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Adult Education: Processes and Strategies

edited by Vanna Boffo and Laura Formenti

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Editorial

The subject of this issue, namely, *Adult Education: processes and strategies* is a keystone of all Adult Education research and training. Our intent is to enter a space for metacognitive reflection to hopefully provide an overview that can distinguish particular venues, actions, subjects, and citizenship practices. We asked ourselves where and how education for adults, with adults, and beyond adulthood, should be planned; that kind of education which, by cladding itself in everyday life, allows women and men to become, change, and transmute. Here, specifically, is the transformation, the change and the process of becoming something other than what each of us perceived to begin with. Every process changes the human form of those creating and experiencing it. It is this transformation and transforming, change and becoming that we are interested in grasping, even if only in a quick snapshot, like a lens freezing an image.

We have pooled innovative ideas and advanced practices, enriching our own thinking about what it means to educate and, especially, to do so with adults and in adulthood. The next question we tried to answer aimed to clarify the meaning and significance of educational action at education venues. Today more than ever, research must provide specific guidelines on what kinds of learning prove useful to clarify what it means to act in certain educational contexts. Just what is educational action, and how can we define a genuinely educational action?

The essays we are presenting here are filled with such questions and can provide the thoughtful reader with some valid answers.

Starting right from the first article by Luraschi and Negro, *Reflecting on reception: seeking beauty when working with young adult migrants*, whose gist is the reflective potential inherent to a participatory, embedded, and aesthetic methodology of a feminist angle in professional research by educators and coordinators into educational services for refugees and asylum seekers. The fundamental issue is which educational action is best practised at micro/meso/macro levels when it comes to migrant reception. Equally, in the article by Colosimo, *Evaluation and employability: educational pathways and human capital optimization in Sudan*, the challenge is that of the educational actions to be carried out to convey and accompany young adults from a multifarious state like Sudan along the bumpy road to awareness of their professional potential.

Fasano's essay, *Experiential training in organizations*, questions what the hallmarks of experiential training are and what benefits its widespread application in organizations might bring. The basic theme of experiential training is interspersed with reflection on educational action in working contexts and how such actions might conceivably lead to a benefit in terms of both product and process. And where the process involves people, the operator's exercising of an action that is individual and, at the same time, shared and communal. An organization is always a place of sharing and community, at least when it takes care of its human subjects. The world of volunteering, by offering informal/non-

formal learning environments, can also show us a model of reflection on the educational action as in Spinelli's essay *Training processes for civil protection volunteers: the national Anpas model*, providing us with a macro framework in which the participatory element and peer-to-peer methodologies lie at the heart of the proposed scheme.

Two other educational projects, one contained in the article *Improving the work of public catering operators: an educational project* by Morbe, Moustica, Millevolte, and Nicolini, and another by Maltese, *#CUOREDINAPOLI: Pedagogical considerations on an adult training experience, between work on-site, cooperative learning and service learning*, describe an equal number of educational pathways where the core of the process lies in considering the professional/worker as a human person who educates him- herself and others through professional action, which becomes formative/educational merely by practising it.

Closing this issue are some good practices which are extremely formative and have been employed in learning environments that are formal – and therefore more structured – but no less full of proposals and methodological and practical innovations for adults. Antonacci and Ceredi have submitted an article entitled *The sense of continuing to educate ourselves in adulthood. An experience of non-formal learning at the University of the Third Age and Spare Time in Trentino*, while Sfarra presents an experience at a CPIA [adult education centre] in the Marches, *Communicating for expression and being: the literary education of adult learners using the digital network*. Both of these experiences confirm what has been said so far about research into practices as a way to restore the sense of educational actions and to become individuals/persons through education.

This is a journey whose roots lie in a distant, yet still contemporary time, where several branches of knowledge are being questioned about the sense of the centrality of the person in educational schemes. The collection of texts, practices and research that we are bringing to your attention asks ancient questions in an innovative form and within fresh professional and social contexts. A sign that we can continue to progress and – since it lies within the objectives of this magazine – can question education and its procedures for the future.

Vanna Boffo, Laura Formenti

Reflecting on reception: seeking beauty when working with young adult migrants

Silvia Luraschi¹, Gaia Del Negro²

Keywords

Aesthetic Representation, Reflectivity, Feminist Methodology

Abstract

This article ponders the reflective potential of using a participatory, embedded and aesthetic methodology of a feminist angle in the professional research of educators and coordinators of educational services for refugees and asylum seekers, in order to rethink educational/reception practices for adult migrants at micro/meso/macro levels.

1. Unexpected Subjects: educational research in migrant reception

For some years, we have been seeing the spread of theoretical studies and field research in the adult lifelong learning sector on the reception of adult migrants with a concomitant updating of professionals and volunteers, both internationally (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Morrice, Shan & Sprung, 2017; Guo & Lange, 2015; Shan & Fejes, 2015;) and in Italy (Di Rienzo, 2018; Shepherd, Scardigno & Manuti, 2018). The aim has been to enhance migrants' human and cultural capital and to foster justice and social wellbeing by means of their studies and practices (GEM, 2018). Here we would like to share certain reflections on participatory and aesthetic research/educational practices with operators that can highlight subjective needs (micro level), context variables (meso level) and collective dimensions (macro level).

"Unexpected Subjects" is a pedagogical research programme of the University of Milan-Bicocca financed by the Alsos Foundation, conducted by Silvia in a participatory and systemic approach under the scientific direction of Laura Formenti, and focusing on the transformative dimension of asylum seeker reception procedures (www.fondazionealsos.org). Partnering the research is the Consolida consortium which pools cooperatives committed for years to carrying out educational activities at reception facilities in the provinces of Lecco and Monza Brianza, within what was formerly known as the SPRAR system. The title of the research, "Unexpected Subjects", takes its cue from the thinking of Carla Lonzi, a leading representative of feminist thought in the 1980s, to carry out an epistemological subversion: migrants – but also operators – are indeed all unexpected subjects who can speak about their own condition and desires. The leap of faith to be taken presupposes that the subjects in question, whether migrants or operators, are authorities on their own lives and needs. This then requires proactivity in searching for needs and solutions (Scardicchio, 2014). The aim of the research/intervention is to rethink education not so much by systematizing 'good practices' but the operators' stance towards others as well as their professional knowledge, which needs to become more aware on practical, theoretical, cognitive, aesthetic, ethical, personal, and social levels (Munari, 1993). The 18-month research project included reflective workshops with asylum-seekers and refugees, meetings between refugees and young natives, and dissemination activities throughout the territory involving those considered insiders in the research field.

2. The workshop: theoretical premises for an active attitude

At the start of the research project, we (Silvia and Gaia) conducted a compositional workshop with an embedded reflective goal (Formenti, 2018), the former as researcher and the latter in support of the methodological part. By *active* or *embedded* attitude what we mean is a reflective attitude in the present, tied also to bodily and emotional attention (Contini, Fabbri, Manuzzi, 2006), which actively tends towards observation of anything strange or irrelevant (Dallari, 2005), to be precise: anything that causes discomfort, flinching, vacillation, or anger, to activate a fresh look at the experience. We therefore identify with the feminist notion that the sense body is a place of knowledge and that ‘what is personal is political’: it is neither conceivable nor desirable to separate the body and mind, nor the search for oneself from the development of others – and vice versa. From these premises derive two methodological implications: art, and ‘starting from ourselves’.

Aesthetic knowhow (Heron, 1996) such as the collage technique, supports associative thinking (Butler-Kisber, 2008) which ventures beyond the ‘already thought’ towards intuition, perception, and emotion. Collage does not require particular artistic skills and yet lends itself to abandoning its own frames of reference and being *guided by instinct*, accompanied by the writing of short reflective texts to explain the meanings of the work produced (Biffi & Zucconi, 2015). In a highly operational professional context (such as that of cooperatives), it is particularly useful to try to steer organized thinking towards project action.

The second methodological point is ‘starting from ourselves’. To challenge the asymmetry of power between researcher/educator and the subjects (too often ‘objects’) of research/education, pursuing a feminist angle (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002), we have chosen to position ourselves as researchers within the analysis of the material we collect (Formenti, Luraschi & del Negro, 2019). This positioning is ethical: we ourselves are “Unexpected Subjects”, that is, galvanized by connecting with our own experience to discover the inequalities (of gender, class and race) present in our society (Fraser & Honneth, 2007).

3. An interpretive account of the workshop

The goal of the meeting, which took place in February, was to reflect on the meaning of the word ‘reception’. In fact, the beginning of 2019 was marked by the entry into force of Italy’s so-called ‘Security Decree’, with a new invitation to tender for reception services and the introduction of heavy cuts in all personal services, starting from education and integration. The question about the sense of reception services was therefore a particularly burning issue.

The 3-hour-long workshop involved 10 members of a consortium of three different cooperatives with different backgrounds and professional roles: 5 female educators and 1 male engaged in the services of the second reception phase, a social assistant, another female educator and a male educator who coordinated the service in addition to 1 project coordinator. This was the first time they had all worked together to try out a reflective aesthetic practice.

The meeting was audio-recorded and transcribed. We ourselves analysed the data collected in the form of a dialogue (each read the texts and transcriptions, then we swapped notes), following an inspiration of an auto/biographical type (data interpreted in the light of the researcher’s biography – see Merrill & West, 2014), within a research-action framework with a reflective goal (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

We prepared an informal setting with a table and the material to be used: A3 sheets of paper, magazines, scissors, and glue. The material chosen – old *Airone* magazines – in our intentions focused on the spatial dimension, which is explicit to the research into how migrants inhabit space and which spaces are available to them and which are not. The participants were invited to create a collage for each person who answered the question: what does reception mean for me in the roads followed by young adult migrants? Having assigned a title to their

work, each participant then wrote down what was in the collage and what it represented, and shared it with a companion, then with the whole group.

In analysing the autobiographical texts produced and the group discussion sparked by the collages, we were guided by the following questions:

- What are the operators telling us about their work with migrants?
- Has a dimension of discovery (a formative dimension) been enabled thanks to the embedded languages of the artwork?

Despite the atmosphere of organizational stress, the operators played along willingly, preparing the collages and sharing their reflections with the group. The project coordinator, Sandro, who is responsible for building and maintaining relations between the services of different cooperatives and territorial institutions, wrote a fairly perplexing environmental metaphor which arrested the group's attention and sparked a debate:

[...] in my collage, which I've called "The Amulet", I put a photo of this old man, who, although it can't be understood from the photo but can be read in the commentary, uses a seashell to call the deer that live in the forest. He avoided throwing the shell away, and saying it was no longer useful because they're in the mountains here. And yet he never uses it to listen to the sea and say: 'dammit, it was so great when I was at the sea,' but reuses it [...].

During the debate, the participants agreed that they could see the ambiguities and contradictions of their own daily work in the metaphor. We therefore found it interesting to reflect on Sandro's story to question at the micro/meso/macro levels a representation which seemed evocative – for this group – of the practices to welcome adult migrants. At the micro level, the metaphor of the shell recalled for us the unrecognized skills of the migrant, that is to say, his or her ability to access 'other' distant resources, from a totally different social context; to what extent is this knowledge of those who come from another place recognized by the individual migrant and by the operators? At the meso level, in other words, that of the relationship between the operators and the migrants, the shell that could call the deer for us evoked the capacity of the educator (and the migrant) to live in a dynamic situation where actions and reactions are multidimensional, and that something greater than our own thinking always eludes us (metaphorically "the deer"). In educational work, developing the ability to improvise together (Gamelli, 2016) requires a slackening of the need for control and programming to stay in the present moment, thanks to bodily listening (Luraschi & Formenti, 2016) to what the other is bringing us and evoking with his or her presence. What further aspects of themselves are barred from the operators in their work and lives?

