

NEW SEEDS FOR A WORLD TO COME

POLICIES, PRACTICES AND LIVES IN ADULT EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Proceedings of the 10th ESREA Triennial Conference University of Milano Bicocca, Department of Human Sciences for Education 29 September-1 October 2022

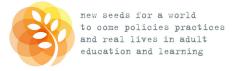
edited by Laura Formenti, Andrea Galimberti and Gaia Del Negro



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Table of Contents

Forewords from the board of ESREA	9
Introduction – Of Seeds, Complexity, and a Research Community Laura Formenti, Andrea Galimberti and Gaia del Negro	11
Papers	
Shaping New Possibilities: The University as an Agora for Discussion Monica Amadini and Sara Damiola	25
Creative Methods for More-Than-Human Communities. Multisensory Learnings from Anthropology <i>Inkeri Aula</i>	31
Culture Contact, Adult Learner's Critical Thinking, and Critical Thinking Use. A Sociocultural Perspective on Adult Education Hadiseh Azadi	37
Crisis in Adult Education of the Post-Pandemic Period. A Possible Model of Sustainable Welfare <i>Vito Balzano</i>	45
Learning Practices in Work Contexts: The Case of an Italian Company Claudia Banchetti	51
Smart Working and New Learning Patterns: A Case Study Claudia Banchetti and Marina Slavutzky	59
Articulating Technological and Pedagogical Accessibility for Adult Learners in Distance Education Jean-Luc Bédard, Béatrice Pudelko, Faustin Kagorora, Valéry Psyché, Anna Maria Zaidman and Geneviève Simard-Tozzi	65
The Joint Professionalisation of Adult Education in Higher Education, From a Critical and Transformative Perspective Eric Bertrand, Elzbieta Sanojca, Jerôme Eneau, Anne Galle Dorval and Geneviève Lameul	71
EDEN - Educational Environments with Nature Giusi Boaretto and Beate Weyland	83
What Lessons can be Learnt from International Organizations' Engagement with Lifelong Learning as a Policy Concept? Ellen Boeren, Maren Elfert, Kjell Rubenson and Tom Schuller	89
Fostering Reflective Thinking and Combating Ethnocentric Tendencies. A Cross-Cultural Inquiry-Based Learning Experience in Higher Education Chiara Bove, Anna Chinazzi and Mary Jane Moran	99

Survey on Adult Learning and Education Policies and Practices. Opinions of European Regional and Local Stakeholders Noelia Cantero, Paolo Federighi, Tina Mavrič, Francesca Operti and Francesca Torlone	107
Skills in Action: From Life Stories to Self-Awareness and Self-Discovery Marianna Capo	113
Improvisation as a Pedagogical Attitude of School Teachers Laura Corbella	123
Perspectives on the Value of Studying an Early Years Foundation Degree (EQF Level 5) in England: Past, Present and Future Destinations Sarah Cousins and Caroline Jones	129
Chronicity and Pandemic: Research Perspectives and Educational Actions to Support, in Changement, the Adult with Chronicity <i>Guendalina Cucuzza</i>	135
Dancing the Crisis Beyond the Usual Choreographies in Social Work Antonella Cuppari	141
Critical Consciousness and Perspective Transformation in Prison as a Double-Edged Sword Antigone K. Efstratoglou and George A. Koulaouzides	147
Quantitative Methods for Investigating Adult Learning and Multicultural Education in the Time of Crisis Loretta Fabbri, Nicolina Bosco, Alessandra Romano and Mario Giampaolo	153
Responding to Changes in Workplace Demands and Learning Styles: Challenges and Benefits of Work-Integrated Learning for Student Development in Higher Education <i>Pierre Faller, Irina A. Lokhtina, Andrea Galimberti and Elzbieta Sanojca</i>	159
Fostering Pandemic Resilience and Community through CBAL Bibliotherapy Online Reading Groups Shanti Fernando	165
Ecologies of Education: Covid Pandemic as an Occasion to Interrogate Adult Education Theoretical Frameworks Alessandro Ferrante, Andrea Galimberti and Maria Benedetta Gambacorti-Passerini	171
Embodied Research: Searching On and Through the Body <i>Nicoletta Ferri</i>	177
Social Representations during the first SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic Wave of 2020 in Italy. Learning from Emotional Education to Redesign a Resilient Future <i>Valerio Ferro Allodola and Maria Buccolo</i>	185
Digitalisation and Democracy: A Context Paper Angeliki Giannakopoulou, Daiana Huber, Dina Soeiro, Hélder Rui Gama Maurício Lourenço Touças, Susanne Lattke, Nils-Eyk Zimmermann, Thomas Fritz and Christin Cieslak	193
Coping with Change? How Swiss Adult Education Providers Adapt to Current Challenges at the Organisational Level Sofie Gollob and Saambavi Poopalapillai	199

