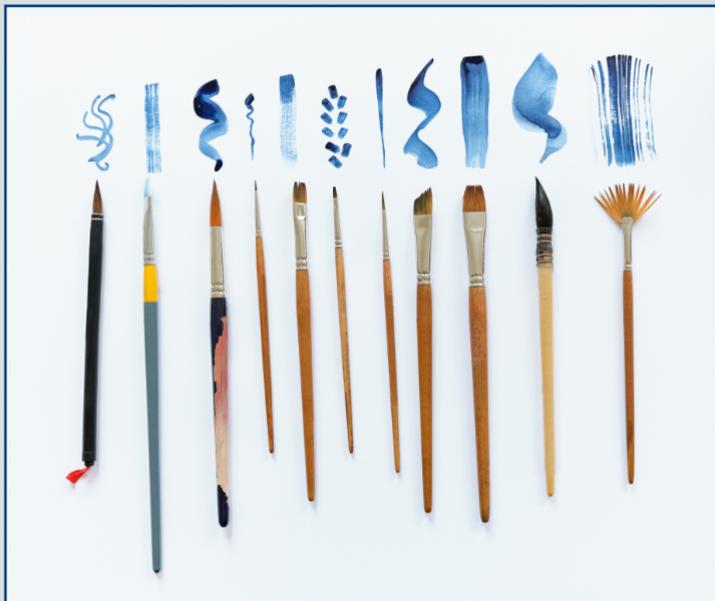


MARÍA JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ-SERRANO (Ed.)

**THE VALUE OF THE DIFFERENCE
AND LIFELONG LEARNING
IN THE CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGY**



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Salamanca

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PRESENTATION

MARIA JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ-SERRANO

WHILE THERE HAS BEEN a long-standing and evolving discussion about the value of difference in education, this approach has received significant attention and influence in contemporary pedagogy in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As a result of facing increasingly diversified societies, educators have come to recognize and respect different cultures, learning styles, abilities, opportunities or experiences.

Relevant pedagogists have claimed the importance of valuing and embracing differences in education to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments that can be responsive to the diverse needs and strengths of all learners. Since the end of 19th century several educators have begun to demand constructivist and student-centred approaches to learning, among them, Vygotsky in the socio-cultural theory considered the value of differences; and Piaget reinforced the diversity in learning by supporting cognitive differences at diverse stages of the learners' development. At the beginning of 20th century, other influential figures claimed similar ideas: the humanistic approach of Carl Rogers considered the value of individual uniqueness and personal growth, and the importance of culture and individual differences in learning influenced the contributions of Jerome Bruner to this value of differences approach. Montessori's educational approach then emphasised the self-directed learning and individual differences in learning styles, which has been influential in Europe and worldwide.

These approaches recognize that learners bring their prior knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to the learning process. Besides the inner diverse experiences and values, learners belong to a social and cultural context that may also express or mitigate the differences of learners. The fundamentals of critical pedagogy, reinforced by Paulo Freire highlighted the importance of addressing social inequalities and empowering marginalised students. This pedagogical approach encouraged

educators to consider the societal, cultural, and political contexts in which education takes place.

Jointly, consideration of inner and external conditions moves the attention to diversity toward global and intercultural concerns. If from the diversity approach the focus is on providing equal educational opportunities to all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, abilities, or learning needs, by adding the intercultural approach implies such considerations of opportunities, resources or experiences, creating educational environments where every student feels welcomed and supported, and their individual strengths and challenges are recognized and accommodated, in the end to create culturally responsive atmospheres.

From here, the discourse that values individual differences started to focus on the promotion of equitable learning experiences, by highlighting the role and the capacity of educators to foster positive and supportive environments for all learners. The role of educators is central for the designing of learner-centred educational environments. More importantly, it is not only the attention to the differences, but the promotion of differential preferences or talents that help foster a positive and enriching educational experience for all students, eventually promoting their holistic development and the pursuit of lifelong learning. Thus, attention to diversity in education and the promotion of lifelong learning are closely related, as they both emphasise personalised and inclusive approaches for learning. By recognizing and valuing the differences among learners, educators can create environments that foster a lifelong desire to learn and empower citizens to grow and develop their skills throughout their lives.

The concept of lifelong learning has become a key priority in education and professional development. In today's fast-changing world, where knowledge and skills quickly become outdated, the ability to continuously learn and adapt to changes is crucial. In doing so, educators are encouraging students to develop a growth mindset and view learning as a continuous journey of exploration and discovery. Lifelong learning involves fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, adaptability, and a willingness to seek out new knowledge throughout one's life. Additionally, educational institutions and employers are increasingly recognizing the importance of offering opportunities for ongoing learning and upskilling to support individuals' professional growth and career advancement.