At a macro level, the metaphor of the shell invites us to wonder who the deer might be in the contemporary social world. In the 2017 film *On Body and Soul* by the Hungarian director Ildikó Enyedi, two very lonely people have the same dream in which two deer follow one another into the woods. Escaping from the isolation of their lives marked by silent suffering bodies, they find in this image a language for love. To the common sense which sees migration as a problem and an emergency, the sensitivity to recognize that everything is interconnected may be elusive nowadays (Morin, 2001).

Broadening the discourse further, the metaphor of the shell prompted us to think about how encountering new people and frames of meaning, which initially seemed alien, had influenced us. Arguably, the same applies to the reception services which are changing and face the challenge of not discarding what their operators have learned in meeting others alone. Silvia continued to meet the group of operators throughout the research project to continue the debate on this subject, checking the assumptions expressed in this commentary with them.

4. Conclusions for a genuine collaboration

The conscious arrangement of aesthetic settings triggers divergent reflective thoughts and brand-new connections (Leavy, 2017), which may well be 'odd' in the beginning, but can stimulate us, like the shell narrative, to question the sense of our experiences and knowledge in the reception of migrants.

In Silvia's case, it will be interesting to observe whether and how the professional attitudes of the operators have changed towards colleagues, migrants, and even towards the term 'reception', after being involved in the research project. For both of us, this means moving away from a linear point of view of research and education to try out a participatory method inspired by feminist practices. This does not mean applying a predefined method, but understanding, together with the operators, in a more integrated and complex way (Formenti, 2017), how to ask oneself authentic questions which challenge the commonplaces on working with migrants and open the way to reassessing the evolutionary dimension of using spaces both inside and outside reception centres.

Notes

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Assessment and employability: educational pathways and human capital optimization in Sudan

Marianna Colosimo¹

Keywords

Training, Assessment,
Participation

Abstract

This contribution briefly summarizes an assessment of the effectiveness of blended learning within the INSO project of the Centre for Lifelong Learning of the University of Bari, which aimed to develop in young university students of the CCST in Khartoum (Sudan) and other Sudanese universities, the skills needed to promote employability through continuing education, and from a lifelong learning perspective. The innovative educational methodology adopted, and the institutional strategies proposed by the educational intervention helped improve the beneficiaries' perceptions of self-efficacy at work, as a decisive lever to favour increased employability and more effective management of human capital in such a difficult country as Sudan.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Italy has been paying particular attention to the internationalization of the university system and was one of the first countries to promote the creation of the “European Higher Education Area” (European Migration Network, 2012). Today, one in ten international students in the world is African, and yet more and more young people remain in Africa to study. For more advanced education, however, talented Africans traditionally leave their home country¹. In Sudan, in particular, there are a number of particularly important educational institutions, including the Comboni College of Science and Technology (CCST) in Khartoum, which is an important academic establishment for young Sudanese to find quality education and training. However, the lack of innovation in educational methods has gradually left young Sudanese university students lacking in skills to turn their knowledge and projects into portable proposals for the world of work. In view of this, to bridge the existing gaps in such an important sector as adult education, there has come a need to support education, particularly at university level. In close liaison with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Republic of Sudan and Comboni College, the CAP (Centre for Lifelong Learning) of the University of Bari and the IRiSS-CNR (Institute for Research on Innovation and Services for Development of the National Research Council of Italy) originated a project called INSO – “Innovation in Society: educational pathways and human capital optimization in Sudan”, basically a course for young Sudanese university students, holders of a particularly distinguished degree (BSc Honours) or a three-year degree (Intermediate Diploma) from the CCST or another Sudanese university, which proposed to develop the skills necessary for a more stable integration in the labour market. The ongoing challenge which the CAP Uniba and IRiSS-CNR set out to tackle was to offer young Sudanese students the opportunity to study – using blended learning – important topics such as micro-business start-ups, organizational sustainability, marketing and management, social networks and relational dynamics, job search techniques and social media for micro-start-ups, in order to develop greater employability. The use of blended learning did not present any obstacles in educating the students, confirming that “in the field of adult education, the blended model appears to be particularly suitable since it

can satisfy requirements of flexibility, personalization, variety, self-regulation and group learning, identified as the most important factors in a learning pathway.” (Delfino et al., 2006, p. 386; Ausburn, 2004) “According to Garrison and Kanuka (2004), blended learning encourages the development of critical thinking and higher-level learning, relying as it does on participants’ self-regulated learning skills, more easily possessed by an adult student audience.” (Delfino et al., 2006, p. 386) Consequently, these assumptions constituted the basic theoretical grounds to define and implement effective and innovative methodological experimentation of a participatory type.

2. The INSO project and assessment of the effectiveness of the education

According to theoretical approaches developed over the last few decades, from *theory-based assessment* to *realistic assessment*, the participation of social actors is of fundamental importance in understanding which social mechanisms influence the success or failure of a particular programme². Participation in assessment can prove useful since it is the only way to create a mutual trust environment which yields more in-depth information and facilitates the prerequisites to ‘use’ the assessment and its results. A participatory assessment circulates ideas with appropriate techniques and procedures and prompts the mutual exchange of ideas³. “When people are active participants, the subjects of research, rather than *objects* of study, they are more inclined to contribute to the overall design of the project” (Altieri, 2009, p. 157), and to make use of the research results and contribute to an understanding of their implications (Altieri, 2009; Zani, 1996). “*The active participation of social actors, who are transiting from the role of those observed to the role of protagonists, is therefore a constitutive element*” (Altieri, 2009, p. 157) for the proper functioning of a programme. In light of the above, it was decided to assess the effectiveness of the education provided within the project, by activating a participatory process ‘during the educational activity’, which kept the subjects under assessment constantly informed and active in the assessment itself.

The research involved compiling a structured online questionnaire to be administered to the students, in order to compare the objectives expected by the project with the results obtained, and focusing on three evaluation criteria: student satisfaction with the usefulness of the course (customer); evaluation of the learning in terms of self-perception (self-assessment) and its portability; impact on the careers of the young Sudanese students. The variable in the cross-sectoral analysis was the territorial context of the beneficiaries of the education, analysed through questions which required the students themselves to take part in the assessment. The assessment research initially sought to investigate the level of student satisfaction regarding the usefulness of the course and to discover the most important changes produced in their education, as well as their perception of learning, in terms of improvements in competence, abilities and skills. Last of all, we wished to understand how the participants were able to transfer what they had learned into their academic and professional situations and to analyse key aspects of their territorial context, in terms of imaginable improvements and career expectations.

3. Assessing adult education: a summary of the implementation results

The educational activities promoted by the INSO project were carried out between 2017 and 2018 at the CCST in Khartoum (Sudan) by means of blended learning workshops and a Moodle e-learning platform managed by the CAP Uniba and IRISS-CNR. One hundred and three students would eventually take part in the project (68.67% of the students expected).

As part of the assessment, a structured questionnaire was administered in December 2018, involving 34 students with an average age of 23. Compared to the initial number of 103 Sudanese students involved in the

project, there was a significant decrease in the number of students participating due to technical problems with computer access. This aside, the students involved in this phase were particularly attentive and participative in the requested collaboration, as can be seen from the replies in the questionnaires and from the suggestions the students made. On analysing in detail the students' academic qualifications at the end of the course, it turned out that 26 of the 34 participants already possessed some kind of degree at the time of completing the questionnaire, having graduated in 2018. Exactly half the participants in the research were of Sudanese origin. A good 68% of the students also lived in the same home city (in Sudan or South Sudan). The research results showed that the course organized by the University of Bari helped improve perception of where they live for 16 out of 34 students. Specifically, for seven of them, the project helped change the way things were thought about and dealt with, as one student said: *"Thanks to knowledge gained across multiple fields, the project helped me better understand what surrounds me and changed the way I think about and deal with things"*; for seven more, thanks to the knowledge gained in different fields and professional sectors, the project helped them become more aware of what they believe in: *"The course made me aware of my values and those of the context I live in"*, while for five students the course led to a greater acquisition of useful skills in the field of work: *"It enabled me to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to better manage my career"*, and in particular for four students, *"It helped to improve my knowledge of sustainable development."* Exactly half the students taking part said they spent their time studying and working, but twelve out of thirty-four students also appeared rather advanced in forms of self-learning: *"I read and document myself by researching my areas of interest (e.g. computer science),"* one student stated, while another commented: *"I spend most of my time doing graphic design or drawing by hand and digitally."* The course was also crucial in the development of sectors such as information technology, as some stated: *"I am striving to build a software design and to learn more about software engineering, to improve myself and to plan for my future, especially because I have just graduated,"* expanding knowledge on important career development topics: *"It helped to improve my knowledge of sustainable development"* and to apply what had been learned in life: *"It made it easier for me to apply the knowledge acquired in society."*

As many as 19 out of the 34 students said they had the opportunity to successfully exploit much of the knowledge gained from some university exams or work experiences, particularly in marketing, which some of them already dealt with in their home country.

Equally significant was the result obtained in terms of student perception of the level of learning acquired from the course, in that 71% of the students said they had improved their perception of self-efficacy by the end of the course; in addition, 31 out of the 34 students said that the Training Module on "Job Search Techniques" would be of concrete help to find their desired employment. Finally, for 62% of the participants, Comboni College in Khartoum had a significant impact on their personal and professional growth, as nine students affirmed:

"It offers quality education and the acquisition of useful knowledge for life, but also participation in educational programmes such as the INSO project."

4. Conclusions

The assessment research highlighted that the blended learning methodology adopted during the INSO project made the course participants constantly proactive. This was true right from the start of the course, when they were asked to understand how the information platform works (and to manage it for the duration of the course), as well as in their keen attendance of the educational activities and their involvement in the final assessment, in which the objectives set not only included acquiring learning outcomes (through creation

of conceptual summary maps of the educational topics covered) but also and above all to participate in a cross-sectoral assessment of the implementation, to recognize and bring out the perceived effectiveness of the education provided, together with the implementers.

Consequently, the course participants had the opportunity to interact continually with their teachers and tutors throughout the project, asking questions and expressing doubts and any perplexities, also when it came to the actual assessment.

It follows that it is important to continue to focus on adult education as a strategic lever for change, in favour of a mutual development which can reduce human capital waste among migrant resources.

Notes

¹ See <https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/content/lafrica-che-non-ti-aspetti-e-nelle-universita>

² See <https://valutazione.blog/valutazione-partecipata/>

³ See <https://bezzicante.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/perchc3a9-la-valutazione-c3a8-migliore-se-c3a8-partecipata.pdf>

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Experiential training in organizations

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Keywords

Experiential Training,
Creativity, Languages,
Facilitation, Training

Abstract

What are the hallmarks of experiential training and what are the benefits of a widespread application of it in organizations?

This short essay aims to provide some methodological elements and to suggest tools to increase the effectiveness of training schemes, drawing inspiration from some good practices mentioned in "Management of Working Groups" which won the Adriano Olivetti AIF Award 2018-2019 for Experiential Training².

1. Conceptual foundations. The trainer communicates what the trainee understands

"What a person sees, listens and perceives on any given occasion is unique to that person and will not be exactly the same for anyone else at the same time and place" (Korzybski, 1958)³.

Rapoport added:

"Any communication is a problem of translating emotions into words and involves, in its broadest sense, not so much a search for words that correspond to other words, but experiences that correspond to other experiences."⁴

If, as is the case during training meetings, in addition to the need to communicate theories and assumptions, there is also a need to communicate one's own experience, the complexity of the communication itself increases, since words and phrases related to personal experience are used which do not have the exact same meaning for others nor do they faithfully correspond to the experience referred to. This issue pops up frequently in company training schemes where the boundary between theory and practice is particularly blurred.

