the discipline of education, or it falls into the area of health care and social development is object of discussion. The result is highly informal, fluid contexts of learning. For the educator this means that she has to feature the own context of work in every intervention, and that competences beyond the classroom management are to be acquired (Buiskool, Broek, van Lakerveld, Zarifis, & Osborne, 2010). Instead, other types of professional profiles in education (like teachers at school or academic context, and even vocational educational trainers) work in formal and non-formal environments with better defined tasks and activities (Przybylska, 2008).

In the case of Intergenerational learning (IL) as well as family learning, which both play a crucial role in the field of adults' education, we see clearer examples of the problem above mentioned. In fact, IL improves dialogue between generations through civic participation in common social and institutional spaces, triggering processes of informal learning towards the achievement – both by adults and children – of key competences for lifelong learning. However, it is also clear that ensuring IL through the creation of adequate educational environments is a challenge both for researchers and practitioners. Formal education promotes mainly intra-generational experiences, structured in learning contexts where little or no contact between among generations (beyond the technical role of teachers/educators) occurs (Loewen, 1995; Miller, Shapiro, & Hilding-Hamann, 2008). Instead, intergenerational learning implies setting up adequate learning contexts for both children and adults' learning (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008). Moreover, events like parenting, cultural participation, support to the own kids' schooling, social activities, engage adults and have the potential of taking them to reflect on their own condition as lifelong learners, from one side, and as *educators* of the future generations, from the other (Margiotta, 2012; Raffaghelli, 2012). However this field of practice is frequently considered part of the "private" space (the case of family learning) or just a cultural, entertainment or volunteering space of practices, where no pedagogical approaches are needed.

If more effective practices for intergenerational learning are required, the need of intervening on adult educators' professionalism becomes an imperative: promoting professionals with the ability to understand new contexts of learning, and to reinforce the adults' key competences for the lifelong learning society without invading their sense of independence and advocacy in the social spheres of life, along informal learning occasions (Margiotta, 2011).

The concept of *design* provides us support at this point: like in the field of architecture or engineering, the educators can design their interventions, that is, analyzing the context, the available resources, the educational problem and the participant's motivations, in order to orchestrate *educational solutions* both supported by educational theories and the educator's own pedagogical experience. The practice of design is supported by the ability of *design thinking*, which is the ability to think about ill-defined problems, acquiring information, analyzing knowledge, and hence, designing possible solutions. It can be considered a style of thinking, that combines empathy for the context of a problem, creativity in the generation of insights and solutions, and rationality to analyze and fit solutions

to the context (Cross, 2007). From one hand, this type of thinking is connected to the own personal taste, creativity and imagination; but from the other, in the field of education it promotes the visibility of practices and the possibility to share them, to promote discussions about the set of values, the approaches and the effectiveness and quality of them (Kali, Goodyear, & Markauskaite, 2011). Therefore, the solutions achieved designing for learning would lead in time to a pedagogical reflection that can end up in further conceptualizations, that can be *represented* and *shared* (Laurillard, 2012).

The concept and practice of design has acquired growing importance in the field of educational research. Actually *Learning Design*, that is, an approach for educators to explore their educational problems and make more grounded decisions to plan/implement their pedagogical practices is an emerging trend (Agostinho, Bennett, Lockyer, & Harper, 2013; Conole, 2010; Goodyear & Dimitriadis, 2013). Why Learning Design to support adult educators' professionalism? As it has been emphasized in the extensive report commissioned by the European Commission, "Key competences for adult learning professionals" (Buiskool et al., 2010), designing for adults learning is one of the key competences for professionals operating in this area. In fact, to promote intergenerational/family learning, being this a rather ill structured field of practice, new forms of representation and sharing of educators' knowledge could lead to better approaches and skills to manage the problems encountered in the field. Therefore, there would be a joint development of professionalism (the single ability to intervene in a field of knowledge) as well as reflections contributing to the development and impact of adults' education (a consolidated set of practices that support a group of professionals in their ability to deal with specific educational situations).

In this paper my attempt is to illustrate how Learning Design, as practice that supports educators in capturing and representing the own (situated) plans of action within educational interventions, can be a key element to develop educators professionalism, towards quality and effectiveness of adults' education. This assumption is underpinned by the introduction of a specific training approach (that of the A.L.I.C.E project), where adults' educators are invited to implement a creative/reflective process of five stages; every stage introduces tools for representing as part of the Learning Design approach; furthermore, educators are encouraged to go beyond representing, by sharing and commenting other educators' designs. According to this approach, two levels of professionalism are promoted: the level of the single educator, and the level of the community of adults' educators.

The analysis of the process of *designing for learning* within a blended, international course is undertaken on the basis of an exploratory, interpretivist approach, attempting to show the connections between designing for learning and the reflections from the participants on the professional achievements.

## 1. Learning Design and Educators' Professionalism

The research connected to the concept of Learning Design (LD) attempts to explore how teaching and learning, as integrated process, can be represented, and how this is connected with educators' reflection for a continual improvement of the own practices (Mor, Craft, & Hernández-Leo, 2013). The development of LD as field of research was hand in hand with the idea of improving educators' professionalism. The two discussions are intertwined, as we will see. Conole (2012) points out that Learning Design aims at making visible the invisible art of education. Representing is something frequent in several disciplines like music,

chemistry, architecture, and so on. Let's take into account the example of music<sup>1</sup>: wonderful music could have been lost if it was not for the invention of the system of musical notation. Of course a good system of notation does not make an interpreter excellent, not even good. But a good notation allows to understand the creator's idea, and to pass, from one musician to another, beautiful pieces of art. Therefore LD encompasses both a framework to organize pedagogical processes, as well as technological tools supporting representations (Mor & Craft, 2012), that can be either visual (Botturi, 2006; Agostinho, Harper, Oliver, Hedberg, & Wills, 2008, Botturi & Stubbs, 2008) or conceptual, like patterns and templates to guide pedagogical planning and reflection (Goodyear, 2005; Koper, 2006, Conole, 2010, 2012; Mor & Craft, 2012). This way, the LD tools should support better collaboration and sharing of practices amongst educators, making pedagogical practices more transparent and qualified on the basis of peer-evaluation (Conole, 2012; Laurillard, 2012, Persico, 2013). Laurillard affirmed that such an approach would lead to improve the status of teaching as area of practice and research (within educational sciences), making it become a *design science*. In this regard her thought is closer to Cross's ideas (2007), who analyzed in several research works the concept of "*designerly ways of knowing*", or a form of professional knowledge that is based on the development of devices (technological, technical or social) aiming at creating solutions for socio-technical and cultural problems. To Cross, this form of thinking would be epistemologically different from the natural sciences (observational and experimental) and the humanities (analytic and participatory). On the basis of the literature analyzed above, we could conclude that LD encompass the improvement of educators skills' regarding: a) a holistic approach to a specific educational intervention, connecting learning goals to educational values and the expected impact of the activity; b) reflection along the intervention, comparing the initial plan and its expected results with the actual learning outcomes; c) documentation of an educational process in a way that its sharable and can be reproduced by others, becoming, at a certain point, a scheme of practice, that Laurillard has denominated *pedagogical pattern* (Laurillard, 2012). Nevertheless, the value of LD for educators' professionalism may be conditioned by the way LD is envisaged as practice. There is increasing concern about the actual adoption of some sophisticated LD tools in educators' daily practice (Persico & Pozzi, 2013). One of the most important critics raised regards the limitations of *representing* at the beginning of the pedagogical practice as activity with crucial impact on the *real* educational intervention (Agostinho, 2011). This debate has led to analyze how the educators react to different types of LD tools, not only in the sense of a "user experience" but also as a mean to improve their levels of reflection, the concrete effectiveness of pedagogical practices, and the eagerness to share and discuss with peers (Goodyear & Dimitriadis, 2013). According to Goodyear & Dimitriadis (op.cit) LD should be considered a *looking forward process* influencing the educational intervention in an iterative process that includes four phases. I further considered every phase's impact on educators' professionalism, and added a further, fifth phase, to generate a framework for the case study hereby introduced. Table 1 introduces the theoretical framework.

1 This example is taken from the Larnaca Declaration on Learning Design: <http://www.larnacadeclaration.org/>

Table 1 introduces the theoretical framework.

Design for Learning Phase*	Description	Expected impact on Educators Professionalism
Design for configuration	Representing (using narrative/visual tools) as a base to prepare the educational intervention.	Individual level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge and “vision” about an educational intervention.</li> <li>- Acknowledgement of potentialities and criticalities in a specific intervention</li> <li>- Community level</li> <li>- Sharable scheme of practice without confirmation of its effectiveness</li> </ul>
Design for orchestration	Using Learning Design representations and tools created to support the implementation of a pedagogical practice.	Individual level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Management of educational interventions.</li> <li>- Strategic skills to intervening in critical situations as well as to catch up opportunities improving educational impact.</li> </ul>
Design for reflection	Using Learning Design representations and tools to trigger reflection on the implemented pedagogical practices.	Individual level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to analyze and compare the planned educational intervention with the effective learning outcomes and educational impact.</li> <li>- Ability to deepening on the sense of an educational intervention, thinking about the own deontological engagement.</li> </ul>
Design for redesign and sharing	Using Learning Design representations and tools to support change and innovation applied to the implemented practice, including sharable schemes of practice ( <i>pedagogical pattern</i> ) as well as the results of an educational practice.	Individual level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to monitor ongoing processes and reflect on the adjustments to be done in order to correct possible misleading.</li> <li>- Ability to change and improve the own professional work on the basis of the experience.</li> </ul> Community level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to “package” the own work in a way that is easily understandable and usable by peers.</li> <li>- Ability of networking on the basis of professional results, discussing about the possible improvements, implications for future practice, and impact on the professional identity.</li> </ul>

**Table 1 – Theoretical Framework connecting Design for Learning with Educators’ Professionalism**

(\* Phase 1 to 4 have been taken from Goodyear & Dimitriadis (2013); phase 4 has been re-elaborated by the author of this article.