Critical Social Theory and the Ontology of Hope: Implications for the Future of Adult Education <i>Patricia A. Gouthro and Susan M. Holloway</i>	207
Using a Multiliteracies Framework to Explore Adult Literacy Practices through Arts-Based Learning Organizations Susan M. Holloway and Patricia A. Gouthro	213
Digitalization Resistances of German Employees in the Pandemic – Vocational Education and Training between Emancipation and Adaptation <i>André Kukuk</i>	219
The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Major Crisis in Adult Education in Quebec: Chronology of Events and Impact on Student Attendance Claudel Lamoureux-Duquette, Virginie Thériault and Pierre Doray	227
Digital Cultures of Care Federica Liberti	235
A Socio-Material Approach to Professional Learning for Engineers In Industry 4.0.: In response to the Emergent Human-Machine Interaction <i>Ahreum Lim and Aliki Nicolaides</i>	243
The Two Levels of Digital Adult Education: Adult Educators as Learners and Providers of Digital Services Doris Lüken-Klaßen and Jan-Hendrik Kötting	249
Lying on Your Back. Awareness Through Movement as New Form of Ecojustice Sensitivity Silvia Luraschi	255
Embodied Learning in the Liminality of Pain. Exploring the Body and Its Experience <i>Maja Maksimovic</i>	263
Music Narratives of Offenders: Horizons of Time, Space and Life Scape <i>Kakuko Matsumoto</i>	273
Radicalization and Transformation in Everyday Life. Educating the Radical Thinking <i>Claudio Melacarne</i>	275
Social Mediation: Engendering Community Learning Processes Susan Mossman Riva	279
Talent Development and Leisure at Work: The Way for Developing Adult Talents? Nikol Nanakova, Nikola Stanickova and Veronika Gigalova	287
How Adult Educators Overcome Crises. Insights From a Qualitative Investigation at German Adult Education Centers Beatrix Niemeyer and Franziska Bellinger	291
3R-Play's Educational Practices for Adult Education: The Case of Football Coaches' Training 'I' Edition' Sara Nosari and Emanuela Guarcello	297
Reflective Learning Opportunities for School Leaders in Sustainable School Improvement Project Katrine Puge and Line Lindhardt	ts 309

Citizens Or Citizens in the Making? A Study of School-Community Collaborations to Enhance Civic Engagement among Adult Students Francesca Rapanà, Francesca Lasi and Marcella Milana	315
The 'Commons' as a New Value in Adult Learning Elzbieta Sanojca and Michel Briand	321
Watching New Seeds Sprout: A Review of Artificial Intelligence in Adult Education Kerstin Schirmer	329
Gender, Adult Education and Career Reward: The Paula Principle in Today's Europe <i>Tom Schuller</i>	337
Like a Spider in a Network of Relations. The Role of Universities of Applied Sciences for Cultural Adult Education in Rural Landscapes. Theoretical Basics for Innovative Research and Development Mandy Schulze	345
Student Resilience and Motivation during the Pandemic – Lessons from a Study into Adult ESOL <i>Kathryn Sidaway</i>	349
Crisis as a Window of Opportunity for Affirmative Action: Comparative Study from High, Middle and Low-Income Countries Shalini Singh and Nitish Anand	357
Transitions in the Policies for the Education of Adults. Comparing the Funding Regimes in Denmark and Slovenia Shalini Singh, Søren Ehlers and Tadej Kosmerl	365
Radicalization and Violent Extremism Prevention. A Socio-Pedagogical Approach Marina Slavutzky	371
Educational Support: Knowledge and Gestures in the Perspective of Accompagnement <i>Alessia Tabacchi</i>	377
Pre-Placement Educational Preparation and Training for Adoptive Parents Alessia Tabacchi	383
Coevolutionarratives: The Power of Narratives in Approaching Crisis <i>Katja Vanini De Carlo</i>	389
The Paradox of Exclusion Through Inclusion: Lessons Learned for Adult Education Danny Wildemeersch and George Koulaouzides	395
Exploring the Association of Learning a Foreign Language with Cognitive Improvement of Older Chinese Adults: A Case Study Simin Zeng	401
How Do You Learn in the Workplace? Paola Zini	409
Re-Imagining Lifelong Education in Socio-Culturally Complex Communities Davide Zoletto	415