2. Design and methodology of an adult training course

In 1984, David Kolb published a book which essentially expresses the principle that everyone learns through discovery and experience. He argues that experience affects knowledge and then awareness in the form of *personal learning*.

The main feature of his theory of experiential (or experimental) learning is a holistic model of the learning process, since it is a multilinear model of development in adults, consistent with what they know, how they learn, grow and develop naturally.

Training is not a self-induced process whereby, at the training venue, everything leads to a reversal of the traditional deductive design approach (explanation of the theory and subsequent analysis of examples and/or classroom exercises) in an inductive process (classroom exercise/simulation, participatory reflection, conceptualization, new exercise/simulation with application of experience), as shown in the figure below.

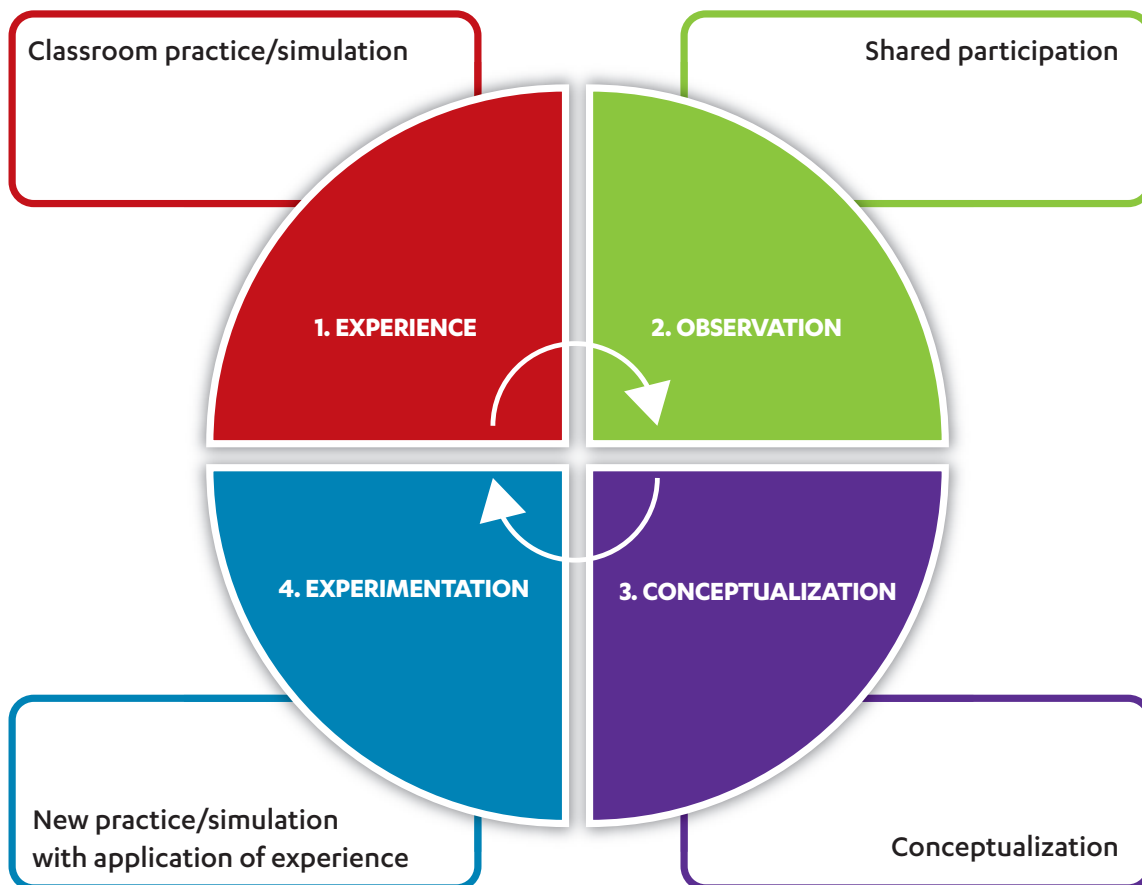


Figure 1. Possible Experiential Training cycle.
Source: Own graphic.

In fact, in the experiential model, one cannot learn simply by looking at or reading something; in order to effectively learn, the individual, group or organization must actually *do* something. Moreover, not only is the type of communication adopted by the trainer decisive (verbal, non-verbal and/or paraverbal), but for learning to be useful, it is believed that most people need to locate their new knowledge in a context which is relevant to them⁶.

The good practice under examination added a few innovations to this commonly used scheme with creative entertainment tools to open the exchange and the search for original ideas and solutions, as well as different means of sensorial suggestion (visual, kinaesthetic, auditory). Creative management of the groups and the adoption of different languages seem essential to reinforce two key factors of the experiential path: *reflectivity* and *participation*.

In general, reflectivity needs to be stimulated, nourished, and maintained over time, so that its role, often relegated to the margins of the training experience, can take a position and give the training its proper value, sense, and meaning. This requires that the exercise of reflection be carried out while remaining within the action, including one’s own way of relating to others, the dynamics that are triggered, and the stimuli that the environment feeds back – but not always in a clear and orderly way. The venue for this purpose is required to encourage encounter, dialogue and reflection.

However, participation is measured by direct exchanges with the other participants on the themes in question so as to share experiences and first-hand relational problems in order to find new solutions, and therefore requires that everyone takes part in a balanced and inclusive way.

Additionally, we absolutely must ensure constructive inclusion and the use of criticism, to help people make their different points of view accessible and understandable. To do so, it is a good idea to use group facilitation tools, creating the best environment and conditions for a pleasant, wide-ranging production of ideas to be shared and selected to reach a general joint conceptualization.

3. The structure. Taking a risk to change one's habits.

The type of education described is more commonly referred to as 'training' [in English in the text, t/n], a methodology involving the use of games and so-called 'Played Simulation' (e.g., Role Play) as an experiential means of learning, which becomes an essential tool to ensure that the people involved are free to explore their own and other people's dynamics, to take a risk while remaining within a suitably protected situation.

After the experience of the game, room is made for group discussions to share what has emerged on the level of personal experience, and on the level of relations and interactions with others ("from experience to awareness" – Bruner, 1999).

In this sense, the game represents an experience of surprising value in the educational field, since it becomes a preferential way to understand the links between restriction and responsibility, and between regularity and episode; it therefore has effects not only on the affective/motivational sphere of communicative interaction, but firstly and particularly on the cognitive sphere, since it consists of a set of rules and constraints which delimit a space within which actions and interactions are carried out and developed, and various strategies can be prepared and implemented.

The reduced number of rules and the variety of languages increase the potential of this training by virtue of greater possibilities for personal and professional situations, encouraging discussion and reflection in the post-game (or debriefing) phase, dedicated to reflecting and identifying together what happened during the course of the game and what it meant.

At this stage, the trainer's task is not to teach a lesson or provide solutions, but to optimize the development of ideas and exchanges between the participants, encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences (Marcato et al., 2017).

As an alternative, dramatization can be used to work on transforming the conflicts experienced by the participants. In this case, it is possible to resort to a 'Forum Theatre' which stimulates those participants who are non-actors in the scene performed by their colleagues to become protagonists in transforming the conflicts represented, so as to pool ideas and creative strategies which can then be used by all the participants in real life (Boal, 1977).

In order to bring the different interpretations gathered into more objective and neutral conceptualizations, the trainer can once again use the most common techniques of sharing used by facilitators and animators of working groups (e.g. Dell'Aquila, Jaowi, 2013).

The experiential training cycle which derives uses different tools, many taken from creative entertainment programmes, which can be chosen according to the topic to be dealt with in line with the trainer's preferences, to the metacommunication stimuli it is wished to provide, or the kind of learning style it is wished to maintain (see Barbe Burke, 1979). By way of example, some tools are mentioned in the figure below, which can be substituted and supplemented by each trainer with others featuring characteristics and purposes in line with the objectives of the particular training scheme proposed.

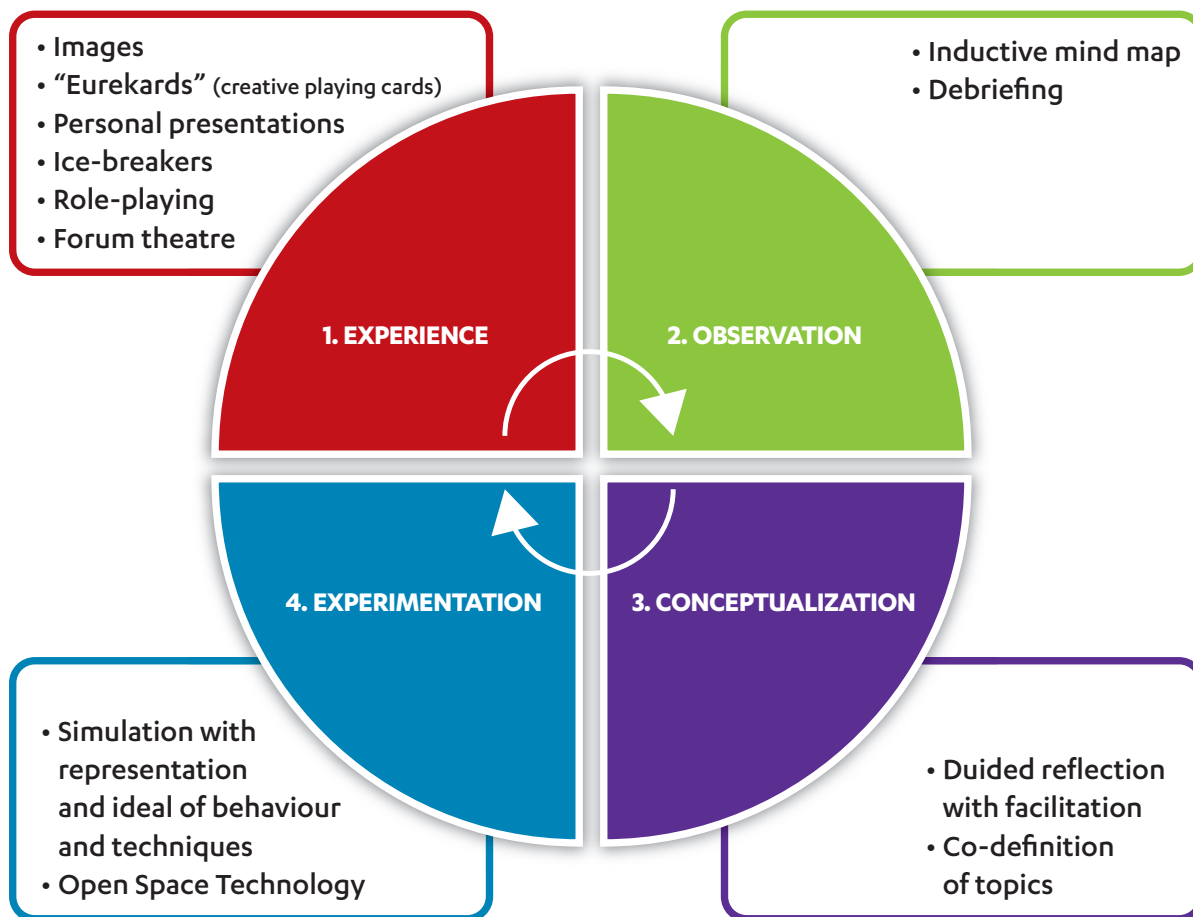


Figure 2. The cycle of creative experiential training.
Source: Own graphic.