## 2. Methodological approach

In this study, I attempt to demonstrate the connections between design for learning as creative process and the educators’ professionalism. I further operationalized the relationship between designing for learning as *creative process* (in the sense of developing something from scratch, within an ill-defined situation) divided into four phases retracing the framework introduced (Tab. 1); and the educators’ reflection and concrete professional skills acquired (as part of their professionalism). Focusing this study on a specific case (an international project of educational cooperation), the guiding research question was: *Can the process of Design for Learning, intended as forward oriented and creative process, support the achievement of adult educators’ professionalism?* This research question entailed an experimental training activity to support adults’ ed-

ucators to design and implement engagement in intergenerational learning activities. Accordingly, the methodological approach chosen should support the ontology of the phenomenon analyzed (a creative process) and the research goals (exploring the connections between design for learning and educators' professionalism) (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Therefore, the approach of *case study* was selected, since it entails a process of understanding the developments of a situated phenomenon, seen in its uniqueness and originality, as an "individual unit" (Stake R., 1994) or what has been later called a "functioning specific" or "bounded system" (Stake R., *Qualitative Case Studies*, 2008). The valuable contribution is hence the thickness of descriptions and information obtained regarding the problems posed and the developments of the situation. The boundaries of our case are given by:

- a) The educational process and strategies to improve adults' education, in the context of the LLP-GRUNDTVIG project "Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences" (see Margiotta & Raffaghelli this Issue);
- b) The transnational and eLearning approach. Six institutions from IT, RO, UK, EL, CH built a course and an educational environment (on Moodle as Learning Management System) provided the space to reflect about practices and share ideas, during an initial phase of introduction to creative languages and the project's approach, which was more informative, and lasted 6 months (see Margiotta & Raffaghelli this Issue).
- c) A professional learning community composed by 23 adults' educators and a team of 6 adults' education institutions attempting to shape new approaches, namely, the Adults Learning Pilot Programmes or ALPPs. The ALPPs' design overlapped with the final part of the eLearning activity, but the central part of ALPPs –the implementation– was conducted by educators coached by the professional community and by the national coordinators. As a matter of fact, during the ALPPs, the educators worked on the field to promote the idea of adults as educators as well as the value of creative languages to mediate intergenerational/family learning (see Margiotta & Raffaghelli this Issue).

Conceptually, it was not a simple training activity. Instead, the educators were provided with the ALICE project approach (use creative languages to promote intergenerational learning), being invited to *create* from grasp, an educational intervention adopting the approach but further providing reflections on the impact and the approach's shortcomings. Therefore, the "training" became a *creative process stimulating problem setting, problem solving and the generation of educational patterns*. To this regard, hence, the theoretical background of Learning Design was embraced.

While for the educators and national coordinators the interest was, of course, to promote effective and quality educational interventions, the research focus for me was to explore the relationship between designing as *forward oriented practice* and professionalism as a *proxy* variable of effectiveness. As for the concept specification, I considered that the Learning Design phases were a dimension correlating with the development of professionalism being this last concept divided into the several abilities mentioned in the framework. The assumptions supporting this research were:

At the level of the single educator, the more s/he improve her/his skills about designing for adults' learning, the more s/he would be able of planning and intervening in ill-structured problems, providing creative educational solutions.



At the level of the community of adults' educators, the more the educators are able of designing for adults' learning, the more they can adopt tools to represent, share and discuss the own practices, reinforcing a field of professional practices, which is also part of the adults' educators professional identity. Technologies are a mean in the process of representation and sharing.

The Figure 1 represents the process along a timeline, while Table 2 shows this approach through its elements.

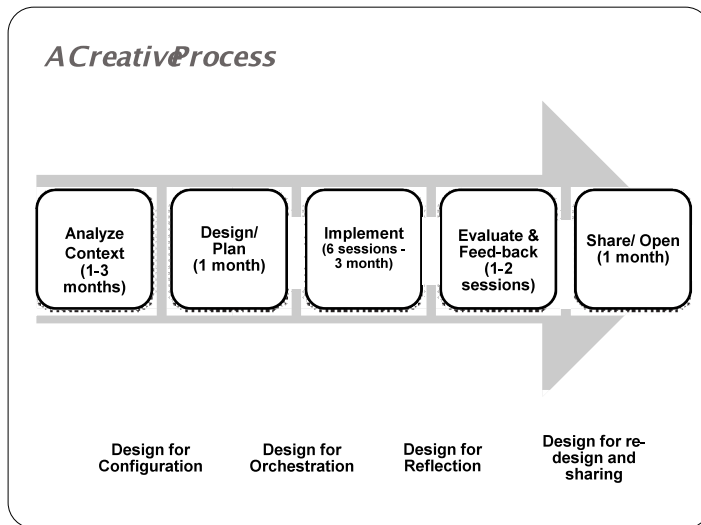


Figure 12 – Phases of Experimental Training for Adults' Educators

Phases of Design for Learning	Phases of Experimental Training for Adults' Educators	Description
Design for configuration	Contextualize	Objective: to collect information and reflect about the driving forces in the context of educational practice. Tools to represent/think about the design approach: Design Narratives <sup>2</sup> Design thinking to provide solutions for...: The context as changing, fluid space of learning. The enlarged context of learning in the intergenerational case: adults' goals of learning and children/teen goals of learning differ, but can dialogue in an <i>enlarged</i> context of learning.
	Plan/Create	Objective: Plan the intervention beyond the procedures, reflecting on the pedagogy. Tools to represent/think about the design approach: Pedagogical Patterns and the Four Leaves taxonomy. <sup>3</sup> Design thinking to provide solutions for...: a clear and concise representation as part of the process of Learning Design to allow discussion and peer-reviewing on the quality of approaches before putting them into practice.
Design for orchestration	Implement	Objective: A process of implementation that is continuously monitored from peers, participants and external stakeholders (institutions engaged in the practice) Tools to represent/think about the design approach: template for monitoring and reporting and private <i>trainers' log</i> . <sup>4</sup> Design thinking to provide solutions for...: telling a <i>story</i> that makes the whole approach effective and accountable.
Design for reflection	Evaluate	Objective: A participatory approach to understand learning achievements and the educational impact Tools to represent/think about the design approach: the <i>learning/key competences map</i> . <sup>5</sup> Design thinking to provide solutions for...: understanding effectiveness as part of the educational process.
Design for redesign and sharing	Edit/Share	Objective: To understand the importance of Open Educational Resources in strengthening the pedagogical and design thinking. Tools to represent/think about the design approach: a virtual platform to shape/upload the own educational work. Design thinking to provide solutions for...: sharing educational practices in search for quality within the educational process.

**Table 2 – Design for learning theoretical framework aligned with the phases of experimental training of adults' educators (A creative process)**

2 <http://www.ld-grid.org/resources/representations-and-languages/>  
 3 <http://www.slideshare.net/JulianaElisaRaffaghelli/alpp-strategylu6lu7>  
 4 <http://www.slideshare.net/JulianaElisaRaffaghelli/alpp-strategylu6lu7>  
 5 <http://www.slideshare.net/JulianaElisaRaffaghelli/alpp-strategylu6lu7>

Hence, design for learning as forward oriented practice (from the idea for the educational intervention to the crystallization of practices in an open educational resource) was the kernel of the creative process, and I expected this had impact on the adult educators' professionalism. The analysis of this relation between dimensions was undertaken as a participatory and developmental approach, where the educators were expected to engage from the beginning. To this regard, it must be highlighted here that the case study is an idiographic research where concepts as validity, reliability and generalization do not apply. Instead, basing on the interpretive tradition, I searched for *trustworthiness* and forms of *authenticity* (Lincoln et al., 2011), being fully immersed within data and debriefing at every phase of development with participants (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008). From the five forms of authenticity listed by Guba & Lincoln (1989), I mainly emphasized firstly, *ontological* and *educative authenticity*, as *criteria for determining raised level of awareness by individual research participants with strong moral and ethical overtones* (Lincoln et al., 2011, p.122). As a result of this, I aimed at obtaining *catalytic* and *tactical authenticity*, in the sense of prompting, through the research activity associated to the intervention, forms of changing the social/educational context.

Therefore, the analysis of the impact of designing for learning on the own professionalism, as main dimension of this research, was undertaken from the beginning of the process, adopting strategies and instruments for reflection in parallel with the provided tools for learning desing, and along the creative process. The table 3 shows the type of tools and the pieces of data collected and further analysed.