Symposia

and Adult Education Michel Alhadeff-Jones, Hervé Breton and Sabine Schmidt-Lauff	423
Spaces, Times and the Rhythms of Critique and Emancipation in Adult Education Michel Alhadeff-Jones, Francesco Cappa, Fadia Dakka and Fergal Finnegan	433
Studying the Multiplicity of Temporalities and Rhythms that Shape Adult Education and Professional Development Michel Alhadeff-Jones, Philippe Maubant, Pascal Roquet, Chiara Biasin and Richard Wittorski	441
Adult Literacy(ies) for the Immediate Future Javier Ávila-López, Analí Fernández Corbacho, María C. Fonseca-Mora, Lorena García-Barroso, Emilio Lucio-Villegas, Fernando D. Rubio-Alcalá, María-Carmen Sánchez-Vizcaíno	449
Should I Stay or Should I Go Now: Conditions of Participation in Literacy and Adult Basic Education Betty Becker-Kurz*, Marie Bickert, Maurice de Greef, Simone C. Ehmig, Pilar Figuera-Gazo, Juan Llanes-Ordóñez, Johanna Leck, David Mallows, Gwennaëlle Mulliez, Michael Schemmann, Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha, Lena Sindermann*, Veronika Thalhammer*	459
Index	467
Author Index	471

Social Representations during the first SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic Wave of 2020 in Italy. Learning from Emotional Education to Redesign a Resilient Future

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Abstract - From 2020, Sars-CoV-2 Pandemic has provoked forms of psychological distress, exclusion and marginalization in children, adolescents, adults and seniors. The research aims to: a) studying the representations and emotions experienced related to the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic Wave of 2020 in Italy; b) explore the prevailing emotions, changes in people's lifestyle, fears or hopes for the future; b) investigate the aspect of interpersonal relationships, the educational message generated by the health emergency and the judgment of people on distance learning that Italian schools and universities have activated. The research was conducted with an integrated approach: Medical Humanities included the theoretical reference scenario for reading the social representations of Covid-19; emotional education for the re-planning of existences, education for sustainability in ecopsychological orientation for the prospects of change.

KEYWORDS: representations, pandemic, learning, emotions, resilience.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research started from the observation, in the various contexts of family and professional life, of the impacts that the restrictions imposed by the Italian government had on the elderly, adults, adolescents and children in the first wave of SARS-CoV-2 in 2020, offering a stimulus to reflect on current changes and future prospects.

The objectives of the research were: a) to explore the prevailing emotions linked to the pandemic, changes in people's lifestyles and fears or hopes for the future; b) to investigate the aspect of interpersonal relations; c) to delve into the educational message generated by the health emergency and people's opinion of the distance learning that Italian schools and universities have activated.

The research was conducted with an integrated approach: the Medical Humanities included the theoretical reference scenario for the reading of the social representations of SARS-CoV-2, emotional education for the redesigning of existences and education for sustainability in the eco-psychological orientation for the prospects of change.

2. RESEARCH SCENARIOS

The article intends to read the current 'crisis' generated by SARS-CoV-2 as a problem of commitment and responsibility of research to build answers for the future, starting with reflection on the actions to be taken to redesign people's lives.