4. Different languages for different interpretations of the world

Alongside the formalized languages, suggestions can be intermixed from experiences closer to the imagination and sensibilities of the training participant (videos, stories, photographs, music, paintings, etc.), so as to call to mind more aspects and moments of his or her personal experience.

The faculty of sight imposes a conceptual order on information from the outside world, as well as a meaning for and organization of the data collected⁷.

In the training environment, images can be used to work on interpersonal communication processes and to activate an external observation dynamic on the verbal and non-verbal modes originated in the act of communication.

This is all with the aim of training participants to interpret the various levels of communication and to share the premise that *“one cannot communicate [...] nor can it be said that communication takes place only when it is intentional, conscious, or effective”* (Watzlawick et al., 1971, p. 40).

The function of drawing does not differ much from that of a video, thanks to *Visual Thinking* (Cipriani, 2015), but it does add an interpretive element for the self. It is a tool that plays on the dual level of communication and interpretation, so it is particularly suitable for use in the experiential phase and, in the post-game, observation and conceptualization phases, to encourage reflection.

In a game phase, music also makes it possible to replace verbal language in order to translate personal attitudes and characteristics that are often hidden or not palpable. It also has an aggregating function which is reflected in the level of relations between people in the workplace and can become a pretext to stimulate aggregating

processes through a well-known language rarely used by the majority in everyday life, and even less so in groups.

Kinaesthetics is another form of non-verbal communication, i.e., the language of a definitive relationship in meta-communication, which brings forth profound aspects of the self that the person does not intend to express or in some cases of which he or she is not even aware. It is therefore possible to use stages of play which allow body language to express opinions and ideas and to verify the reactions of the other participants, for example in games using active listening methods.

5. Conclusions

Experiential training is effective in practice and achieves better results than classic training methods. The adoption of different tools, such as those briefly described in these pages, can also recreate situations similar to those which favour personal learning, especially through the played simulation experience. As we have seen, it is possible to reproduce the experiential cycle in a way that is helpful for the kind of training it is intended to propose, with extremely effective outcomes for both the trainer and the participants.

The role of a trainer with skills close to those of coaches and facilitators is key here.

Impact assessments of the good practice in question have shown that, in addition to personal and professional growth with the almost 'natural' application of what has been learned, a significant effect of improving relations with colleagues can be obtained (see the 2018-19 Adriano Olivetti Award Annual, p. 76).

This type of training, in addition to knowledge of the topics covered, can also affect relational dynamics and grow soft skills, thereby affecting work and organizational wellbeing and creating a participatory work culture within a company.

Notes

- ¹ Gaetano Fasano, researcher at INAPP (formerly ISFOL) a public research institute affiliated with the RUIAP (Italian University Lifelong Learning Network).
- ² Adriano Olivetti Award, Annual Edition 2018-19, p. 76
- ³ All of this is familiar to the neurosciences since they define the brain as an organ of action (a generator of its own reality) and not of representation (which captures reality as it really is).
- ⁴ In George Doris, *Alfred Korzybski and General Semantics*, 1983, p. 143.
- ⁵ Kolb, D., *Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development*, 1984.
- ⁶ If the new knowledge cannot be contextualized within a known and useful situation of one's own life, it is highly likely that that learning will be quickly forgotten.
- ⁷ Visual perception and thought interact, influencing one another. If perception and thought were two distinct processes, understanding would in fact be impossible (Ravazzani et al., 2015).

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Training processes for civil protection volunteers: the national ANPAS model

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Keywords

Adult Education, ANPAS – National Association of Public Assistance Associations, Training Model

Abstract

This contribution presents the work carried out by the National Public Assistance Association – ANPAS – to train volunteers engaged in civil protection in which the participatory element and peer-to-peer methodologies have been the main focus of the scheme.

1. Adult training in high-reliability organizations (HRO)

ANPAS is a network organization which brings together 923 public assistance organizations from all over Italy in an organized volunteer movement. One of its main activities is participation in the national civil protection system both to build a culture of safety and prevention in normal times, and to supply personnel and means in times of municipal, regional or national emergencies. More than 86,000 volunteers collaborate with ANPAS in addition to around 342,000 associates; across the country as a whole, there are approximately 3,700 employees and 8,000 means (for civil protection interventions; emergency or urgent work and social services)².

In light of these characteristics, since 2014, ANPAS has been committed to training volunteers to raise their level of cultural preparation, operational skills, and individual and organizational resilience by means of projects funded by the government's Civil Protection Department. The macro-objectives of this type of training are: to plan intervention activities and limit possible errors while, at the same time, guaranteeing a margin of flexibility and a response to the unexpected in order to let the system function even in unforeseen and unpredictable situations, as in the case of highly unlikely events, those defined in the literature by the *Black Swan Theory*³.

One essential feature of these activities is the need for them to take place within *Highly Reliable Organizations* (HRO), i.e. those capable of employing organizational forms which can lighten the trials and tribulations suffered and make the recovery process faster (Taleb N. N., 2014).

These organizational peculiarities, together with an approach of an andragogical and experiential type, have been the main features guiding the training schemes at both macro and micro levels.

2. The training model

The theoretical core of the training model developed can be summed up as follows:

- Assumption of adult psycho-social characteristics to design training schemes co-created in line with the socio-constructivist paradigm (Alberici, 2002; Knowles, 2002; Carletti, Varani, 2005; Johnson & Johnson, 2005);
- Training that is mainly experiential, in line with David Kolb's model, aimed at promoting reflective skills in action (Kolb, 1984);
- A vision of the organization as one of *learning* (Alessandrini, 2016).

Beginning from these assumptions, the educational offering has been designed and organized with a 'cascade' model between peers: in point of fact, the major resource of a voluntary organization of these dimensions consists in all the people participating who allow it to function. The growth and personal and technical development of the volunteers is also an essential condition for organizational growth and improved technical performance, including in emergency work.

The first-level training, promoted nationwide, concerns methodological-didactic and specialist preparation for the relevant technical activities of volunteers who will then become trainers themselves. This first step is designed to train volunteers for their future role as trainers: it consists in methodological preparation and groundwork for their role to equip them with the skills necessary to help other volunteers learn more easily. The training/trainers' activities are carried out during two intensive residencies for a total duration of 32 hours. This first phase is followed by technical/specialist preparation linked to the particular role or civil protection activities carried out in the individual's association. This second training session, again organized using an intensive residency formula, has a variable duration according to the type of output profile: from 16 basic hours to a maximum of 32.

The second level, promoted regionally, is carried out by volunteer trainers who have passed the previous course, is comprehensive, and relies on a Training Needs Analysis at individual regional associations and committees.

Acting as a link are the jointly developed training programmes which eventually become 'kits' – containing teaching activities and materials, tools for analysis, assessment and monitoring – used throughout Italy to guarantee a homogeneous educational offering and a level of preparation monitored at entry and exit.

The assessment phase consists of 3 main procedures:

1. An orientation and selection system consisting of preparatory online activities (study and selective tests) which must be passed to be invited to a motivational interview. This interview is based around a series of categories which take in previous experiences, availability, and the real possibility of covering the role the person is applying for, as well as meeting the entry profile established for each course.
2. Assessment of the person's level at the beginning, during and at the end of the course, and therefore with a formative and summative value. The entry and exit test results are compared at the end of the course and are also tallied with the feedback questionnaire responses.
3. Feedback questionnaires for the courses with an assessment by the teachers, on the syllabus (preliminary information, timeframes and venues, teaching material); self-assessment of the expectations met or otherwise, the contribution made to the group, and so on.⁴

To guarantee quality in the first-level process, a centralized orientation and selection phase is included on entry to ensure an initial assessment which respects the expectations and characteristics of the applicants and a correct positioning with respect to the exit profiles stipulated in the training objectives (the job profile of for-profit organizations).

The following bullet points (Spinelli, 2013) were the basic components of this approach:

- Training is a participatory process;
- Like other public assistance activities and services it is characterized by a strong ethical dimension;
- Peer-to-peer and collaborative training is the most appropriate methodological approach to disseminate and build knowledge and to foster cultural growth;

- First and foremost, the activities respect and exploit the training participants' knowledge and skills;
- The ultimate aim of the training is to enable participants to carry out the role for which they have been trained in an informed, well-prepared and autonomous way, while respecting all the members of the movement.

The training practice developed based on these premises has favoured the experiential and social dimension of the training and inductive knowledge processing methods. This choice was dictated by the desire to make the most of the participants' previous experiences and to help them during their training to carry out guided learning which is both reflective and attentive to the creation of the group and the subsequent teamwork, something essential for civil protection activities and for a movement which is nationwide in scope.

The methodological choices were dictated by reflections of a formative nature, in close relation with the value horizon which determines the associative nature of ANPAS:

"In this perspective, designing and implementing a training scheme is a matter of power: the more an association is able to self-determine, allowing equal freedom for its associates while fuelling their ability, the more it will manage power in a form of co-responsibility close to participatory democracy." (Spinelli, 2016, 28)

3. Results

Following this participatory model, which focuses on training trainers and the widespread diffusion of the educational offering among peers, from 2014 until now, training courses for trainers have been carried out in the following specializations:

- National mobile convoy operators;
- Logistics operators;
- Kitchen operators;
- Vulnerable category operators;
- Coordination centre operators;
- Civil protection association managers;
- Dog-handling unit evaluators.

Of great importance is the basic course to prepare emergency interventions in an ANPAS civil protection field (National Mobile Convoy Operators); this course is the first level to be eligible for any of the subsequent specializations and, to date, has 79 trainers; 300 courses already carried out, and a total of around 6,500 trained volunteers. Using the same model, the course to prepare operators for the vulnerable categories, with 24 volunteer trainers, currently employs 235 trained operators, of which 215 have passed the course. The other courses, some of which are currently being trialled, have smaller numbers depending on the real needs of the various specializations.

The learning assessment involves an entry and exit selection for all national courses, while for the regional courses the assessment is only selective for some courses and is determined by the level of specialization required.

On the other hand, all events are monitored in order to obtain data concerning the approval of the educational offering which, to date, has obtained remarkably high scores, also as regards the training methodologies used.

4. Conclusions

Using the same scheme to train trainers, ANPAS has designed, planned and carried out institutional training which has a less operative approach falling more within the movement's mission, identity and vision of values (a course entitled "Being ANPAS"). The training model has also been adopted for courses without a cascade pattern, but which still use participatory methods of building organizational knowledge as a lever to generate new knowledge, to foster the motivation of the adults and recognize their previous experiences, and to disseminate the culture of volunteering and the constitutional values on which this is based.

Although the activity described for the civil protection training is voluntary, the necessary preparation to carry it out effectively is highly specialized and 'professionalizing', not in the sense that it is carried out as a work activity, but due to the fact that it is necessary to work with knowledge and competence. This makes the training model a mechanism well integrated with both the ANPAS organogram and the national civil protection system.

Notes

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² The national association's balance sheet can be consulted at the following link: <https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Ascds%3AUS%3Ac8b110e-9824-4c56-9bfa-d55fcae33935>

³ The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable, by Nassim Nicholas Taleb

⁴ The entry data for the three civil protection cascade training sessions are as follows:

	CASCATA 1					CASCATA 1					CASCATA 1		
	Op. colonna mobile nazionale	Resp. Cucina	Resp. Logistica	Resp. Campo	Op. Segreteria e sala operativa	Op. categorie fragili	Psicologi emergenza	Comunicatori	Op. nuclei di valutazione	Valutatori unità cinofile	Op. attività assistente con animali	Op. colonna mobile nazionale	Resp. Associativi e Op. Centri di coordinamento
N. CANDIDATI	120	35	50	48	66	64	27	46	143	32	47	77	103
N. NON SUPERATA SELEZIONE (NO FAD)	69	14	27	24	35						18	38	48
N. IDONEI NON SELEZIONATI						4	3	10	48		0	8	21
N. NON IDONEI						35	6	21	47	14	6	11	10
N. AMMESSI	51	20	23	24	32	25	18	25	48	17	23	26	25
N. RITIRATI											5	0	0

Figure 3. The civil protection cascade training sessions.
Source: Own graphic.