Type of source	N of units collected/analysed	Period of data collection
a) Trainers' Log	23	September 2012 – March 2013
b) Online Forum and Social media as collectors of evidence on the ongoing practices	8 online forum Focus on 4 specific threads	September 2012 – March 2013
c) Reports from coordination webmeetings International Meetings, as well as other field notes taken by the author of the article along the process of training.	6 Webmeetings 3 International Meetings 13 Educators' Monitoring reports 24 "Memos" (researcher fieldnotes)	July 2012 – October 2013
d) Educators' Competences Map as counterpart of the adults Key Competences/Learning Map	12 Learning Maps	March 2013
e) Artefacts produced by educators as part of the crystallized practice: an Open Educational Resource within the field of adults education	1 "wallpaper" 13 Evaluation reports 8 OER	January 2013 – November 2013
f) Final Survey regarding the impact of Learning Design tools on the professional activity	1 Final survey (n. 11)	June-September 2013

**Table 3 – Data collection sources and timeline**

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Design for Configuration: Contextualize and Plan/Design

The first phase of the creative process was that of the contextualization of the educational intervention. The focus was put on the situation in which the trainer had to intervene and the driving forces that could support the ALPP or prevent it to go ahead; it was also the moment in which the educational problem was identified. In this phase, the trainer was supposed to think about the participating groups and the institutions that could support her. As tool for Learning Design, the educators were provided with a very simple instruments: the “Design Narrative” (Mor, 2011) . The Design Narratives are personal accounts, detailed and deep, to interpret a scenario of practice and change, based on the importance of personal narrative as form to organize our experiences into a meaning making process that we can lately share (Mor, op.cit). It is a story about change, and in our case, about educational change. The adoption of this instruments was not immediate: surprisingly, the educators were eager to use templates to planning the activities, but several doubts arose at the time of just stop and take a look at the context as a “bigger picture”, an ongoing narrative in which the “educator’s story” had to find its own place.

As initial step all educators shared their ideas in an online forum, which was commented by the eTutor in charge of coaching the activities. The participants were sure about the own educational vision, but it was less easy to focus the way the forces could accompany or block the efforts.

This was reflected by the eTutor comments’ on the educators’ ideas:

*Some ideas give me the perspective of action (what are you going to do as part of the educational intervention) like the case of L., S. and D. You should start reflecting about the educational value and the educational problems you want to face with them. Some other ideas seem very interesting, but more conceptual, and I cannot imagine how are you going to intervene. It seems to me that you are mainly focusing the inter-generational intervention between the school and the family... (eTutor, Online Forum LU6)*

One of the educator’s questions also illustrate the type of hindrances to develop the design narrative and the map, which related not only to the problem of moving the educational vision from the educator to the context and the potential learners; the narrative also entailed a new way to approach the educational problem:

*I hope this is the assignment you asked for...  
I will not write a whole story... I need some help  
Do we have to write that something has happened to someone under some circumstances?  
And at the following story: something=video on youtube that kids found? Someone=their fathers? Circumstances = the background of the story?  
Question: we are trainers, what exactly is our role in design narrative?  
We just have to represent in context the education problems and give a solution?*

(P, Trainers’ Log, LU6)

What these episodes are showing is how difficult was to conceive an “ill-defined” scenario. The virtual “wall-paper” exposed the transition of educators from a more “educator-centered” perspective to the new, refurbished ideas, based on the work done through the design narratives. Fig. 3 shows a final stage of the wallpaper.



Figure 13 – Virtual Wallpaper showing Design Narratives

This initial approach to the educational problem was followed by the moment in which the educators carefully thought about the “educational solution” they wanted to propose. This was the time of Planning/Designing, a time for considering a personal strategy to solve the imagined educational problem, but including the ALICE approach and method. The common factor across the entire project was, in fact, the selection of a Creative Language to mediate intergenerational relationships, making adults to become more competent in supporting children and dialoguing with teens.

As mentioned before, the educators were provided with “templates” for Learning Design, basing on two levels of granularity of the educational intervention. There was hence a “macro-level”, or of the *educational approach* proposed by ALICE project; and a “micro-level”, or of the *educational session*. These provided the educator with examples of use of the creative language in an intergenerational learning process; they were based on the “design narratives” provided by the educators, so they found their ideas crystallized at this level.

After collecting the many educators’ designs, it was possible to see some similar elements characterizing approaches, that allowed me to identify what, according to D. Laurillard (2012), we could call “pedagogical patterns”: that is, elements that can be systematically found across several planned or implemented educational interventions. Stemming from an initially “ill-defined” educational problem, these patterns can put the basis to generate systematic approaches to intervene, problems. Fig. 4 shows one example of emerging pattern.

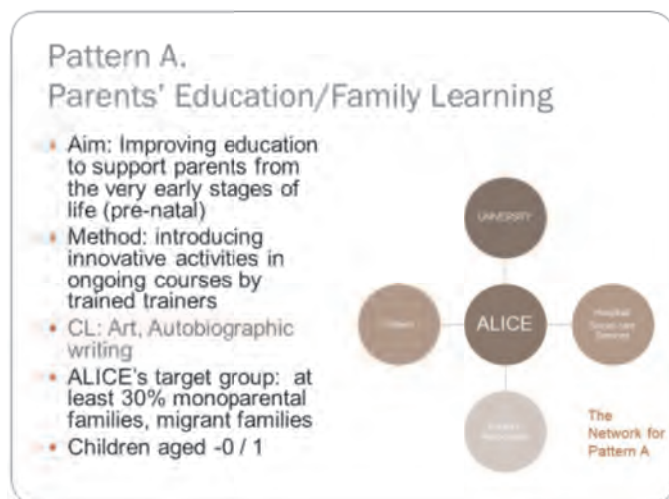


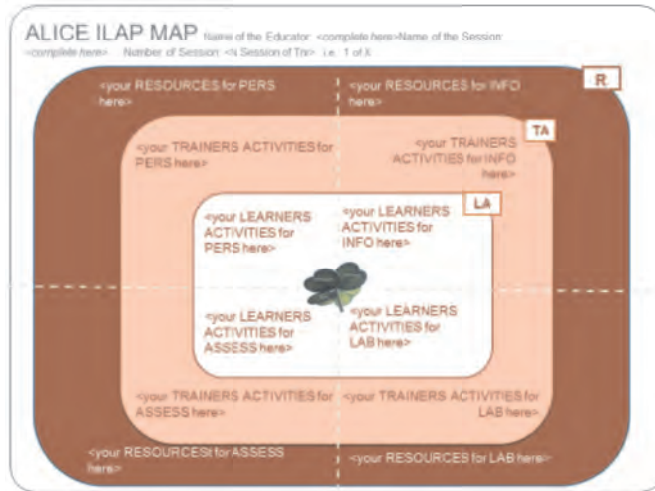
Figure 14 – Pattern showing the “ALICE educational approach”

The design instrument for the second level (micro) was a set of templates based on the “Four Leaf” framework (Margiotta, 2006, cited in Raffaghelli & Icleanu, 2013) or ILAP, acronym that stands for Information, Laboratory, Assessment and Personalization. The ILAP framework is composed in fact by four phases where the learner is engaged in different activities aimed at promoting specific (but connected) learning outcomes by every sequence. The four phases, and their connected activities are:

- INFORMATION: See, Listen, Read, Explore
- LAB: Discuss, Reflect, Try, Do
- ASSESSMENT: Check your knowledge and skills
- PERSONALIZATION: Make your learning useful for your personal/professional purposes
- Every phase encompasses:
  - Learners specific Activities (LA)
  - Trainers specific Activities (TA)
  - Resources for Learning (R)

The participants were provided with both a template to structure the own plan, and web-based tool<sup>6</sup> were to input the several activities (see Fig. 4).

6 [http://www.alice-llp.eu/Templates/Trainers/template\\_for\\_trainers.html](http://www.alice-llp.eu/Templates/Trainers/template_for_trainers.html)



**Figure 15 – A scheme for the representation/visualization of your session**

This visual representation was expected to help the educators to connect the learning goals with the learners' activities (the kernel) the trainer's activities and the necessary resources. It was also a base to discuss with peers the scheme of sessions, the coherence of the plan and the criticalities found in aligning the macro-plan (educational problem, strategy, learning goals) and the micro-plan (specific activities per session).

The national coordinators and peers discussed the outcomes of this plan; there was hence an international session between national coordinators (February 2013) to jointly analyze the main problems detected at this level. Two orders of problems emerged in the mentioned session, arising from the contrast between the general idea and the specific activities. Firstly, the difficulty in focusing adults' learning within intergenerational activities, with many activities were the adults accompany children learning, but do not have space for the own learning. Secondly, and tightly connected, the difficulty of envisaging evaluation (and reflection) as part of the intervention. In fact, particularly in adults' education the moment of reflection is that of acknowledging the informal learning that eventually had place along an intergenerational creative experience.