In this perspective, pedagogy and the other human sciences in general aim to build the future, with an eye towards all generations: so that they can re-learn to dream, to hope, to plan a life projected towards tomorrow (Buccolo, 2015).

Bauman (2009) depicts the time of modernity as a set of scattered dots that do not indicate any future trajectory, but invite us to live the present, without allowing projects, desires, dreams to be realised, but 'occasions' to be consumed

according to a logic that motivates only to enjoy the ephemeral possibility of the now, living in the dimension of the momentary as a form of a life without prospects.

The immobility of the present time, "suffered rather than experienced", emphasises the most negative aspects of a generalised global, material and immaterial crisis (Galimberti, 1994), with which we are accustomed to identifying contemporary society: we speak of a health, economic, political and social crisis; but also of a crisis of values and education (Tramma, 2008), grasping only the negative meaning of the term as opposed to the positive one of transformation, change, and therefore also of evolution and design of the new towards which this research focuses.

The image of such an unstable and pressing reality is linked to the concept of a liquid society (Bauman, 2002), complex (Morin, 2011), which is at the same time a source of opportunities and dangers that, in some cases, can lead to devastating consequences.

We note, therefore, the need to promote an educational action aimed at the person in his or her entirety and to give space to all his or her needs, embracing all the constituent dimensions, not limiting itself only to the cognitive-rational level, but also integrating the emotional one.

Education is called upon to support the person in his or her path of self-realisation, in line with what Nussbaum and Sen (1993) stated in the Capability Approach, for which the path to happiness is pursued through the discovery and development of one's own potential.

Education has the task of accompanying the individual to face and overcome the alienation, loneliness and uncertainty of the modern world, based on ethical and not exclusively economic principles, so as to build more inclusive and sustainable social environments.

It is therefore necessary to revolutionise our 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 2005) and activate actions to support the redesigning of existences in order to restore hope, depth to life and the search for serenity in everyday life.

In such a scenario, it is essential to recover the emotional dimension that has long been repressed (Damasio, 1996; Cambi, 2015) due to the suspicion and fear arising from its unpredictability, seen as an element of disturbance or disorder, while very little has been done to teach how to cultivate and protect it. Emotions influence cognitive skills and, conversely, certain emotional experiences give rise to cognitive representations and certain 'ways of thinking'.

Developing emotional competence, therefore, means acquiring awareness and responsibility for one's emotional life (Iori, 2009), that is, 'becoming emotionally literate' (Contini, Fabbri, Mannuzzi, 2006), learning to stay in touch with our deepest experience, including our bodily and emotional experience.

3. METHODS

3.1. Setting and participants

The exploratory work carried out moves within the framework of participatory action research (Orefice, 2006), following an integrated research approach that takes place at the time of the investigation through the collection and analysis of data, of education understood as self-education of the individual subject who develops a reflexive and transformative action (Striano, 2002) and of social action aimed both at the development of the awareness that we are all interdependent and participants in a common planetary destiny (Morin, 2016) and at the improvement of the living conditions of children, young people, adults and the elderly.

Those involved in filling out the online questionnaire were, in turn, activators of further internal research processes. The investigative action implemented, therefore, was not purely instrumental, but intentionally constructed to set in motion the processes of activation of the subject, which made it possible to emphasise both the change in individual behaviour and points of view, and the importance of personal reflection and action for the transformation of the world.

3.2. Procedure

An online questionnaire (Google Forms) was used to collect the research data. However, the restrictions imposed by the quarantine did not allow the instrument to be validated by selecting an even larger sample of people.

Nevertheless, the research results represent an interesting starting point for further research into the phenomenon, which could be undertaken in the post-pandemic period.

3.3. Survey development

The questionnaire is divided into three sections with a total of 32 questions. The sections were identified from the need to explore social representations of Covid-19 (Farr Robert, Moscovici, 1989) and emotions (Buccolo, 2019), which will be the starting point for designing the necessary change (Morin, 2001).

The first section was dedicated to the collection of general data on the subjects participating in the exploration and on their socio-healthcare perceptions of Covid-19; the second section was aimed at collecting the emotional aspects related to the perception of the phenomenon; the third section stimulated reflections on the change of life in moments of health emergency.