Both the value of the difference and the value of lifelong learning align with broader goals of creating inclusive and equitable societies where every citizen has access to education and the opportunity to reach their full potential. This is the aim of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 for 2030: to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

This book aligns with this achievement, by promoting that educators and policymakers continue to emphasise these values and equip citizens for a lifelong journey of learning and growth. The book is the result of a wider collaboration among academics from several universities in Portugal, Italy and Spain, participating in the Erasmus K131 project: *The value of the difference and lifelong learning in contemporary pedagogy* (2021-1-ES01-KA131-HED-000005377-1).

The book is divided into three sections to explore in depth the value of difference, the value of lifelong learning and proposals to attain those values in diverse educational scenarios. In the first section, *The Difference as Value in Contemporary Pedagogy*, four chapters describe the meanings of difference associated with racism and sexism, the inclusive paths and intersectionality, the innovation in rural schools and the values for transformation in primary education schools. The second section, *The value of Lifelong Learning and the role of educators*, includes three chapters on the transformative competences, the challenges for employment training, and the European plans for digital education aligned to lifelong learning. The third section, *Environments and Strategies for valuing difference and Lifelong Learning*, presents nine proposals that attain to: improve the Spanish Reading and Writing Skills for Lifelong Learning; to consider the role of cultural interference in the didactic process; the promotion of gender equity in the literature; the design of serious games valuing the difference; the role of theatre in social sciences; the process of inclusion of early childhood education; the opportunities of rural schools to value the differences; the work context as a lifelong learning space for adults; and the socioemotional development to foster inclusive communities. All these research and practical contributions highlight the value of lifelong learning and the educational significance of difference. The sixteen chapters address the multiple needs faced by education in global and interconnected societies, which have started to demand values that have a positive impact on social transformation. Educators and policy-makers have in this handbook a spring to think of education as collective capital with plenty of transformative experiences and processes.

PART 1.
THE DIFFERENCE
AS VALUE IN CONTEMPORARY
PEDAGOGY

INCLUSIVE PATHS: MIGRATIONS, EDUCATION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

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ABSTRACT

Despite ongoing educational diversity and inclusion efforts, migrant and minority students often face marginalization. PISA 2018 data sheds light on the state of equity and inclusion of diverse student groups, particularly those with immigrant backgrounds who continue to rank below native students. Shifting from a categorical approach, influenced by a medical model, to a rights-based approach is necessary to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in inclusive education. The current system fails to provide adequate support for migrant children to thrive. Recognizing the multi-dimensional aspects of identity, discrimination, and power dynamics, tailored support systems can be developed to promote equal opportunities for all children. This chapter emphasizes the adoption of an intersectional lens in inclusive education to empower educators and policymakers to offer quality education that respects diversity and considers the unique needs, abilities, characteristics, and learning expectations of students and communities in Portugal. By eliminating all forms of discrimination and providing concrete responses, we can foster a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all.

Keywords: migrants; inclusion; education; intersectionality; Portugal

1. INTRODUCTION

FOR UNESCO (2005) «inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing

and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It implies changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children» (p. 13), where states should respect, protect and fulfil the right of all learners to education because every student matters and matters equally (UNESCO, 2019). United Nations (2016) states that inclusive education implies also «access to and progress in high-quality education without discrimination (p. 3).

The Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Education for All (EFA) are specific about the kind of education that is needed in today's world. SDG 4 calls for countries to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (United Nations, 2015). However, defining equitable education requires distinguishing between equality and equity, two terms occasionally misunderstood. Equality is a state of affairs, meaning that each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity acknowledges the diversity of individual circumstances and strives to allocate precise resources and opportunities required to achieve an equitable outcome for all (UNESCO, 2020).

Inclusive education rests upon three primary pillars: ensuring access to education, fostering active participation, and promoting academic achievement for all children and young individuals (Alves et al., 2020). However, the definition and implementation of inclusive education vary considerably from one country to another.

In Portugal, according to the Basic Law of the Education System, the right to education is expressed by guaranteeing a permanent formative action aimed at promoting the overall development of personality, social progress, and the democratization of society (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Inclusion and equity are basic principles of the Portuguese education system, assuming that, at school, every student, regardless of their personal and social situation, finds answers that enable them to acquire a level of education and training that facilitates their full social inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2022). All students have not only the right to participate in learning processes, the right to participate in the life of the educational community but also the right to a quality education that supports them to achieve their full educational potential and to develop a sense of potential and to develop a sense of belonging and self-esteem (ACM, 2022).