This second round of designing for learning (being the first the adoption of narratives) led the group to better focus the educational problem (intervening to support adults in intergenerational processes) as well as to become aware of the shortcomings with regard to adults' learning, in the plan of action. As a result, most plans of intervention were reorganized, particularly at the level of the participatory evaluation as *adults'* session to reflect on the intergenerational experience. In some of the participants' words (excerpts of Trainers' log):

*"...I must say I thought everything was clear to me until I had to imagine the implementation day by day. The exercise of learning design was, how could I say, ...painful? But there's no gain without pain ;)"*  
 (D., Trainers' Log, LU6)

*“...Planning for adults’ learning is not easy. I realize we are all thinking about the children’s activities, their space for learning, but we forgot adults. But I think we actually find the best way to access adults’ learning through the joint activity with children followed by the moment of reflection. I did not realize the potential of reflection in this intergenerational experience!”*

(S., Trainers’ Log, LU6)

*“...In some extent I was worry that too many templates, too many instruments to use in my professional work would only impede me to think creatively. I still care about the burden of things I have to do before and after a training session with ALICE approach. But I was not able of seeing “dark zones” in my thinking that the exercise of planning the sessions with the provided instruments allowed me to see...”*

(E., Trainers’Log, LU6)

These results point out how the Learning Design tools and activities in these phase addressed better educators’ knowledge and awareness about the importance of the context; moreover, the educators acknowledged the different adults’ needs in an intergenerational learning situation and improved the precision of their plans to respond to these specific needs. However, as many of the educators referred, the adoption of design tools was burdensome. Some educators had to connect first with the creative activity, with the educational problem an idea, which was also led by their prior experience. This was particularly true for expert professionals: they already had a number of consolidated approaches to practice that tried to adopt to the intergenerational learning proposal. However, the adoption of tools supported them to go in depth and to “see” (as E says) the “dark zones”, the intervention features they were not able to thinking of. For novice educators, the cognitive load was important, and some of them were not able of using accurately the tools, for they could not imagine how to “fill in” the requested “areas”. Here the support of an expert trainer (the national coordinator) was crucial to scaffold the use of the Learning Design tools. This is an important issue since it points out that designing for learning is not an immediate professional skill and the tools offered, to be effective, require adequate support.

### 3.2. Design for Orchestration: Implement

The next phase regarded the process of implementation, which lasted from March to June 2013, even if many of the educators had already implemented “preliminary/testing” sessions to engage participants.

The design supports provided consisted in a template to “document” ongoing experience. The templates were very simple, with the structure of a “Google-doc” report<sup>7</sup>. This was accompanied by the “trainers’ log” as well as national meetings, which encompassed a process of reflection and discussion to monitor the ongoing activities.

The strategy followed during the meetings regarded two main ideas: the first

7 <https://docs.google.com/document/d/12NnB0XF2Gf0MQAQtP62QPIE6Pm-45ttzGOs4SkMcoOs/edit?usp=sharing>



one, that there is a substantial difference between plans and action; the second one, that the strategy of monitoring was aimed at keeping to the forefront the educational “vision” proposed through A.L.I.C.E approach, while at the same time searching for better impact on the target group (adults). It was reminded, basing on the “ALICE patterns” that the project attempted to *raise awareness*, through *participation and engagement*, on the following issues:

- Adults as Educators are a key for the Lifelong Learning society
- Adults can improve their skills to support children, having impact on their own *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*<sup>8</sup>
- Creative Languages can help adults to better support children, generating intergenerational creative learning experiences

This monitoring strategy was supported hence by the following points, that were later adopted to select best practices:

To what degree is your ongoing intervention...

- ...*Focusing adult’s learning prior and during the experiences?*
- ...*Introducing properly creative languages and adopted them as a mean to improve intergenerational dialogue?*
- ...*Implementing a participatory evaluation based on educators and adults reflection?*
- ...*Targeting adults (within ALPPs) that are relevant for the EU benchmarks the project is aiming to contribute with (i.e. least educated adults, senior volunteers, immigrants, adults excluded from education)?*
- ...*Achieving relevant learning outcomes in terms of adults’ key competences?*
- ...*Showing forms of impact on children?*
- ...*Adopting concrete strategies for documenting the own activity?*
- ...*Adopting concrete strategies to disseminate and exploit the own approach?*

One of the main results of this phase, as reported by national coordinators and educators, regarded the way educators’ explored and discovered the perspective of adults’ education within intergenerational interventions. The weaknesses at the level of planning, followed by discussion and adjustment of interventions, were the springboard for a more effective orchestration. The educators observed that adults engaged in intergenerational activities initially underlining their exclusive interest on their own children. However, the creative languages embedded in the educational activity, followed by moments of reflection and dialogue with other adults had as effect adults’ insight and appreciation of the educational value of the intervention.

While this awareness on how to better guide the intergenerational learning from the perspective of the adult was not completely based on the adoption of the design supports, the initial Learning Design provided a base to focus the process of monitoring. The figure 5 is a “wordcloud” (a representation of semantic density) which was elaborated using the monitoring reports written by the educators engaged in the implementation of ALPPs (n 13). Inside the wordcloud the bigger words are those more frequent in the text. The semantic density of the

8 [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf)



was performed, it is not possible to say whether the strategic skills for problem solving in educational interventions was achieved. However, the effective (and objective) final results in terms of key competences in adults (see Margiotta & Raffaghelli this Issue), allow us to consider that the educators put into practice these skills.

### 3.3. Design for Reflection: Evaluate

The project adopted a participatory approach to evaluation that aimed at understanding whether ALPPs had been *effective* and of *quality*. There was clear concern about the social, political and value oriented nature of evaluation, which in practical terms implied a constructivist methodology based on interpretation of meaning making processes as the main way to achieve evaluation results. The educators, as evaluators of the impact of the ALPPs, were addressed to see themselves not as external experts with “true” knowledge about processes, activities, results. Instead, the strategy was focused on interacting and inviting participants to understand why and how things are done, taking altogether the responsibility for the intervention. In this process, the trainer/evaluator and participants were supposed to learn from each other, through dialogue and self-evaluation.

To support this approach, the educators were provided with what we called the “Key Competences Conversational Evaluation”. This meant that adults’ reflection was conducted as a conversational process by educators, basing on the illustration of key competences and further discussion (in group and personally) about the levels of achievement. The “KC conversational evaluation” was implemented mainly in a final session, where the educator analyzed together with adults which learning outcomes in terms of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning have been achieved. The educators were provided with a template<sup>9</sup> from the first phase of Design, but this was effectively implemented at this point. No questionnaires or complex grids were distributed among adults: the educators were supposed to adopt the Key Competences grid and discuss with the adults which levels of competence had been achieved.

This approach to evaluation, jointly with the results achieved with the implementation of ALPPs were discussed in the “Educators’ International Workshop”, held in Crete (24-25 June 2013). The Figure 6 shows one educators’ presentation; every presentation was followed by a discussion for peer-reviewing and the Scientific Committee’s suggestions/recommendations.

9 <https://docs.google.com/document/d/16UkdvccB2cXOcgFTToUSQN9wLdDWx3v3SEquJ-SdiTX7k/edit>



Figure 17 – Discussion Session with ALICE educators

Along the individual presentations and during the final discussion, all educators manifested great satisfaction with the work done, for it promoted intense experiences not only for adults and children engaged, but also for themselves. However, the educators remarked how difficult it was to trigger initial adults' reflection, and how after being triggered, they faced the concern of documenting adults' deep reflections and stories without incurring in problems linked with privacy. Many educators felt that they had to struggle against the "project technicalities" (the request of documenting using the Learning Map and video/audiotaping the sessions as evidence from the process) and the own sense of adults' education as an art, something that flows in the moment and cannot be "written". Moreover, the educators' discussed about how the professional community, generated through the local contact with other educators' as well as through the on-line educational environment, supported them in reflecting about the experience. As some educators manifested (Memo 17, fieldnotes from the international workshop):

*In my mind, I felt I had two voices sometimes in harmony, sometimes in conflict: one regarding the technical approach, the other regarding the specific learning needs and situation I was dealing with (...) You have to know your audience and be prepared for challenging and be flexible at the moment to apply. As a trainer you should never impose, rather help in case of actual difficulty of someone, give the message through reflective thinking, you stimulate in the adults. (A.)*

*The approach of the Learning Map was not easy to apply; I understood it well since we used the same tool in our training, step by step, then technically I knew what I was supposed to do. However, by the end of the ALPP, I felt it was not easy to identify the evidence about the key competences in the adults' discourses. I had to get back to the audiotaped session to accomplish my own Learning Map (M.)*

*I was aware I could not become expert in everything [the creative languages], yet I profited a lot from the experience of the others within the ALICE network. At the beginning, I felt everything was strongly theoretical and technical, but slowly it ended up in interactions and discussions that supported me in implementing my idea (X.)*

In the end, most educators agreed with the idea that the approach

adopted to implement ALPPs and to reflect on its results was complex, but also rewarding.

*I found that ALICE gave trainers a great freedom to use the tools they knew or got to know, while the creative languages offered a wide range of expressive possibilities. I (and I think my colleagues) hence passed this attitude on to my “pupils”, the adults, as a continuous process of reflection for the improvement of our social contexts (P).*

Overall, the educators agreed that the fluid online educational environment, put together different social and cultural environments, requiring educators' trade-off between the local situations and the tools provided to for planning and implementing of ALPPs: these were basic features of ALICE. As L. expressed: *the trainers did a massive work with the online course, becoming teachers and learners at the same time, as it should be always while working with adults.*

As for the educators' professionalism we can confirm that the participants developed mostly the ability of *deepening on the sense of an educational intervention, thinking about the own deontological engagement.* The ability to analyze and compare the planned educational intervention with the effective learning outcomes and educational impact, was less developed since it was one of the “difficult” issues as declared by the educators when illustrating the participatory evaluation (see M. comment). However, the approach and particularly the tool (Learning Map) supported in raising awareness about the connections between the designed learning activities and the actual learning, beyond learners' and the own trainer satisfaction.