The learning assessment highlights a gap between the entry and exit knowledge levels, summarized by way of example and for each course, as follows:

RISULTATI IN INGRESSO	RISULTATI IN USCITA	DIFFERENZIALE
PRIMO FINE SETTIMANA		
8,2 (su 10)	8,8 (su 10)	+0,5
SECONDO FINE SETTIMANA		
6,9 (su 10)	9,8 (su 10)	+2,8
SECONDO FINE SETTIMANA		
14,1 (su 18)	15,8 (su 18)	1,7

Figure 4. Learning assessment.
Source: Own graphic.

For the mobile convoy operators course, out of a nationwide sample of 3,840 students, the average results on entry came to 9.8/15 with 12.1/15 at the end. Instead, individual data were used by the teachers to take compensatory action.

The monitoring data were used by the technical staff to obtain process information. The general trend shows great satisfaction among the teaching body; satisfaction with the methodologies used and the creation of the groups. While the information received prior to the course was of a sufficient average, it did show peaks (good information) and troughs (bad information) related to individual volunteers and/or the home territories.

At a territorial level, the assessment system is similar: the entry selection mechanism, if envisaged for a course, uses the same procedures; however, the learning assessment is more quantitative and summative, while the exit feedback questionnaire remains the same. For the cascade training session 3, the questionnaire is administered digitally.

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Improving the work of public catering operators: a training project

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Keywords

Lifelong Learning, Improvement, Adult Education

Abstract

This contribution describes the contents and partial results of a training course which is still in progress for operators, managers and directors of a large catering chain's outlets in central and northern Italy.

The training scheme, which is still under development, is addressed to more than a thousand beneficiaries and deals with improving psychological wellbeing at work, both that of individuals and from a team working perspective. The project, which has been carried out by the Laboratory of Ideas (Laboratorio delle Idee) in Fabriano since 2017, has provided an overview of the commercial catering approach and cues for a concept of continuing education for workers as people.

1. Introduction: The project and training scheme for continuous improvement in commercial catering outlets open to the public

The training project described is based on the lifelong learning approach (Checcucci, Cusmai & Rosetti, 2011) geared to improve the skills of the individual being trained within the sphere of adult education (Oliva, 2010). The concept of the *double portability* of the improvement has been employed, seeing in this formula a vision of work which helps a person grow by improving his/her working abilities (Labideas, 2018).

Within the course, skills development and the need to personalize the learning according to the type of beneficiary have gradually taken shape. To this end, the training has been characterized above all as a 'spiral' path, adapting the formative concepts to each role in a company's organogram, allowing exchanges between the various steps of its organization without the risk of letting relationships lapse into the classic pattern of workplace conflicts, but fostering awareness and a sense of mutual responsibility at all levels.

2. The context

The company involved in the training scheme was established in 2017 and possesses more than sixty outlets comprising 16 free-flow restaurants⁵, 24 cafés, 12 ice-cream shops and 14 pizzerias also offering takeaways, located in six Italian regions (Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Abruzzo and the Marches).

As far as the job roles are concerned, the company has: directors, channel managers (one for each type of service), outlet managers; station chefs, HR managers, and operators, divided by task (dining room, bar, and so on).

3. Beneficiaries and training methodology

The training scheme has involved everyone in the company (about one thousand persons), including managers at all levels. The methodology adopted has included three ways of carrying out the training: classrooms, face-to-face with both theoretical and hands-on content; training on the job, based on the trainers' direct observations in the workplace; one-on-one interviews with each operator – general manager – outlet manager.

For each of these training sessions, specific tools have been prepared according to the subjects to be tackled, subdivided into: working/training tools (entry and exit questionnaires, info sheets for group work, visual and multimedia materials); improvement monitoring tools (self-assessment Improvement Forms); trainers' reports.

4. Training programme

The training realized (still ongoing and now in its second edition) was born out of the company's need to *connect on the same training level* and in the perspective of *lifelong learning*, the various figures of its organogram, starting from the finding of sundry problems which affect the fluidity of the service and consequently the quality of the product (both perceived and delivered), including the psychological approach to work, customer relations, group work, and relations with the managers (Cappetta, 2018). For each of these issues, a course has been developed which, by reconnecting the personal aspects of the individual operator to those of the group and the corporate sphere, aims to provide participants with the tools for subjective, group, and corporate improvements as a whole.

The continuous improvement theme

In the first edition of the course, certain topics were introduced which form the foundation of the continuous improvement concept, which is in turn the main goal of a training approach based on lifelong learning.

Participants were presented with the 'double portability' concept as regards their work: first they were administered a classroom survey on the main problems encountered, then the results were analysed looking at the solutions in detail, finally a guiding thread was laid down between the improvements in personal life, which is to be seen as a positive reciprocal contribution of knowledge and skills, in order to strengthen motivation towards participation and change.

In a second phase, six generic soft skills, or improvement tools, were introduced, useful for personal growth at work and in daily life: *communication, problem-solving, teamwork, empathy, resilience, and ability to listen*. For each of these tools, hands-on group activities were carried out. At the end of this phase, each learner received an *Improvement Form* divided into three 'sectors', matched to three different kinds of 'customer' (in the classroom a 'customer' was defined as *someone who asked to satisfy a particular need*): the customer 'me' (related to the physical and outward attitude/behaviour/presence at work); the customer 'us' (related to the working group); the customer 'him/her' (related to customer relations, including communication and relationship).

Training on the job

Training on the job took place at the real workplaces, paying particular attention to the characteristics of the working spaces and hours.

The observations concerned both the personal attitude of each participant in the workplace and specific aspects of the technical organization and interpersonal relations during the performance of their tasks or duties.

One-on-one interviews

During this last phase of the training, short interviews were carried out with individual operators in which the participants handed over the self-assessment forms and had the opportunity to give feedback on their personal level of awareness.

The form and the subsequent discussion identified the objective of the continuous improvement which each individual would be working on in the months to come.

5. Analysis of the data collected

Within the classroom, the improvement tool mentioned most often was group work (followed by communication, ability to listen, problem-solving, empathy, and resilience). As regards the subjective plan, various problems emerged, linked to difficulties with challenging others, the tackling of colleagues and managers, and effective communication. Lack of time (or the inefficient allocation of working hours) and a lack of fitting technical skills to deal with elements of stress, anxiety, or uncertainty were also emphasized. However, in the classroom, activities which focused on the participants' choice of generic skills (tools for improvement) allowed them to cope with the main problems encountered during the training sessions. In this way, the training scheme was able to associate every difficulty found with a suitable tool with which to work from case to case (*problem-solving* for technical difficulties, *communication* for relational problems, and so on).

As for the Improvement Form, some highly significant data emerged among the participants⁶: the forms analysed show a score from between 1 to 10 of 4.9 in relation to the questions on the individuals' perception of themselves in the workplace, while a positive score emerged (with an average of 8.5) in the items related to listening to the customer, a predisposition to change according to requests, patience, and a readiness to deal with changes, to then subsequently reveal, in the interviews, a whole series of statements concerning insecurity and a lack of self-esteem which did not correspond in the least to the levels of awareness expressed on the form.

6. Conclusions

The course described here has been developed with the aim of arranging the concepts inherent to training for continuous improvement and lifelong learning within a commercial catering context, in order to spot problems, strengths, and opportunities to develop a concept of training which, starting from the individual operator/worker, could lead to overall improvements within a company as a whole.

In order to achieve this goal, all of the company's job roles and individual figures were involved, in order to define a common path for corporate improvement which starts from the growth of the individual with the ultimate aim of improving the entire organizational structure. In this presentation, we have limited ourselves to analysing the training programme carried out with operators (since the one for the managers is still in progress), in order to provide an overall picture of potential training schemes for improvement which can lead to corporate development and enhancement. In this scenario, some important aspects have emerged of just how individual operators perceive themselves and their role within a company. Generally speaking, the data analysis has confirmed what is often observed in group work dynamics, namely, a constant lack of awareness of personal limitations, personal error, and relationship difficulties in resolving conflicts positively.

In this regard, in-depth studies have been made in subsequent lessons along with requests for reflection, both individually and as a group, as has also been done in the training programme for the general and outlet managers, seeing in the improvement in group work (inevitably linked to an improvement in the personal conditions of each individual) a flywheel for an overall improvement in various working environments (Bonini, 2002).

The interviews concluded with the identification of one or a number of improvement objectives and with some practical suggestions from trainers who had steered learners towards the use of one or more of the improvement tools (or skills) analysed in the lessons, to promote the specific improvement identified as an objective in one or more facets of everyone's work.

Within the framework of results achieved in the training programme for operators (which will be integrated with those for the training of managers and directors) prospects can be seen for innovative development in commercial catering training courses, especially when it comes to the triangular relationship between operator-company-customer (Cornacchia, 2018).

To this end, the Laboratory of Ideas has developed, as a second phase of the training scheme (still underway), a course centred around the themes of *Lean Organization* and *Lean Thinking*, with the aim of adapting the contents for each company figure involved in the programme, from operators to outlet managers (Egea, 2018). In this light, the structure and promotion of a training procedure within companies that could be called 'inclusive' is conceivable, whereby each individual role/corporate figure can receive, through training, the tools to develop a path of awareness and work improvement (on both technical and psychological levels), which could be applied throughout any company working in commercial catering.

Notes

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- ⁵ Free-flow restaurants have been developed around the traditional self-service, characterized as restaurants with separate islands offering “the various preparations (first courses, main courses, side dishes, desserts, drinks...) where the customer can move freely without following a queue and a preset route.” (Galeazzi, 2009)
- ⁶ Data was collected from the self-assessment improvement forms through a randomized sampling of the total number of forms collected, in a cross-section of 100 surveys. The percentages were obtained by mathematically averaging the responses given to each item on the form, with a score from 1 to 10.

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#CUOREDINAPOLI: Pedagogical considerations on an adult training experience, between work on-site, cooperative learning and service learning

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Keywords

Adult Learning, Service Learning, Relational Art

Abstract

This contribution proposes a pedagogical reading, in terms of adult learning, of the artistic/relational experience #CUOREDINAPOLI carried out for several years by the Academy of Fine Arts in particularly thorny urban conditions. Through the categories of Territorial Interventions, Cooperative Learning, and Service Learning, the intention has been to offer ideas for reflection on a particular teaching practice and an innovation intervention with a strong participatory impact.

1. A revolutionary experience

#CUOREDINAPOLI has proved to be an extraordinary experience in the most literal sense of the word. Not only has it produced a series of artistic, communicative and cultural events which, over the last few years, have involved and inspired artists, students, tourists and inhabitants of problematic territories in the centre of Naples, through a large relational anthropological sculpture created within the city boundaries it has also been nourished by relationships between the various subjects who have continually contributed to supporting it. It is an extra-ordinary experience also, and above all, because it started from a fundamental viewpoint: to enter the ordinary in order to draw attention to it, revitalize it, and change the perspective of it without altering it. The territories involved in the artistic operation promoted by the students and tutors of the New Technologies of Art programme at the Naples Academy of Fine Arts are those which, although within the city's geographical centre, often represent 'cultural peripheries', in which the aesthetic sense – but also the relational one – takes on specific and peculiar forms and connotations which cannot be altered but must first and foremost be understood, welcomed, and then invested with new meanings. The artistic activities were developed over ten months and were carried out through the active involvement of a group of more than one hundred artists, both students and tutors – from conception to organization to realization.