The survey, addressed without any restrictions to all people resident in Italy, was sent via email and whatsapp to people and groups interested in this type of research, with widespread distribution via Facebook and published in online magazines and newsletters with national distribution.

The questionnaire, which was active from Tuesday 24 March to Saturday 18 April 2020, was filled in by 5,518 people.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the research can be summarised by taking the clusters of the survey constructed for this study: a) General data; b) Section I - Representations of the phenomenon: general aspects; c) Section II - Representations of the phenomenon: emotional aspects; d) Section III - Reflections on the change of life over time of COVID-19.

4.1. Research results - General data

Almost 80% of the sample collected was female subjects. The most represented group is between 51 and 65 years of age. More than half is employed. The majority has a high school diploma. Almost half live with their wife/husband and children. Note that almost more than 14% live alone at home at the time the questionnaire was completed. The nationality of the subjects is mainly Italian and the sample covers all twenty regions of our country.

4.2. Research results of Section I - Representations of the phenomenon: general aspects

Regarding the perception of Covid 19, almost the entirety considered themselves to be 'fully aware and informed' and almost 60% had a high perception of the danger level of the virus. The media most frequently used to keep abreast of the spread and consequences of COVID-19 are the official websites of the institutions and TV. The level of confidence in the COVID-19 containment measures taken by the institutions is, for the most part, quite high. According to most of the sample, COVID-19 was initially confused with a seasonal flu' and, moreover, more swabs should have been taken'.

4.3. Research results of Section II - Representations of the phenomenon: emotional aspects

Experienced emotions were anxiety, sadness, fear, vulnerability, resilience, acceptance, trust, confusion, empathy. Level of fear of being infected is "enough". Concerning the self-management of emotions, most stated to 'take note of the situation and try to turn negative emotions into positive ones'. Experienced fear: nearly 80% YES, In particular: "not being able to see the people I love" and "not being able to return to normal life". Positive thoughts: nearly 96% YES. In particular, related to: "the small joys of everyday life". The first thing I will do after the national emergency period: "embracing loved ones"; "take a walk in nature". Emotions I will feel after the national emergency: joy, freedom, gratitude and others. Reflection; resilience; taking stock of one's life; listening, are the words that best summarize the educational message of the health emergency.

4.4. Research Results of Section III - Reflections on Life Change at COVID-19

Related to the question "How does it feel to be locked up at home", more than half "quite at ease", but more than 26% "not at ease". Smart-working judgment is between "quite and very useful". Distance learning judgment: "quite effective" for more than half, but "not very effective" for almost 33%. Main problems on distance learning are:

- "many parents have more children at home: IT tools are not enough for everyone" (50.6%);
- "connection/network coverage problems" (48.2%);
- "lack of specific teacher training" (45.6%);
- "many parents already face daily family management problems and cannot also deal with distance learning for the learning of their children/teenagers" (41%).

5. DISCUSSION

The data collected confirm that pedagogy must be configured as a science that can and must provide its contribution in the education of the citizen (Callari Galli, Cambi, Ceruti, 2003; Sirignano, 2019) and of the education professional (Corbi, Perillo, Chello, 2018; Strollo, 2006), especially in this historical moment, which has invested all aspects of personal and social life. Moreover, special educational attention must be paid to the phenomenon of fake news (Ferro Allodola, 2021), for example in the topic of "vaccine confidence/hesitancy" (Biasio, Bonaccorsi, Lorini & Pecorelli, 2021).

The reading of perceptions and emotional experiences is linked to the "feeling" of people in the Covid-19 era in order to understand moods, reactions and construct paths of reflection that can lead to immediately assessing more or less sudden changes in the environment, reacting accordingly (Riva, 2004) and rethinking one's existence.

Anxiety, sadness, fear, anger are just some of the emotions we detected and which had a great impact on the reconfiguration of people's lives in their homes. The greatest fear expressed by people during the first wave of Covid-19, is certainly that of not being able to re-embrace their loved ones, followed by the impossibility of returning to normal life, the fear of contagion and death. The alternation of negative and positive emotions is clearly expressed, and most people are aware of their negative emotional experiences, but through resilience and listening they seek the foothold of positive thoughts to move forward.