### 3.4. Design for re-design and sharing

After the debate on evaluation, a concluding session during Crete's international workshop for educators was devoted to how to wrap up all the materials produced by educators (from the plan/reports and resources for learning, to the evidence collected on learning outcomes) in order to “document” the own activity and transform the whole in an “Open Educational Resource” (OER). While the process of “documentation” had started from the very beginning of ALPPs, as part of the strategy of evaluation, in this phase the idea was to go a step further, basing on the recent EU strategy of “opening up education”<sup>10</sup> (announced at June and launched by September 2013). The EU strategy consisted on aggregating open, quality content, in order to allow institutions and educators to show the quality of their researches and activities by sharing them, for all to profit of such results and further develop or apply them. The idea of producing OERs stemming from the educational activity within ALICE project was planned in 2011 (see Project Proposal). However, the strong emphasis by the new EU policy conveyed educators' attention about the relevance of the strategy. Moreover, it was pointed out the situation of intergenerational learning, where there is a lack of OER, highlighting the importance of ALICE's contribution to fill such a gap. However, an OER requires both a pedagogical development (an implemented and documented educational intervention, such as the ALPPs) as well as technological supports to make it accessible on the web. At this point, a Learning Design tool was introduced, with the aim of support-

10 See: <http://openeducationeuropa.eu/>

ing the process of working out OERs. An interoperable platform, “Octopus”<sup>11</sup>, developed by the Technical University of Crete (TUC) was introduced; it had been previously analyzed by the developers and the educational coordination of the project, and it had been featured according to the pedagogical patterns given for the ALPPs learning design (macro-plan), and on the basis of the ILAP model (micro-plan). The aim of the platform was to provide a technological support for the trainer to account for and display her activity, methodology and results. The educators logged in the platform and created their account, following hence a hands on session on the platform editor with the help of the TUC educators. Each trainer from the other partner countries described their ALPP and added resources to integrate the description, in order to modelize it and allow its repetition by other users. The educators started a complex process of revisiting the own work and looking back at activities aiming at “showing” their results in an “usable” way. After an initial enthusiasm for the easy affordances of Octopus platform, the educators demonstrated appropriated motivation and understanding of the task ahead. The residential workshop was followed by a process of three months in which the educators were pedagogically assisted by national education coordinators, which in time interacted with the transnational coordination; and technologically assisted by the TUC.

Along this process, two types of problem were observed (Memos 20-23). The first one was the need of developing basic technological skills, instrumental for the elaboration of analogical content (pictures, drawings and other adults’ learning artifacts), as well as for the placement of this content “on the cloud” in a way that it could be easily accessed (using of social networks, using of video or podcasting platforms, etc.). The second one related to the holistic conception of the OER: What is to be shown? Amongst the chaos of resources gathered along the experience, what should be selected to account for the educational intervention in a significant way? The education coordinators had to intervene heavily to render the final resources, in a process of dialogue for the *translation* of the ALPPs to the means of an OER. As it was underlined by one of the education coordinators *“it seems this part of professionalism was never considered; as if using the technologies to document and account for the training work was an addition...but I understand this is becoming a key part of the training profession”* (Webmeeting, September 2013, Memo 22)

Another education coordinator manifested our trainers should have required more technological training. They feel in some extent this work could be done by someone else, but at the same time they are eager to be the main authors, to own the whole process. (Webmeeting, July 2013, Memo 20)

It could be concluded that the educators became aware of the distance to cover between the raw educational material elaborated and collected, and the actual “packaging” in a knowledgeable piece of work, mediated by technological supports.

Another concern is that in this phase the interactions were less than expected amongst educators. There was a sort of isolation and focused interaction with those providing scaffolding, in order to make the creative effort to produce an OER. The task was perceived as onerous, not only due to its characteristics, but also due to the fact that it had to be accomplished during the summer time (Memo 21-22).

11 <http://learn.ced.tuc.gr/octopus/home/>

The issues emerged from the initial meeting introducing to the OER strategy to the distance process of coaching and elaboration, was discussed at a new international workshop held in Bucharest (24 October)<sup>12</sup>. During these meetings, the educators expressed the own limitations to pass from the initial platform, which affordances were deemed accessible, to the actual process of “translation” of materials gathered to the form of an OER. While the aspects addressed by the national education coordinators were confirmed, the educators expressed a more positive vision about the impact of the OER enabling device to rethink the own practice. Most educators expressed that the initial feeling of “unpreparedness” and lack of interest in devoting so much time to use technologies to package the own materials became, through the dialogue with national coordinators and the technical support, a way to revisit the own design and connected experience, “as if I was looking everything from outside” or as from a “bird eye” (Memo 24, expressions collected during the meeting). As for the issue of collaboration between educators, when asked during the meeting, the educators expressed that the process of wrapping up the own work was a more “lonely” stage of work, but that they “lurked” other visible works and examples (provided by TUC) in order to figure out how to accomplish the own task.

It can be concluded that while the phase of designing for re-designing, supported by the platform Octopuss and its affordances, did not lead to the full development of the expected professional skills for this phase, it could be actually considered an effective milestone in the way to do so. With regard to the individual skills expected, namely, the ability to monitor ongoing processes and reflect on the adjustments to be done in order to correct possible misleading; as well as the ability to change and improve the own professional work on the basis of the experience, the reflections made demonstrate increasing awareness of educators about the importance of technologies as complementary element of the own professional activity but also as a new way to work, where documenting and sharing becomes crucial. At the community level, even where there was no dialogue or collaboration for possible improvements between the educators, some of them actually remixed exemplar OER built by the group of educators led by TUC, and they all took a look to the others’ work to get inspiration. This could be considered a very basic (but highly necessary) skill to network and share the own work. The raising awareness and concern about adopting technologies to make the own work accountable, as discussed in Bucharest, should be also considered an element of a changing professional identity. It must be also said that the time devoted to this activity was probably insufficient to enact collaborative processes, an issue that should be considered in future interventions.

#### 4. Overall impact on Educators’ Professionalism

We could now consider two other results, obtained on the basis of a) the educators’ self-evaluation after having accomplished the phase of design; and b) a survey where the educators’ evaluated the impact of the tools provided to design for learning, after having concluded the phase of evaluation. These results would al-

12 “Opening Educational Practices for Adults Education: promoting adult trainers’ “open” professionalism” [http://www.alice-llp.eu/conference/?page\\_id=78](http://www.alice-llp.eu/conference/?page_id=78)

low us to further understand the connections between the “creative process” supported by the Learning Design tools, and the educators’ professional development. They are presented separately for they provide evidence on the overall impact of the “creative process” on educators’ professionalism. Moreover, the information collected through these two instruments worked as a form of “triangulation”, which in qualitative and mixed-methods research is deemed to improve the quality, relevance and trustworthiness of interpretations (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2014).

#### 4.1. *Educators’ self-evaluation*

This evaluation was performed by the end of the Learning Unit 6 (online training of trainers) on “Designing for Adults’ Learning”, which represented the end of the process of designing the own educational interventions. Most trainers had already started the process of implementation with small “ice-breaking” activities, or preliminary activities devoted to collect information about the context of intervention, testing the feasibility of the intervention. Therefore, this self-evaluation was considered a good screening of the way in which the educators perceived themselves with regard to the basic skills to design for learning.

The self-evaluation adopted the Learning Map, which is a rubric presenting the type of competences evaluated, and the description of four levels of development of a specific competence. The rubric was presented through a web form, previously tested by two respondents regarding the affordances and the linguistic adequacy. At the point of implementation of the specific rubric, the participants had already used other five rubrics to evaluate other areas of knowledge and skills regarding adults learning, as foreseen in the training of trainers programme (see Margiotta & Raffaghelli, this issue). The table 4 introduces the rubric adopted and following it, there is a brief descriptive statistic showing the educators’ responses.

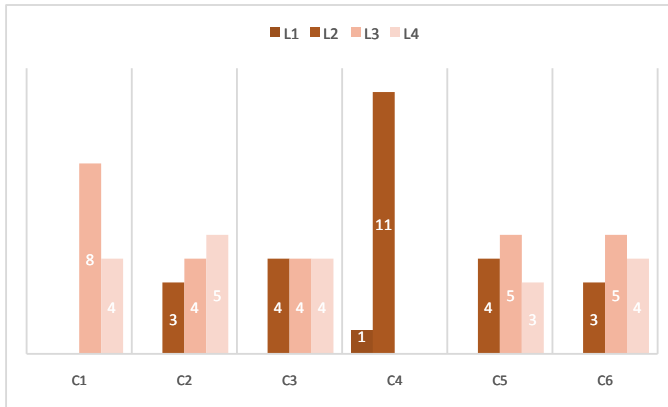


Thresholds  Competence Indicators	Initial threshold (L1) Descriptors	Standard threshold (L2) Descriptors	Advanced threshold (L3) Descriptors	Expert (L4)  Descriptors
<b>Learning Unit 6: Learning Design – Implementing Adults Creative Intergenerational Activities</b>				
<b>C1- Knowledge about the concept of adults' education .</b>	I'm informed generally about the concept of adults' education as reflexive and transformative practice	I'm informed in detail on the the concept of adults' education as reflexive and transformative practice. Even if I understand the concept, details sometimes are obscure.	I'm well informed on the concept of adults' education as reflexive and transformative practice. I see clearly the connections with the ALICE strategic approach. Everything is perfectly clear to me.	Not only am I informed about the concept of adults' education as reflexive and transformative practice and its connections with a general strategy in the context of EU policies; I'm also able of adopting some of the specific messages on adults education in order to generate innovative educational practices in my context of professional intervention.
<b>C2- Understanding/ skills for Learning Design within adults' education</b>	I'm informed generally about the concept of Learning Design as strategy to promote better educational interventions in the field of adults education.	I can recognize the importance of Learning Design as strategy to promote better educational interventions in the field of adults education..	I can recognize the importance of Learning Design as strategy to promote better educational interventions in the field of adults education; and I'm able of implementing some tools that support this perspective (I know where to find them and which examples are valuable). Everything is perfectly clear to me.	Not only can I recognize the importance of of Learning Design as strategy to promote better educational interventions in the field of adults education, as well as adopting the tools seen in this LU6; I'm also able of identifying new tools to keep improving my skills on Learning Design.
<b>C3- Knowledge and skills to Implement Adults Learning Activities</b>	I'm informed generally about the strategies to implement (like continuing monitoring and joint reflection with participants) Adults Learning Activities	I can recognize the importance of the several strategies (like continuing monitoring and joint reflection with participants) to implement Adults Learning Activities.	I can recognize the importance of the several strategies (like continuing monitoring and joint reflection with participants) to implement Adults Learning Activities; I'm also able of	Not only can I recognize the importance of the several strategies (like continuing monitoring and joint reflection with participants) to implement Adults Learning Activities, as well