The students lived in the territory, questioning it, and dialoguing and building close relations with the inhabitants to identify the desires and needs for realistic improvement.

Thus were born the various operations which led, among other things, to painting the cracks of older buildings red, in order not to hide them, but to underscore their history; to the creation of personalized avatars with the faces of the local traders who then exhibited these outside their businesses to emphasize their individual commitment as agents of change by 'putting themselves out there'; to the revaluation of abandoned objects which, through a new denomination, made up the works of art in an 'open-air museum'; ending with the final long table laid outdoors under the stars which was the poetic scenario for a communal dinner.

This intention to transform the existing viewpoint would already suffice to define #CUOREDINAPOLI as an experience which is also deeply pedagogical, however it is possible to grasp further formative and educational

nuances starting from the theme chosen for the last edition which ended in May 2019: “a *revolutionary realization*”. The pedagogical reference to the thinking of Paulo Freire on the various possibilities and opportunities for learning and education in adulthood, thanks, and through, the process of building awareness as a key to accessing a *revolutionary* change, is made even more concrete and evident in the practice of active participation which acts as an architrave for the whole process leading to the final event. A process which can be studied through three great pedagogical magnifying glasses which are particularly significant for adult learning: *alliance with the territory, cooperative and informal learning, and service learning*.

2. The pedagogical alliance with the territory

The first ‘revolutionary’ thought-action employed by #CUOREDINAPOLI was an interpretation of the territory to operate in as a macro container of extant heterogeneous meanings which art could only make more visible – amplifying the realization, in fact. The Quartieri Spagnoli (Spanish Quarters) area in Naples chosen for the last edition (like the neighbouring ones of the previous editions) represents a thorny urban situation, largely also due to the stereotyped views of it that have been generated in recent years, for better or worse.

As many know, it is at first sight one of the most densely populated and deprived areas of the city, socially problematic, characterized by precariousness and degradation, and poorly integrated with the urban fabric. An emblem of the contradictions of the contemporary city but which the artistic intervention wished, right from the outset, to transform into an active network of sharing and participation, capable of generating an exchange of abilities, skills and knowledge, in order to transform the awareness of the people involved. This novel interpretation of the context was the starting point to build a common way of belonging, one in which “it is possible to link the construction of ‘knowledge’ to the construction of ‘meaning’ (to make/reprocess experiences, to build meanings, to welcome others, to outline choices, to transfer one’s own knowledge to new contexts, in order to solve real problems and cope with different points of view)” (Azzalli, Bertacci, Betti, 2013, p.17). Through a *sign*, the heart, which *amplified* the sense of repossession of the area and the city, came a way to “explain and recover the project’s philosophy, trying not to exceed the limit between restoration and interpretive reconstruction.” (Aragon, 2012, p. 203) The sign was used by the citizens as a hashtag to communicate to the world and to each other, thus penetrating the social fabric and showing its pedagogical value with roots even deeper than the bonds created within the relational, social and urban fabric of this territory.

The long process of sharing and exchange, marked by the realization of the artistic and relational devices mentioned briefly above, found its natural convergence in a final festive event which transformed the *Quartieri* into a vibrant centre for the elaboration of visions and practices aimed at renewing the territory. An experimentation and a subjectivity destined to merge in a complex flow of energies, demonstrating in the field that “the relational experience is a process intrinsic to artistic practices, but in the interactive dimension it becomes a design, that is, conscious, manifest and determinant, starting from the conception of the artistic idea itself. The relationship is no longer merely a condition of the artistic activity but its raw material. The involvement of the public in the interactive environment becomes structural, innate to the work and no longer simply an occasional prearranged or desired event.” (Balzola, Rosa, 2011, p.17)

Learning through the ‘*revolutionary realization*’ thus became an awareness and insight capable of subverting actions, directions, and ways of thinking. A small gesture (such as cleaning the alleyways before an upcoming holiday, for example) could become an example to be followed by others and could give a positive sign to the entire neighbourhood.

In the context of adult learning, training which takes place by adopting a relational exchange with a territory

has a considerable pedagogical impact on a twofold level: in this case, in the formal context, it has enabled students to contribute to the development and refinement of certain soft skills, for example, the ability to read and analyse a context in terms of needs and potential, while, on a more informal level, for the inhabitants of the neighbourhood it has brought a greater openness to innovation and a fruitful appreciation of their daily circumstances also in terms of resilience.

3. Learning through cooperation

By striving to interweave the philosophy of #CUOREDINAPOLI with the pedagogical thinking of Martha Nussbaum (2012), it is possible to reach the further awareness that to improve society art can also offer educational opportunities, to make some of the fundamental principles of critical awareness and the qualities of humanity flourish, such as understanding of others, empathy, and solidarity. To do so, the methodology used by the laboratory, which led to the realization of the relational sculpture, stressed the need to integrate technical-artistic teaching models with innovative pedagogical sensibilities, capable of training the artists according to a cooperative learning dimension (Ellerani, 2013). This would also make them active players in an increasingly complex field in crisis; a pedagogical urgency manifested through the choice of transferring, also physically, the teaching laboratory inside the territory where it was intended to operate, in order to help form an articulate gaze oriented to a shared commitment between the individual and the community. In this way, a multidimensional learning environment was built which, according to the *capability approach* perspective, yearned to become a “learning-enabling ecosystem” (Ellerani, 2017), attentive to relationships and also a promoter of social innovation, generating both cultural and artistic opportunities.

For their part, the local inhabitants and traders have represented important components of the project, becoming part of the ongoing learning community and thereby forming and bringing, through their direct active and spontaneous participation, a decisive contribution to the fact that the event carried out would not be possible in that same way in any other place, dispelling any trace of anonymity or stereotyping. An event which merely prompted all the members of this new community to become interested in their own neighbourhood, through the realization of products so personalized that they generated a passage from that art defined in the first editions of the project as ‘site-specific’, to one which was even more profoundly structured by the relationships created and which took the name and characteristics of a ‘people-specific’ art, that is to say, centred around the people, their stories, and their specific ways of operating within the territorial context – Nussbaum yet again.

In terms of learning, what was revolutionary in this case was the awareness of being subjects who traverse places, relationships and stories and who learn to be part of a flow whose elements influence everyone in turn.

4. Revolutionary service learning strategies

The teaching and learning objective of overcoming the divisions inside the laboratory, between students and tutors and between the various disciplines involved in the collective project, was amplified by the overcoming in the community of the division between the closed space of the Academy and the wider, varied and complex space of the territory, so much so that many of the components related to the service learning methodology could be attributed to the project, in particular those that most closely match the characteristics of adult learning. Interpreting the teaching strategies of the project in a pedagogical key in the light of those proper to the service learning methodology, made it possible to elucidate and highlight the twofold possibility, already well documented in the literature (Speck, Hoppe, 2004, Furco 2011; Selmo, 2014 Mortari, 2017): on the one hand to offer to the students as protagonists, fully and at every stage of the project, and to the Academy as an

institution open to the territory, a concrete opportunity for the practical implementation of the pedagogical principles of active learning - through a research device of the kind so dear to Dewey; on the other, to support and add content to the educational mandate of the artistic training for the personal growth of young adults. Fostering and realizing this dynamic and fruitful opening was to have several formative effects. As a matter of fact, when it comes to learning in adulthood it is not sufficient to know more to understand better:

"The emphasis is not on adding new experiences or more up-to-date content, but on the ability of the adult to reinterpret a remote experience based on a brand-new set of meanings." (Biasin, 2016, p. 58).

In this light, service learning is well matched to the specific characteristics of adult learning thanks to its natural polyhedral openness which allows its contents to be projected beyond the formal context of teaching, beyond the traditional division between the fields of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. #CUOREDINAPOLI has proved to be an implicit pedagogical model and has encouraged the meeting of subjects from many different territorial contexts with the community chosen for the intervention through a structure assimilable to service learning. This community has become more convivial and more local and territorial thanks to the work and constant attendance and has proved to be a most suitable space to improve artistic skills on the one hand and a vision of life quality on the other, especially when it became necessary to cope with this level of deprivation and shortcomings. The latter demanded a capacity for collaboration, dialogue and an exchange of visions which further fulfilled the learning potential.

In more exquisitely pedagogical terms, a position remarkably close to that expressed by Mezirow (2000; 2003) in his theory of transformative learning, when he affirmed the learning potential of the *disorienting dilemma*, that brand-new situation which can come up and become a source of learning only if posed by reality, a confrontation between theory and practice.

Mezirow is not the only educator who can be taken as a reference for the explanation of the links, implicit and otherwise, between the methodology of service learning and that adopted by the New Technologies of Art programme. Freire's thinking in his definition of education as emancipation is equally potent today.

"In fact, problem-solving education" is the intention behind the specific practice of service learning which has been dealt with. To the extent that it allows access to "a new mindset in which, through dialogue, the principles of accountability and sharing useful for the construction of a real democratic society come into being through the concrete commitment of each individual." (Freire, 1997, p.132).

The active, dialogical and participatory method proposed by Freire found its natural interpretation within the constant exchanges that occurred in the laboratory: when theory and action find their space of co-presence, an experience becomes an opportunity for learning.

By placing on a level playing field both the teaching activity of the tutors and the learning activity of the students, there comes a verification of that reciprocity of the educational relationship underlying the democratic education of adults in which

"[...] various aspects come into play, which not only concern an exhaustive knowledge of the discipline being taught and of the teaching method, but also refer to the communicative, relational and organizational dimension of the teacher's activity [...] the interaction between the teacher and the students must be based on mutual respect and recognition of the learning path which everyone, in their individuality and within the class, is experiencing." (Concina, 2016, p.22-23).

The dimension of the formative relationship is thus transformed from the one-way kind which, in more traditional teaching, links the student and the teacher individually, into a two-way recursive kind which defines a virtuous circle of collaboration and reciprocity.

The abolition of the distance between the learning that takes place in classrooms and real life assumes, through Friere's reading, a clearer social and political dimension very dear to the #CUOREDINAPOLI project; just as it was for this Brazilian educator, education must be understood as a factor of an improving transformation; for all the protagonists of the project this has taken place through art put at the service of the 'oppressed', of those who, in other words, because of living in problematic territories need to 'free themselves' by recognizing themselves. The students involved in the #CUOREDINAPOLI experience have promoted, in line with the service learning approach, not only a service *for* the community but also through the community, since it has always taken place *through* a participatory and shared design. In view of this, the learning activity has transformed itself from being an individual pathway into an essentially social process which has allowed the simultaneous cultivation of social skills, specific artistic knowledge, and intellectual development.

One of the results of the research process which accompanied the last edition of #CUOREDINAPOLI was a reconstruction of the pedagogical bases on which the service learning proposal was founded, which can be summarized in the following elements: the importance attributed to direct experience as a source of learning; the protagonists as the first requirement for participation in the project; the relationship between the Academy and the outside world; the social responsibility for artistic training; the value attributed to dialogue and the encounter between different visions and, as a result, democracy as the means and goal of learning. #CUOREDINAPOLI therefore becomes a pedagogical metaphor of the beating heart of an enlarged community, given that it involves the community outside to which the artistic product is addressed, but also because it is a driving force for new forms of community in which adult learning is functional to socialization and socialization is functional to better learning, while triggering cognitive and experiential conflicts that allow access to continuous intellectual and interpersonal growth. The term *community* therefore takes on multiple meanings: it refers to the neighbouring and territorial communities that become partners in the project, but is also expanded since the latter, together with the laboratory community (made up of students, tutors and other institutional partners), help to generate the broader concept of an educational community (Tramma, 2015), one geared to a transformative improvement (Biasin, 2016).