Portugal has a progressive legal framework in the field of inclusive education. The Ministry of Education introduced significant educational policies in 1991 and 2018. In 2018, two pivotal decrees were implemented: Decree Law 54/2018

concerning Inclusive Education and Decree Law 55/2018 addressing Autonomy and Curriculum Flexibility. Alongside these decrees, a series of guiding documents were also established. This new educational framework perceives inclusive education as an ongoing process that necessitates continuous reform and adaptation within the education system. This legal framework reinforces the right of each learner to an education in line with their potential, expectations and needs. To implement this principle, schools now have greater autonomy and curricular autonomy and curricular flexibility, enabling the development of the according to the specific needs and interests of the students.

Decree-Law 54/2018 is built upon the idea that every student possesses learning potential when provided with appropriate support. Consequently, the methodological principles at the core of this decree-law are rooted in the concept of universal design for learning and a multilevel approach to accessing the curriculum. This multilevel approach encompasses the implementation of three distinct types of measures as outlined in the legislation:

- Universal measures, which are intended for all students to promote participation and enhance learning outcomes. It includes curricular accommodations, differentiation, and extension, it involves changes to teaching and learning methods, assessment, and resources, considering learning styles and aiming to promote educational success (Decree-Law 54/2018, Article 8).
- Selective measures, designed to address specific learning support needs that are not adequately covered by universal measures. It includes non-significant adaptations to the curriculum with changes made to the aims and contents, the use of a differentiated curriculum, psycho-pedagogical support, the use of prior learning or extra support interventions, and tutoring.
- Additional measures, established to cater to students facing intense and persistent challenges in communication, interaction, cognition, or learning, which demand specialized resources and support for their learning and inclusion. It implies significant curricular adaptations (e.g., different curricular contents) and can include responses such as the design of Individual Educational Programs and Individual Transition Plans, modular attendance ‘by subject’, specialized resources, «structured teaching», personal and social autonomy development (Decree-Law 54/2018, Article 10).

The implementation of these types of measures implies multidisciplinary teams that must identify and monitor barriers to the learning process and propose diversified strategies to overcome those barriers, using a multilevel approach to provide access to the curriculum, based on the Universal Design for Learning (Alves, 2019). These flexible curricular models are defined by systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of the implemented interventions and measures, and an ongoing

dialogue between teachers and parents or other caregivers (e.g., psychologist, language therapist) (Alves et al., 2020; Decree-Law 54/2018).

However, Portuguese schools reflect an increasingly diverse society which includes dimensions such as migration, ethnic and religious minorities, gender identity, specific needs and high abilities. Dimensions that intersect in different ways and are influenced by factors such as socio-economic level and geographical location. It was supposed that education must value and recognize the diversity of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious identities, as well as promote inter-knowledge and positive interactions between everyone (ACM, 2022). However, this process is ongoing in Portugal. The challenges of implementation, especially a perceived lack of resources and the concern that sharing scarce resources amongst a larger group of students might disadvantage those who are the most vulnerable (e.g., disabled students, migrants), create an inextricable challenge for current Portuguese inclusive education policy and practice. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has unavoidably hampered the progress of this implementation (OECD, 2022).

Data from the last report of OECD (2022) about Inclusive Education in Portugal show that persistent differences in student learning and well-being outcomes persist for students from disadvantaged and/or diverse backgrounds, students from low-income families, students with immigrant backgrounds and students from Roma communities (OECD, 2022). It seems that inclusive education is still focused mainly on children with disabilities, and not on all kinds of students.

In this chapter, I argue for the need for broadening the definition and practices of inclusive education in the school context and the benefit of an intersectional approach. I provide a short characterization of immigrant background students in Portugal, an overlook of the relationship between inclusive education and intersectionality, illustrating how intersectionality can be helpful for the successful implementation of inclusive education in Portugal that benefits every student.

2. IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN PORTUGAL: CHARACTERIZATION AND INCLUSION PROCESS

Students with an immigrant background in Portugal can trace their origins back to the 1970s, primarily associated with the influx of individuals from portuguese-speaking African countries, often referred as PALOPS. It intensified during the 1990s when an increasing number of people from Brazil, Eastern Europe and Asia, started to migrate to Portugal (Hortas, 2018; Oliveira, 2022), turning the country into an important destination for migrant workers involved in formal and informal networks. Consequently, today, there is a diverse population with immigrant backgrounds stemming from various origins (Oliveira, 2022).

According to the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF, 2023), there were 781.915 foreigners living in Portugal in 2022, with a visible presence of immigrants in different sectors of Portuguese society. The foreign population concentrate on geographical locations with more job opportunities and already established social networks, mainly resulting from the first waves of immigration (Oliveira, 2022). The rate of foreign people is the highest in the district of Lisbon, where 42.2% of all foreign people lived in 2021 (Oliveira, 2022).