			adopting some of these strategies. Everything is perfectly clear to me.	as adopting some of these strategies; I'm also able of identifying new strategies to keep improving my skills on adults' education interventions
C4- Networking for project implementation	I am eager to participate in local projects regarding adult education	I am able of creating some informal educational activities in collaboration with other expert trainers	I am able of creating specific activities both with other or by my own.	I am able of creating specific activities negotiating them in local networks. I am open also to work with national European networks.
C5- Evaluating Adults Learning Pilot Programmes	I'm informed generally about the strategies of participatory evaluation (like the Key Competence Map).	I can recognize the importance of the strategies of participatory evaluation (like the Key Competence Map).	I can recognize the importance of the strategies of participatory evaluation (like the Key Competence Map); I'm also able of adopting some of these strategies. Everything is perfectly clear to me.	Not only can I recognize the strategies of participatory evaluation (like the Key Competence Map), as well as adopting some of these strategies; I'm also able of identifying new strategies to keep improving my skills on participatory evaluation.
C6- Sharing Adults Learning Pilot Programmes	I'm informed generally about the strategies to share my work as adults' educator.	I can recognize the importance of the strategies to share my work as adults' educator. I understand the concept of opening educational practices for quality.	I can recognize the importance of the strategies to share my work as adults' educator. I understand the concept of opening educational practices for quality, and I'm ready to create my own Open Educational Resource.	Not only can I recognize the importance of strategies to share my work as adults educator. Taking into account the concept of open educational practices, I'm ready to create, collaborate and exchange the educational resources that I could of producing.

**Table 4 – The Learning Map**

The results presented in the figure 7 are based on a very small group, yet, 12 of 13 educators implementing the ALPPs. The bars show the frequencies of options selected regarding the self-evaluated level of competence (1 to 4); the results are grouped per competence (C1-C6), as explained in the table 4. In line with the qualitative results analyzed phase by phase, it is possible to see that the educators perceived themselves as generally well prepared to face the “creative process”. As expected the participants were cautious about the level of competence achieved, selecting the highest levels (L3-4) regarding conceptual skills like the overall understanding of adults' education (8 frequencies on L3 and 4 on L4).



**Figure 18 – Educators Self-Evaluation results**

It is interesting to see, in any case, that for C2, C3, C5 and C6, most frequencies (8-9/12) are distributed also for the highest levels of competence, which is to say, good understanding and proficient use of tools (L3) or creative use of concepts and tools (L4). In sum, this means that the trainers felt ready to design, implement, evaluate and share ALPPs at the beginning of the “creative process”. The only element that could be considered weaker regarded C4 “networking for project implementation”, which implied the knowledge and skills to engage collaborate in local, national and international networks to make the own work more sustainable. Even when tools to develop this area of skills were provided, the educators manifested (in the qualitative comments to the survey) that networking (particularly beyond the local level) was not envisaged as part of their professionalism, and that “somebody else” would be in charge for both disseminating and connecting the interventions at higher institutional or international levels. While this was beyond the scope of my actual research (this area of skills development was undertaken by another expert project’s partner), this result is pointing out that there are areas of adult educators’ professionalism that will require specific attention in the future. On the light of the results for the fourth phase (Design for re-design and sharing) it is also clear that the participating educators overestimated their skills to “share ALPPs” (C6), since they did not consider the technological component that required consistent support by national education coordinators and the technological team (TUC).

#### 4.2. Educators’ evaluation on the provided support to design for learning

As mentioned earlier, a brief survey was implemented at the end of “creative process” in order to understand how the educators perceived the support provided and which were the most effective tools for them. The answers were collected via web form, but the survey was illustrated during Crete’s residential workshop, ensuring that the educators understood which was asked. The survey consisted in:

- Contextualizing the ALPP: three overall qualitative questions about the educational problem faced, the type of difficulties found to work out an approach

- to intervene, and the hints provided along the creative process;
- Evaluation of Learning Design tools provided as user experience (Template A including design patterns, and the ILAP framework, for planning; Template B for monitoring; Template E for evaluating including the Learning Map; The Octopus platform for sharing)
    - closed questions adopting a scale (1-5, being 1 “not useful at all” and 5 “very useful”) to evaluate the overall usefulness of the tools to design for learning;
    - open choice questions to define the characteristics of the Learning Design tools (Inspiring, Good guide/check list, Insightful, Practical, Confusing, Complex, Stressful)
    - open qualitative question on why and how the tools were useful (if any usefulness had been perceived)

Eleven responses out of thirteen participants were collected, which allow considering the results significant with regard to the engaged group of educators.

As a methodological weakness that has to be underlined here, this evaluation was requested in June 2013, during Crete’s workshop (end of the third phase and beginning of the fourth phase of the “creative process”), but being opened since then until the end of the process (September 2013). The answers were collected at different stages of development of educators’ experiences; this could cause an error of measurement (the type of judgement on the experience is different for there is variance on the experience reported itself). I tried to include this element in the interpretation.

The qualitative questions regarding the contextualization, triggered educators’ reflections that were convergent with the data collected along the four phases of design. Most educators were concerned about not being able to convey the educational aims to the intergenerational environment chosen due to the high amount of work needed to structure the educational intervention (against an “ill-defined” educational problem); as well as to “raise awareness amongst adults about the importance of this approach for the quality of their relationship with their children”. Some trainers also showed concern about the creative languages: “I was not an expert on the creative languages offered by the ALICE project so I decided to adopt a new one and I was worried that this did not work”; “I learnt a lot about digital storytelling, I knew about storytelling but adding the digital part was a challenge”. From the other side, they pointed out that even when the tools and coaching was of good quality, the process was hard and at times they felt overload: “the resources provided by the course were insightful, and the support by the staff continuous, yet I felt myself as crossing the ocean, hard effort, sometimes I felt lost, sometimes confused about where to go, but I could deal with everything and I’m proud of my results”; “I was worried not to be able to fulfil every inputs requested by the organizers and the resources given in the platform, as they were posted in such a short time one after the other”; “I had the chance of question myself on how useful technology is in education, even though it can’t substitute the interpersonal relationship in teacher/learner. I could share experiences, doubts and knowledges with the other partners, in particular in the group work”; “the staff was always at hand, with hints, ideas, suggestions, this is the way I can grow as professional, not with pre-packaged solutions”.

A first interpretation regarding the contextualization of ALPPs is that, as any creative process, there is a burden of work to carry out, and the creative effort is sometimes painful, conflictual, challenging our own capacity for problem setting and innovation; there is frequently frustration, feelings of confusion and questioning. Therefore, the tools and support provided could not address “off-the-

shelf” solutions, but they should trigger dialogue and ideas to set new pathways. This was the approach adopted along the project development. However, it is to be said that the complexity of tools, as expressed by the educators, generated sometimes an additional effort, dealing with new issues and having to develop new skills (particularly digital skills and the management of one creative language). This leads to an important consideration for further adult educators’ professional development initiatives: specific tools and closer to the educators’ need an initial skills, is maybe better than an extensive pool of resources from where the educator has to choose.

With regard to the “User experience”, the figure 8 introduces the series of data on the overall perceived usefulness. The table 5 presents the results per Learning Design tool, and the figure 9 shows the results for all the Learning Design tools.