In conclusion, it is possible to describe as revolutionary the awareness attained by the project during the various editions that everything exists in relation to something else and it is this relationship which can influence and transform the dynamics in question.

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The sense of continuing to educate ourselves in adulthood. An experience of non-formal education at the University of the Third Age and Spare Time in Trentino.

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Keywords

Adult Education, Participation,
Joint Design of Educational Offering,
Widespread Territoriality,
Public-Private Partnerships

Abstract

This article deals with the subject of non-formal learning and includes a presentation of the forty-year-long experience of the University of the Third Age of Trentino, whose mission is to educate and build the awareness and autonomy of each individual, regardless of social class, income bracket, or education level.

1. Foreword

The activities of the University of the Third Age and Spare Time of Trentino lie within the framework of lifelong learning, considered one of the essential elements for a harmonious social, cultural and economic development in modern societies. It was in the “White Paper on Education and Training” (Cresson, 1996) that the foundations were laid for lifelong learning, directing the European Union’s efforts “towards the development of a learning society” in which “to whet society’s appetite for education and training throughout life” (Cresson, 1996, p. 7). A further important document defining lifelong learning is the June 2002 Resolution of the Council of the European Union, which defines it as

“all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective” (2002/C 163/01 No 11, p.2).

It is in this sense that it is recognized as a key element within the context of Community policies, indispensable in the drive towards competitiveness and economic growth. Alongside this purely economic dimension, a further feature concerns more closely the perspective from which continuing (or further) education is viewed in this paper. Of equal importance for the EU is the dimension of active citizenship which is linked to

“...the theme of social cohesion and ultimately nourishes the fulfilment of individuals’ personal aspirations. “We are therefore talking about lifelong learning as a complex structure of learning which in turn is divided into the three dimensions of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) that can be applied throughout a citizen’s life (life-long learning). In 2012, at an Italian level, this educational perspective was recognized as “any activity undertaken by a person in a formal, non-formal or informal way, during the various stages of life, in order to improve their knowledge, capabilities and skills, with a view to personal, civic, social and occupational growth” (Law 92/2012, 4, para. 51).

Starting from the definition of learning just described, the following paragraphs present the experience of the University of the Third Age of Trentino, which falls in all respects within the 'non-formal learning' category.

2. Experience of non-formal learning at the University of the Third Age and Spare Time in Trentino

The University of the Third Age and Spare Time of Trentino (UTETD) was founded in 1979 within the framework of the Regional School for Higher Education in Public Administration, the first Italian establishment of this kind. The brainchild of Professor Pietro Nervi and inspired by an experiment initiated by Professor Wellas of the French University of Toulouse, right from the outset it has been distinguished as an innovative way to assist the more elderly population by responding to the specific needs that the latter meet in their daily life.

Since its foundation, the underlying plan has been to open branches among the various municipalities throughout the territory of Trentino.

The UTETD's activities have become part of a scenario in which growing life expectancy has chipped away at key factors of individual life, above all else, time management, with the ensuing risk of relational impoverishment.

The disruption has arisen from the difficulty of the more elderly to understand their identity, and therefore to act appropriately, due to a lack of analytical and processing tools after poor schooling, a 'stiffening' and obsolescence of the information they have learned, low self-learning capacity, difficulty in transferring information/skills from one context to another, over and above scarce opportunities for proper reflection. The consequences have been twofold: on the one hand, a sense of alienation from the real world and on the other, an uncritical adoption of stereotyped models which have given the illusion of feeling a part of society (Girardi, 1998).

Given this situation, it has become necessary to encourage the acquisition of cultural tools which are more appropriate to become more familiar with and learn to manage the situations encountered and also to change personality. To achieve this goal, the adult/senior citizen needs tools to understand the real world and also him- or herself.

The resulting cultural project has been characterized by an awareness that any knowledge which does not correspond with the life of individuals and the community, and transform this, risks becoming an exercise that is an end in itself, or merely a pleasant pastime.

The cultural project, revised and updated at the beginning of the 1990s in the light of social changes and the changing characteristics of those taking part, has been enriched and consolidated in its scientific approach, content and methodological system to become an advanced adult education system. In all these years, the catchment area has also been enlarged by lowering the enrolment age from 35 years onwards, with the aim of offering an educational opportunity to a much wider audience.

Nowadays, the distinguishing features of the University of the Third Age and Spare Time of Trentino rest on five key points:

- The presence of a structured cultural project;
- Availability throughout the territory;
- The participatory construct of the educational offering;
- A teaching body with specific skills in non-formal training;
- A shared system which sees the public, private and voluntary sectors working together for the success of the project.

3. A structured cultural project

The primary objective of the cultural project of the University of the Third Age and Spare Time is the education and building of awareness and autonomy of people of any class, income bracket or education level. The formative areas and those of more in-depth study form part of a vast and specialized offering to become more knowledgeable in history, philosophy, art, science, politics, various peoples' communication networks, and the potential that one's own body can gain through physical education.

Consequently, the primary aim of this University is to enable every person attending it to carry out his or her own project, through which to grow in psychological, intellectual, relational and physical wellbeing, while freely choosing their own fields of interest, itineraries and timeframes.

In 2005, while reflecting on the need to give the training project a broader and more interdisciplinary scope, a need to recognize the right place for physical education began to clearly emerge, and to consider this to all intents and purposes an integral part of the cultural project as a tool for personal growth on a par with the other disciplines. It is by the very nature of such a well-defined, integrated project that this institution merits the moniker 'the university of the person'.

4. Availability throughout the territory

Today there are 78 branches for the 175 municipalities of Trentino, an arrangement aimed at meeting the needs of an Alpine region characterized by an independent tradition, and where different cultures, including linguistic ones, rub shoulders. At the same time, the spread across the territory has facilitated the participation of people living in municipalities far from the regional capital and allowed a structuring of specific pathways which take local needs and resources into account in the firm conviction that adult education is a fundamental right for the development of a quality cultural life as well as the social status of individuals, society as a whole, and the local community.

5. The participatory construct of the educational offering

Since the early 2000s, the 78 regional sites have gradually introduced the method of participatory programming of training activities, which means a series of annual meetings attended by students and local administrators aimed at defining and organizing activities to achieve one of the fundamental goals of the UTETD cultural project: namely, to give people the opportunity to make an informed choice of which educational pathway to undertake.

Initially greeted with a certain scepticism, the 'shared plenary programming' has proved fundamental for the participants as an opportunity for exchange, sharing, inspiration, and evolution. Giving the opportunity to make an informed choice of the educational pathway to follow had the immediate consequence of increased enrolments and attendance. It has also proved to be an appropriate tool to make the individuals real protagonists in view of the fact that they are listened to, considered, and invested with a precise role. The result of the mediation between the training needs, desires and expectations of the participants gives rise to a real "branch project" as described in the study programme, which shows the activities, contents, details on the teachers and all other useful information to find out what UTETD represents and offers in a particular area.

6. The UTETD teaching body and non-formal education

Teaching in a non-formal context such as the UTETD, demands a readiness to offer joint skills and abilities which together will determine the success of the educational intervention or, on the contrary, its failure. Given that

no one comes to the University of the Third Age and Spare Time to obtain an academic qualification or a formal competence certificate, but solely out of a need to know and for the sheer pleasure of learning, the teachers have no means of “forcing” attendance, but can only count on the efficacy of their educational activities.

Since adults are only willing to learn what they consider important and given that the UTETD student body is extremely heterogeneous in terms of education, professional and personal experience, the teacher’s role is fundamental. The teacher is the one who, in the field, interprets the cultural project and develops it in a way that can achieve the expected objectives.

UTETD teachers are conscientious, curious scholars of their own discipline and build their cultural proposal together with the learners who are aware of their characteristics (which differ from branch to branch), using an empathetic approach which allows them to adapt the offering and make it accessible to all. Original proposals, reliable and multidisciplinary content, appropriate language, use of effective teaching tools and a method which encourages active participation by exploiting experience are the elements which, together with listening skills and a deep respect for people and their ideas, support the students’ determination to embark on and above all continue their path of growth.

In the field of physical education too, the teaching methods must encourage the acquisition of an attitude in which personal resources and limits do not result in preclusion from activities, but become a starting point for developing and experimenting with individual learning procedures which put individuals in the condition to regain their physical condition and improve the quality of their life.

7. A shared system

If lifelong learning is seen as the foundation for personal realization and a means to improve living standards, then strategies must be put in place to ensure access to education and training for all citizens. In the case of the UTETD, accessibility has been made possible thanks to the involvement of several stakeholders who, by sharing a common objective, have contributed to its realization, each in their own way. The stakeholders involved are:

- Local authorities and communities of the valley who launch courses in their own area, providing both premises and financing;
- A teaching body (350) selected and assessed on the basis of their academic qualifications, specific skills, the originality of their educational offering, and the efficacy of their teaching;
- Local cultural establishments;
- A school system which can provide premises for teaching;
- Contact persons for each branch, who voluntarily collaborate in the territorial organization.

Tale rete di attori è gestita dalla sede centrale dell’UTETD, un’area della Fondazione Demarchi già Scuola di This network of stakeholders is managed by the UTETD head office, a department of the Demarchi Foundation, previously a Public Administration School, then a Regional Institute of Social Studies and Research (IRSR), and currently an authority of the Autonomous Province of Trento.

8. The numbers

ENROLMENTS	OF WHOM NEW STUDENTS	FEMALE	MALE
6689	1009 (15%)	5533 (80,3%)	1156 (19,7%)

Table 1: Students by gender, a.y. 2018-2019 - Trento and regional branches
Source: Own data processing

The University of the Third Age and Spare Time in Trentino is a lady: eighty percent of its students are female. The smallest regional branch has 15 students and the largest 356; in the academic year 2018-2019, the students in the city of Trento numbered 1,553.

Number of courses run at the Trento branch

67 cultural courses run with a total of 1,110 hours of lessons and 7,070 participants

34 workshops for a total of 1,087 hours and 606 participants

55 PE courses for a total of 1,340 hours and 589 participants

Number of courses run at regional sites

740 cultural courses run for a total of 1,680 hours

163 PE courses run for a total of 1,900 hours

The characteristics described above have made the UTETD a project which, in forty years, has been able to branch out across the territory to offer an attractive educational scheme which, as the numbers show, is highly appreciated by the students, the local administrations involved, and the regional cultural and voluntary establishments. Thanks to this, the UTETD can be considered a place of experimentation and implementation of non-formal learning throughout life, an element which is both an educational method and a frame of reference.

Notes

¹ Laura Antonacci, head of the University of the Third Age and Spare Time department at the Demarchi Foundation.

² Alessandro Ceredi, researcher at the Demarchi Foundation.

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Communicating for expression and being: the literary education of adult learners uses the digital network

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Keywords

Lifelong Learning, Digital Technology, Good Practices

Abstract

According to Giovanni Biondi (2017), lifelong learning “should be a foregone conclusion, as it seems obvious that learning continues throughout life,” given that today the workplace has changed and there is a great need to stay up to date. In order to avoid regressing into new forms of illiteracy, it is essential to constantly nourish communicative competence which allows people to understand and interpret what is heard or read within a context, encouraging self-expression. One interesting way to do this is to study literature through a critical use of the internet and the social networks, which open real windows onto the world.