Coming out of Covid-19 in a perspective view of reality, people expressed positive by putting reconciliation with loved ones first, regaining the small daily joys of life, from walking in nature to visiting friends and returning to practising their hobbies.

The educational message that that moment of emergency brought was represented by most people by the word 'reflection', followed by 'resilience', 'taking stock of one's life' and 'listening'.

The transversal reading of the data collected in the three sections of the questionnaire, requires pedagogical reflection to make its own contribution to the design of a sustainable change (Malavasi, 2003) that can, in turn, support the redesigning of existences even at times strongly characterised by the unpredictability of the flow of life.

A complex, eco-systemic approach to designing change in a pedagogical perspective (Formenti & West, 2018) presupposes overcoming the traditional separation of subject and object and developing design skills dedicated to reading the dynamism of social contexts and the complexity of the relationship between needs/responses.

The sustainable educational design that we need in order to reprogramme our lives will have to express a transformative possibility for the future that each person will live in common with others, aware of their action within the one Earth community (Birbes, 2019).

We need to consider Sense of Coherence (SOC - Antonovsky, 1979) as a potential resource that can foster the ability to cope with stressors among different cultural groups.

Mindfulness, for example, as an experiential learning practice in the educational community involving teachers, students and parents, to promote awareness and emotional competence.

The continuous transformations have especially affected the development of personal and social skills, which in 2020 gave rise to the creation of the European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence," known as LifeComp (Table 1).

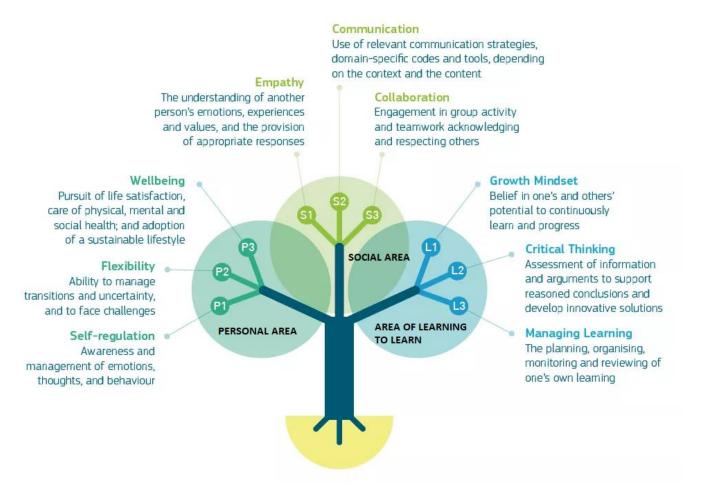


Table 1: LifeComp 2020, divided into the three areas (personal, social, learning to learn).

In LifeComp, therefore, awareness about one's own potential and emotional competence represent crucial skills for the development of psycho-physical and social well-being and enable the recognition in emotional experiences and affective states of the important role they play in the maturation of the individual. The research, moving from these reflections of a pedagogical and didactic nature, sought to highlight the importance of emotional life skills by linking them within the LifeComp 2020 Framework to re-design training paths centered on reading the needs of the subject. We can, therefore, state that in order to know how to recognize, express and manage emotions, we need to re-think continuing education that has at its center activities based on the development of emotional intelligence.

6. CONCLUSION

During the first wave of Sars-CoV-2 Pandemic, it emerged that the dominant emotions are fear and the spread of the perception of insecurity, and that these have undermined the feeling of trust at the foundations and increased a strong resistance to recognising the other and his or her needs.

The isolation and spread of negative thoughts and actions is a characteristic of these times, on which it is useful to focus new approaches to study and pedagogical research, proposing strategies, tools and methodologies that can help build more acceptable conditions of coexistence.

To be lasting, this result must be based on a project of social creativity and shared planning, as participatory as possible between the Institutions.

Authorship Attribution

Although the research was conducted jointly, paragraphs 2 and 5 are by Maria Buccolo, and paragraphs 1 and 3 by Valerio Ferro Allodola. Conclusion are common to the two authors.

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