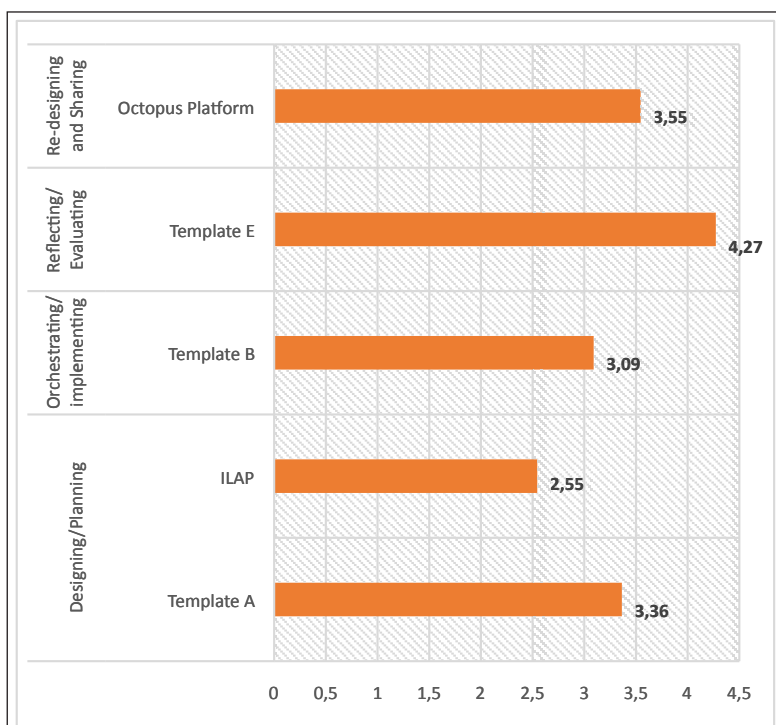
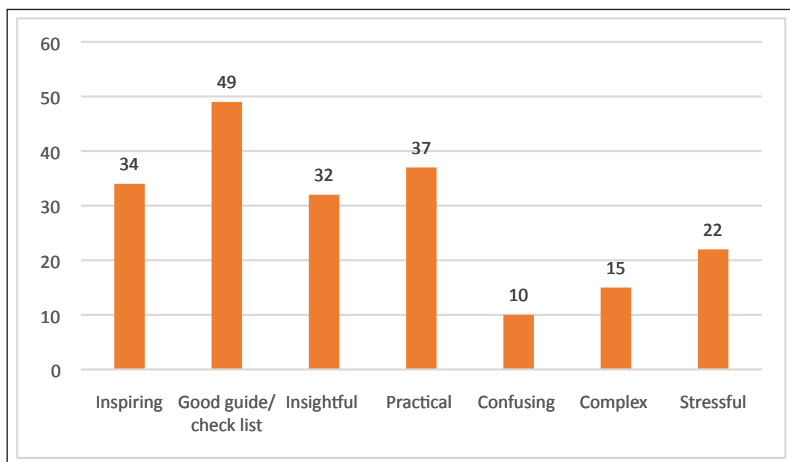


Figure 19 – Perceived Usefulness of Learning Design Tools supporting the Creative Process

With regard to the usefulness, it is to be underlined the higher value (4,27/5) attributed to the Template E (prepared to support the evaluation phase); the mean values (3,55 and 3,36/5) obtained by the Octopus Platform (Re-design/share phase) as well as the initial Template A (Design phase); and rather low value (2,55) attributed to the micro-planning tool, the ILAP (design phase).

These results point out that the trainers considered the tools addressing reflection on the final impact of the own experience; as well as tools to improve and show the own work through technologies, more useful than tools that go too much in detail within the initiative. In fact, the ILAP was a tool that increased the educators’ workload in a significant way, and many of them (as emerged from

their plans) did not used fully, or used it in a single, exemplar session. This tool is highly directive, imposing the features of a session; some trainers preferred to organize the features of some sessions differently from the sequence “information, lab, assessment, personalization”, which could be perceived too didactic and less appropriate for an open, informal education situation as that required for adults. We will keep these results in mind while analysing the rest of the elements, following.



**Figure 20 – Overall User Experience’s evaluation about the Learning Design Tools for the Creative Process**

It is possible to see that overall, the tools supporting design for learning as a forward oriented and creative process were considered mostly a good guide (49/55) and practical tool (37/55) to implement the own ALPP. This could be interpreted in the sense that the Learning Design tools never replaced the freedom given to the educators to intervene. In fact, the educators engaged autonomously identified the educational problems requiring their intervention, owning completely the concept of the solutions presented from the very beginning. Not too far from the first two dimensions (good guide and practical), in any case, the educators considered the tools “inspiring” (34/55) and “insightful” (32/55), which can be interpreted as a potential not only to recall the technicalities to be followed along the process, but also to generate new solutions. In fact, while the first two dimensions are evidence of the tools as scaffolding for the “problem solving” skills, the second could be deemed as scaffolding for the “problem setting” skills in a developmental process. This particularly applied to the Template A, E, and the Octopus Platform. Furthermore, the Template E (that provided for evaluating) was considered one of the most insightful and inspiring tool. As discussed during the Crete’s sessions (Evaluation phase) this is due to the fact that it provided the Learning Map tool and enclosed all the process of reflection on the outcomes with adults. Template E supported hence one of the key moments along the intervention, where more critical issues emerged; but it seems that these critical issues triggered successful interventions, and a sense of fulfilment by the participants. It must be said at this point that the more positive impressions were collected later (by September), while the impressions left immediately after Crete sessions where more sceptical particularly on evaluation.

Another trend of opinion was observed for the Octopus platform: the forms collected by June- early July, showed better opinion than those collected by early September. The last forms collected by the end of September and one during the Bucharest sessions (October) showed again very good perceptions (after having concluded the work).

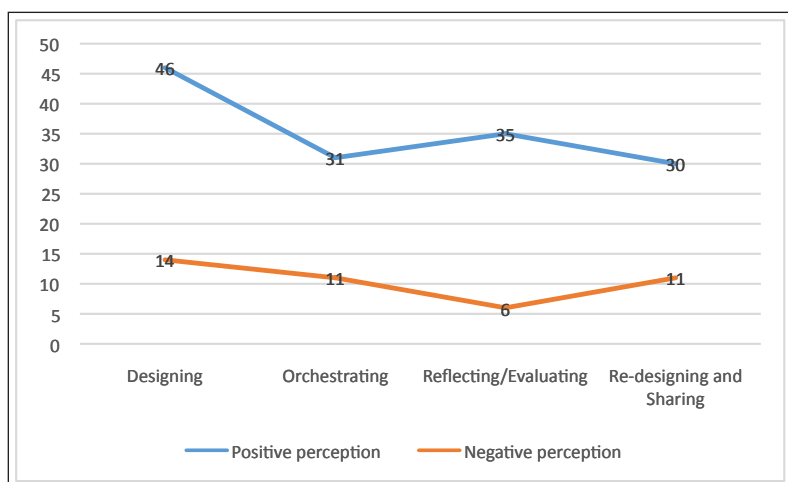
User Experience Dimensions	Learning Design Tools for the Creative Process					
	Design		Orchestrate	Reflect	Re-design & Share	Total x dimension
	Template A	ILAP	Template B	Template E	Octopus Platform	
Inspiring	8(*)	3	6	9	8	34
Good guide/check list	10	9	11	11	8	49
Insightful	6	3	8	9	6	32
Practical	11	6	6	6	8	37
Confusing	3	3	3	0	1	10
Complex	4	2	3	3	3	15
Stressful	1	6	5	3	7	22

**Table 5 – User Experience with Learning Design Tools for the Creative Process**

(\*) the value represents the frequency with which an option was selected by educators (yes-no value) e.g. 8/11

A set of dimensions showing the negative perception on the user experience were also considered, namely, the “confusing”, “complex” and “stressful” ones. The values were lower than in the case of the positive dimensions (Inspiring, Good-guide, etc.), but we should highlight the higher value of the dimension “stressful” (22/55), followed by “complex” (15/55) and “confusing” (10/55) (these last two showing very low frequencies). The “stressful” situation emerged is consistent with the qualitative information gathered along the four phases, particularly that of re-designing/sharing. In fact, the Octopus platform, was mostly considered stressful (7/11), for it implied digital skills most educators felt not to be completely prepared to put into practice. It is also consistent with the information collected for the “usefulness” the value for the dimension stressful (6/11) obtained for the ILAP.

As for the Figure 10, it introduces a perspective on tools built on the “positive dimensions” and the “negative dimensions” above considered. The figure shows both the frequencies along the several phases of the *creative process* (as timeline).



**Figure 21 – Positive and Negative perceptions on Learning Design tools along the phases of the creative process**

This data allows us to visualize in which phases of the creative process the tools were more or less “supportive”. No significant differences are seen in this figure, being all the phases generally perceived as well supported (30-46 of positive dimensions selected out of a total range of 55). It is to be underlined, in any case, that the phase of designing was the one presenting more negative perceptions (14/55). However, the negative perception was mitigated by the good support provided by the tools in the same phase (46/55). This is consistent with the data collected in other areas of the survey (usefulness), and it is influenced by the use of the ILAP, being probably the more technical phase. Very positive also the consideration of the support provided by the Evaluation tools, also considered less negative. While this could be considered not consistent with the qualitative analysis (a phase with complex transitions for the educators, where they had to reconsider the way they were documenting and the importance of evaluating and reflecting on the outcomes), this issue can be interpreted as the result of a sense of fulfilment after having overcome the difficulties of the designing and implementing.

### Conclusions

The quality of adult educators’ practices is a challenge, which requires high skills and professionalism, as well as more emphasis on the definition of the areas of intervention of adults’ education. The foundational works of Knowles, Freire and Mezirow (Raffaghelli, 2013), which theoretical efforts went into the direction of defining adults’ education as field of practice, emphasized the idea of adults’ education as conversational practice, based on learners’ reflection to transform the own conditions of life; this means that adults decide to learn when there are significant events in significant contexts. Professionalism, or the capacity to react in uncertain situations according to expert patterns of action, should harness the potential of a conversational approach, mainly informal, to face “ill-defined educational problems”.