1. Foreword

The EC Recommendation on *Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*, drawn up by the European Union in 2016, states that the OECD programme PIAAC “indicates that adults with higher proficiency in literacy, numeracy [...] tend to have more success in the labour market” (p. 1). This survey focuses on the age group of the European population between 16 and 65, of which about one third with low levels of competence are “less likely to take part in learning or to participate fully in the digitally driven economy and society. They face a higher risk of unemployment [...] and social exclusion” (European Union, 2016).

Hence the importance of continuing adult education as the only antidote to stem “returning illiteracy”, as defined by the Italian Treccani Dictionary (2012):

“Expression referring to that share of literate people who, without the exercise of alphanumeric skills, regress, losing the ability to use written language to formulate and understand messages” (<http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/>)

Hand in hand with this phenomenon is functional illiteracy, which means those who are unable to reconstruct what they have heard or read.

The 2016 Recommendation highlighted the need for EU member states to launch upskilling pathways to facilitate lifelong learning by means of the digital network.

A raising of communicative competence through literature and digital technology was the core of two education programmes for adult learners, described below, on a second-level course at the Aterno-Manthonè technical school in Pescara, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives (European Union, 2016).

2. Reviews of literary texts by adult students, published on the site www.libriamociascuola.it and on the annexed social channels

Going back to school as adults is undoubtedly a plucky choice on the part of those who fell victim to early school leaving: it is precisely the conditioning of previous experience, motivation, and the need for knowledge (Knowles,

1984) which define the characteristics of learning in adulthood.

To avoid repeating past mistakes, “*the role of the teacher as a facilitator and moderator of the knowledge-building processes is crucial*” (Cinganotto, 2018, p. 52) In this particular experience, the study of literature became more exciting because of being combined with the use of internet. The phase of reading, analysing and précising well-known literary works and shorter pieces was followed by personal re-elaborations, both oral and written. Students from the various classes undertook to produce descriptions of plotlines and interesting reviews, expressing original opinions and critically reflecting on the texts.

A powerful motivation came from the possibility of seeing their work published on the site www.libriamociascuola.it, and on the related social channels (Facebook and Twitter), which gave these adult students visibility, gratification, and social recognition for their achievements. This exercise, carried out using a format to be compiled, demanded an ability to be clear and appealing in their presentation to arouse the curiosity of other potential readers to peruse their work, thereby promoting good reading practices.

It may be helpful to cite some examples of the works published, which were analyses of classics of literature as well as texts by contemporary authors.

One of the essays read was *Amador*, by the Spanish philosopher Savater, analysed by Maria De Grandis (2019). Of interest here is the reflection on the father-son relationship which reveals no traits of superiority, but an exchange of thoughts on the possibility of finding a way to learn self-confidence.

The subject inspired a comprehensible empathy in the author of the review, who wrote: “As a human being, the child has the freedom to make mistakes, which is the possible consequence of his or her choices” (<http://www.libriamociascuola.it/II/?p=10999>).

A profound argument, which has us looking inside ourselves, like the analysis of a short extract, “*I believe the taste of a cigarette is more intense when it’s your last...*”, taken from Svevo’s novel *Zeno’s Conscience*, in which the author of the review, Di Domenico, underlined the theme of ineptitude which “makes man passive in the face of life [...]. Man is self-indulgent *par excellence*, seeking infinite pleasures in a finite life.” (<http://www.libriamociascuola.it/II/?p=11105>). Domenico’s focus was on key ethical themes: the sense of an individual’s choices and lifestyles which come to express that person’s being.

Again on the line of ethics was the content expressed by Liberato (2019), regarding Pirandello’s novella *The Train Has Whistled*. In it, madness is accentuated as a form of mental freedom, which appears to the protagonist, the accountant Belluca, the only way to find himself again and to escape from the suffocating everyday life that is oppressing him. According to Liberato, the novella presents “a tangible response to contemporary man, for even in our own times we can easily forget what a sweet perfume life has and how many small things remind us of being alive”: (<http://www.libriamociascuola.it/II/?p=11045>).

A fascinating analysis by Albani (2019) of a recent novel, *White as Milk, Red as Blood* by Alessandro D’Avenia, touches on the theme of so-called ‘adulthood’, or prolonged adolescence, which today leads many to avoid family responsibilities, those of the couple, and other kinds. The main character is a sixteen-year-old girl, in love with another girl suffering from leukaemia, who presents herself as an example of maturity since she chooses to stay with her friend come what may. The reflection which emerges from the shares on the social networks is that an irrefutably accurate cross-section of today’s reality has been painted.

Again in a current vein is Irimia’s review (2019) of Deborah Ellis’s novel *The Breadwinner*. This novel tackles the thorny situation of women in Afghanistan, women who “do not have the same rights as men, such as: going to work, studying, leading” (<http://www.libriamociascuola.it/II/?p=11053>). Irimia sees an interesting elective affinity with the film “*I Am Nojoom, Age 10 and Divorced*”, which deals with the same topic, namely, females with no right to speak, as a cross-sectoral reflection on the content in various fields.

These passages from some works, cited only briefly here, give some idea of the weightiness of the arguments touched upon – perfectly consistent with the theme of adults who are making choices, erring, and seeking themselves – which were considered equally appealing by the authors of the reviews and by the other students and visitors to the site who have read, shared and commented on them on the social networks.

3. Flash mob for a collective reading of Leopardi's *The Infinite*, making a video and sharing it through the social channels

On the 28th of May 2019, a major event took place in all the Italian schools participating in the project *200 – duecento Infinito*, called for by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) and Casa Leopardi. Students from the schools were invited to recite verses of the poem *The Infinite* to celebrate the bicentenary of its writing. The date chosen, the 28th, was symbolic: the two stood for the recurrence of the 200 years, and the upended eight for the mathematical symbol for infinity. Each institute was given free rein to choose the setting for their reading. Instead, a binding condition was the recording of a video documenting the initiative to be shared on each school's social channel, using the hashtag #200Infinito along with a mention of the pages of the MIUR and Casa Leopardi. Each video opened and closed with the passing of a ball, a symbolic witness of the relay to another school, to bring an idea of continuity to the national event. The Pescara flash mob can be watched on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvcHeZro5kc>

From an introductory historical-literary snapshot, taken care of by the teacher [lecture-based lesson?], the adult learners were guided in a critical study of the work's message. The students found an interesting analogy with their own experience of early school leaving and the various problems associated with it in the concept of the "hedgerow" that cuts off Leopardi's view. In the poem, the power of the imagination opened unending spaces to the poet *beyond it*, which the students saw as meaning that they could go beyond their own mental blocks, returning to attend lessons in search of their desired personal and cultural redemption.

The location chosen for the flash mob was Pescara's "Ponte del Mare" suspension bridge, with the awareness that the learner's *hedgerow* was inside them. From the bridge, their gaze was helped in its search for infinity by the vastness of the sea and the distant mountain ranges – with the Maiella and the Gran Sasso.

Each reader recited one verse of the idyll, while the other students, together with the school principal, teachers and passers-by, stood listening attentively until the end.

Both native and non-native students took part, and this enhanced the work even more, since the poem became a bond to share different realities and expectations geared to a sense of inclusion. Which is why the limits described by Leopardi became an opportunity for the students to pass and receive recognition, by putting themselves to the test in public. The social sharing of the video expanded the audience even more, as can be seen from the large number of views.

4. Conclusions

The educational pathways described guided students to lay themselves bare in public, to gain self-esteem and social appreciation. Both required reading and an in-depth study of the texts, but also a sympathetic resonance with the students' lives, values and experiences. Both pathways were opportunities to express themselves with creativity. The use of the digital network for the dissemination of the initiatives realized crossed the space/school boundary, multiplying the possibilities of exchanges with others, and proposing the study of literature as a source of fascination and a freeing of the imagination.

Notes

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Book Reviews

Sostenibilità e Capability Approach.

Alessandrini. G. (ed.) (2019).

Milano: Franco Angeli

Maria Caterina De Blasis¹

In July 2019, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers set up the “Benessere Italia” [“Wellbeing in Italy”, t/n] steering committee, tasked with supporting, strengthening and coordinating government policies and initiatives for equitable and sustainable wellbeing as well as implementation of the commitments entered into under the UN 2030 Agenda. Hence, the attention being paid to the seventeen goals presented in 2015 by the United Nations is evidently growing in Italy too. Seventeen goals which see the idea of sustainable development as more than a purely environmental issue, and instead affirm an integral and integrated view of the various dimensions of sustainability.

An original interpretation of the subject was recently dealt with in the volume issued by the publisher Franco Angeli under the title “*Sostenibilità e Capability Approach*” [Sustainability and Capability Approach] edited by Giuditta Alessandrini, a senior professor at the Department of Education Sciences of Roma Tre University.

The book, which is based on a seminar organized by the Research Network on “pedagogical and formative dimensions of the capability approach”, held at the same university last November, gathers contributions from 26 authors who have proposed a dialectic comparison between sustainability and the theoretical framework of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

The volume is in four parts: “The context of professional teacher training”; “The development of skills in industry”; “Welfare strategies and ethical-political dimensions of sustainability”; “Research”, which contains the work of young lecturers, doctors and PhD students from the Department of Education of Roma Tre University.

The issues addressed in the volume refer above all to two of the seventeen objectives of the UN 2030

Agenda: the fourth, dedicated to quality education, and the eighth, on full employment and economic growth. Two intertwined goals which represent a basic roadmap through which to read, interpret, and thus “learn the future”.

The aim of the book, as the editor has pointed out, is precisely to “*propose a mapping of studies on the capability approach and training in the European context, with particular reference to the inferences possible with the Agenda 2030 theme on sustainability*” (Alessandrini, 2019, p.20).

In this way a debate has been launched on sustainability and the political and intellectual responsibility that pedagogy can cover in this area, also from the perspective of intergenerational thinking.

The Capability Approach thus becomes, in the pedagogical field, an appropriate key to understanding which can foster an integral sustainability which does concern the environment, but even more than that, the women and men who inhabit it and who can make informed choices and exercise their fundamental rights by using their *capacity for action*.

The educational and formative dimension is therefore essential for (sustainable) human development, also because, as Alessandrini has written, the “*culture of sustainability and education are one and the same*” (Alessandrini, 2019, p.23).

The approach developed and promoted by Sen and Nussbaum, with the latter’s *Implicit Pedagogy*, is therefore proposed as a paradigm which can contribute to creating in school institutions, but also among trainers, a culture of sustainability that is not utopian, but concrete.

By advancing the idea of being able to compare the themes of sustainability and the Capability Approach, the editor of the volume, thanks also to the contributions of those who wished to take up the same challenge, has outlined the elements common to the two “visions” in a successful schematization, extremely useful for those who have tackled – or wish to tackle – the works of Sen and Nussbaum and are interested in promoting sustainability in

education and training. Alessandrini identifies five dimensions shared by both paradigms and describes them as: the awareness that economic development is not simply equated with human development; the proposal of a vision to counter the spread of an approach to development seen only in terms of marketing and functionalism; the primacy of attention to the common good; the rejection of an individualistic and privatized vision of knowledge and, finally, great attention to safeguarding the dignity of each individual.

Accordingly, *“Sostenibilità e Capability Approach”* does not present itself as a theoretical or abstract text, but proposes interesting, down-to-earth ideas which, from school to work, passing via the relevant policies, provide an original and innovative discourse on the subject of sustainable development, also through the use of the keywords of the Capability Approach: freedom, responsibility, participation, inclusion, dialogue, and dignity.

Virtually a grammar book, therefore, to help the reader learn and speak the language of the future which, in order to cope with complexity and not succumb to it, must rely on a mandatory, committed and concrete sustainability which can provide a home for human development, care for the environment, and social justice.

Notes

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EPALE
Electronic Platform
for Adult Learning
in Europe