In this research, I contended that Learning Design, as practice that supports educators in capturing, representing and reflecting on the own (situated) plans of action within educational interventions, can be a key element to develop educators professionalism, towards quality and effectiveness of adults' education. In the debate about Learning Design as research area the focus has moved beyond the development of tools to design for learning, towards the importance of designing for learning as *forward oriented process* (Dimitriadis & Goodyear, 2013). This concept means that Learning Design is not an activity performed at the beginning of the pedagogical practice, but is rather a process where the available several tools are adopted to plan, organize, monitor, evaluate and share the educational work.

In an attempt to explore the connections between adult educators' professionalism and Learning Design I formulated the following research question: *Can the process of design for learning, intended as forward oriented and creative process, support the achievement of adult educators' professionalism?*

The research consisted on a case study where I analyzed specific aspects of an international, experimental training programme, the "ALICE training of trainers", through an holistic and mostly interpretivist (yet mixed methods) approach. The aim of this programme was to develop the participants' skills to generate intergenerational learning experience through the use of creative languages (art, music, digital storytelling, games, etc.), mainly focusing on the adults role and learning, as form of adult education intervention. It adopted several means, from more traditional residential and online training activities, to the deployment of an experimental idea on the basis of the ALICE educational framework, the ALPPs. It is in this last phase of the training that Learning Design was introduced, as concept entailing a set of tools that could mediate the professional development. As *forward oriented process*, not only it promoted the adoption of Learning Design tools at the beginning (planning) but along the whole process of ALPPs' implementation supporting educators' reflection and continuing improvement of the own practice. The five operational phases of the training activity (contextualize, plan, implement, evaluate, share) were conceptualized adopting Dimitriadis and Goodyear's four phases of designing for learning as forward oriented process (Design for configuration, for orchestration for reflection for re-design and sharing). Overall, the phases integrated a *creative process* where the educators were called to focus an adults' educational need, to provide and implement solutions, to evaluate their impact and to wrap up results using technologies to share/disseminate the educational results. I presented, phase by phase, the tools and activities supporting designing for learning along the creative process, discussing the positive relationships and the shortcomings in order to promote adult educators' professionalism.

In synthesis along every phase there were expected results, some of them confirmed, some other leading to the areas where further research is needed:

- Design for configuration. In this phase it was observed better educators' knowledge and awareness about the importance of the context; moreover, the educators acknowledged the different adults' needs in an intergenerational learning situation and improved the precision of their plans to respond to these specific needs. While the use of Learning Design tools was significant and they were perceived positively, it can be concluded that there was a relationship between the tools and the skills achieved. However, as many of the educators referred, the adoption of tools was burdensome, and the tools

- in this phase were those that raised more negative perceptions (stressful, complex, confusing sensations about their implementation). While intensive support was necessary (particularly in the case of novice trainers) it is to be highlighted that designing for learning is not an immediate professional skill and the tools offered, to be effective, require adequate and tailored support.
- Design for orchestration. The evidence collected showed that the Learning Design tools and activities connected to monitoring addressed better educators' management of the educational intervention. Since no objective observation on skills was performed, it is not possible to say whether the strategic skills for problem solving in educational interventions was achieved. The positive perceptions on the tools and the good results reported against the initial problems raised allow us to consider that these skills were probably put into practice.
  - Design for Reflection. The Learning Design tools supported the ability of deepening on the sense of an educational intervention, thinking about the own deontological engagement. The ability to analyze and compare the planned educational intervention with the effective learning outcomes and educational impact, was less developed since it was one of the "difficult" issues as declared by the educators when illustrating the participatory evaluation (see M. comment). However, the approach and particularly the tool used in this phase (Learning Map) helped the educators to raise their awareness about the connections between the designed learning activities and the actual learning, beyond learners' and the own trainer satisfaction.
  - Design for re-design and sharing. The platform Octopus and its affordances supported increasing awareness of educators about the importance of technologies as complementary element of the own professional activity but also as a new way to work, where documenting and sharing becomes crucial. At the community level, even where there was no dialogue or collaboration for possible improvements between the educators, some of them actually remixed exemplar OER provided. This could be considered a very basic (but highly necessary) skill to network and share the own work. It must be also said that the time devoted to this activity was probably insufficient to enact collaborative processes, an issue that should be considered in future interventions.

There are two important remarks after this synthesis, regarding the two topics that I am putting into relation in this paper. The first one regards the debate about adult educators' professionalism: the evidence presented here helps us to consider that providing a rich environment for development, with several available tools, with problems to solve, was effective but it required high quality support from the staff and it produced, at a certain point, high levels of stress that required energy and determination to be managed. In the literature the professional communities of learning, the problem/project based approaches and the use of technologies have been too much emphasised as a panacea for triggering professional learning, and particularly in the case of teachers (Hendriks, Luyten, Scheerens, Slegers, & Steen, 2010) and extended to trainers (Przybylska, 2008). However, we can see here that the devices for learning (like the learning design tools) must be planned carefully, avoiding the educators' overload. Also relating to the educators' professionalism, we can conclude that there is an ongoing transition about the way the participants in this research perceived the own professional identity. All educators were clearly focused on their task as social anima-

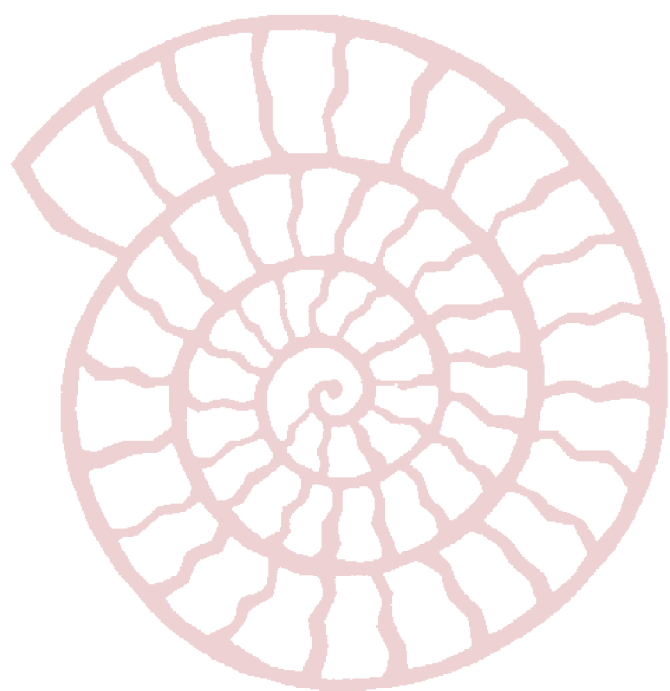
tors, in the microcosm of the learning group and the learner (particularly the children as learner in the intergenerational relationship). Most educators were not aware (as they declared) about skills regarding the process of reflection/documentation, evaluation, networking beyond the group level, as well as adopting technologies to show and share the own professional achievements. Many of them considered the final phases of the creative process as an additional task that would be performed usually by another “expert” (in technologies, in European projects, etc.). As Buiskool et al. (2010, p.33) put, beyond more traditional activities like learning needs assessment, learning facilitation, monitoring and evaluation of adults’ education, the adult educators are expected to deal with tasks as overall management of activities, marketing and PR activities (what here has been called “networking”) as well as ICT-support activities. Moreover, in the context of opening up education, it is easy to connect the requirement of sharing educational resources on the Web with professional skills to do so; as we could appreciate in this case study, this is not an automatic step; adult educators will have to be supported in designing for re-esigning and sharing their work in the form of OER. The second remark regards the debate on Learning Design. While we can conclude that Learning Design tools are effective in promoting adult educators’ activities and reflection linked to professional development, the tools’ affordances should be better explored in order to understand which of them are really helpful and which of them are overloading. Representing educational processes is a complex effort that is added to what is deemed the central educator’s task, which is facilitating adults’ learning. As emerged in this case study, some complex Learning Design tools (like the ILAP form), aimed at facilitating the representation, were associated with stress and a feeling of not being able of managing the burden of work; instead, simpler tools (like the Design Narrative) were useful to cast out the educators’ ideas . This is an element worth to be considered at the time of developing complex Learning Design tools to represent and inform pedagogical practices, as it has been the trend in the last ten years (Persico, 2013); a trend that has been criticised, considering the fact that many Learning Design technologies would not be strictly connected with the educators’ need of facilitating their work conducting effective interventions (Arpetti, Baranauskas, & Leo, 2014) . However, this issue reinforces the concept of learning design as a forward oriented process, where the tools are adopted in a dialogic way with the pedagogical practices along a process with the educator’s professional identity at the core. In fact, as emerged in this case study, the educators selected and adopted in personal ways the several tools provided: they considered the tools’ value differently, as far as these could be a springboard to improve the ongoing pedagogical practices.

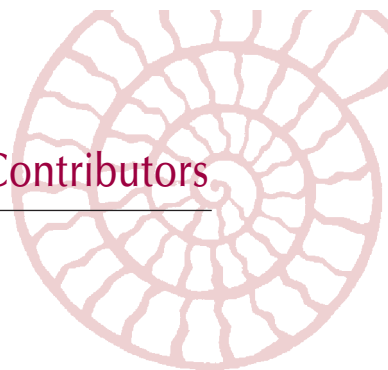
To conclude, this case study cannot assume its findings as generalizable; however, the internal consistence of results, as well as the expressions of fulfilment by all the stakeholders (national coordinators, educators, adults) might support its trustworthiness, as a base to keep working, promoting more practices and field research, with the final aim of undertaking effective adults’ education as a key or our lifelong learning society.

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# SIREF

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