These immigrants brought their families and included their children in schools (Almeida et al., 2023; Oliveira & Gomes, 2016). According to PISA 2018, in Portugal, about 7% of students had an immigrant background in 2018, up from 5% in 2009, with a slightly greater increase in the number of second-generation students (+1%) than first-generation students (+0.5%) (OECD, 2019a). Amongst these immigrant students, about one in four was socio-economically disadvantaged (OECD, 2019a). The Portuguese Observatory of Migrations estimates that during the 2018/2019 school year, there were 52 641 students with a foreign nationality in Portuguese schools, which represents an increase of 18.5% from the previous school year (Oliveira, 2021). During the 2019/2020 school year, there were 68.018 foreign students, representing an increase of 29.2% from the previous school year (Oliveira, 2022). In fact, according to the Atlas of Students with an Immigrant Background (Seabra et al., 2023), immigrant students rose from 14% of the total number of students in 2012/2013 to 17% in 2019/2020, with an increase in both absolute (+3.336 students) and relative (+3.03 p.p.).

The majority of foreign students are currently enrolled in basic education, comprising 79.8% during the 2019/2020 school year. Among these, a larger proportion is in the first cycle 34.9%, 17.7% in the second cycle and 27.2% in the third cycle. Secondary education, on the other hand, caters to approximately 20.2% of these students, equivalent to 13,716 individuals (Oliveira, 2021).

Students with an immigrant background were distributed preferentially among the municipalities in the Lisbon metropolitan area, the Aveiro-Porto Braga coastal strip, the Algarve and Alentejo. In 2019/2020, the top municipalities that attracted students of immigrant origin were Sintra, Lisbon, Amadora, Almada and Cascais (Seabra et al., 2023).

The most represented national origins were Brazilian, Angolan, French and Cape Verdean (representing a total of 58%). The 18 most represented countries of origin were: Brazil (28.6%), Angola (13.9%), France (9.5%), Cape Verde (6.3%), Mozambique (4.0%), Ukraine (3.6%), Guinea-Bissau (3.2%), Romania (2.5%), Venezuela (2.4%), São Tomé and Príncipe (2.4%), Germany (2.3%), Moldova (1.7%), China (1.4%), Spain (1.1%), India (0.8%), United Kingdom (0.8%), South Africa (0.7%) and Nepal (0.7%) (Seabra et al., 2023).

Currently, national and international legislation unequivocally protects the right of immigrant children and young people of immigrant origin to be fully integrated into their host societies, particularly in education (Hortas, 2013). In this area, Portugal has, in recent years, been positively compared with other countries (MIPEX, 2020).

In Portugal, the realm of educational policies and interventions has demonstrated a consistent and enduring commitment to embracing social and cultural diversity in its multifaceted dimensions since 1991. Since then, various legislative measures have been adopted in favor of the inclusion and academic success of immigrant students. For example, concerning policies for the integration of migrants, the Portuguese Government's program proposes measures to work on intercultural education in schools, through training for preschool, primary and secondary teachers that encompass four pivotal dimensions (DGE, 2017):

- Openness to cultural diversity: encouraging an open-minded approach to different cultures.
- Social cohesion: fostering a sense of unity and togetherness within society.
- Equal opportunities: striving to ensure equitable access and opportunities for all.
- Participation in democratic life: encouraging active engagement in democratic processes.

And work on educational measures that promote academic success and reduce drop-out (DGE-MEC, 2012).

However, the available evidence indicates that the full realization of the right to education, which is widely enshrined in national legislation, has not been achieved in the academic field (Faneqa, 2018; Hortas, 2013, 2018, Guerra et al., 2019; OECD, 2022; Seabra & Cândido, 2020). Recent studies carried out in Portugal on inequalities in school results between immigrant pupils (i.e., foreigners), Portuguese descendants of third-country nationals and indigenous Portuguese reveal significant disparities between the groups (Almeida et al., 2021; Guerra et al., 2019; OECD, 2022).

Studies carried out by the OECD (2006, 2010) show that, in general, immigrants tend to have greater difficulties in achieving good school results when compared to host country nationals. Although between the 2003 and 2018 editions, there was an overall improvement in results in the three areas considered, both in the average of the OECD countries and in Portugal, immigrant students continue to underperform non-immigrant students (Oliveira, 2022).

Immigrant students often face the challenge of adapting to academic regulations, expectations, and educational objectives that may significantly differ from

those in their home country. Additionally, they must acclimate to learning a foreign language, which can result in various learning challenges or difficulties within the host communities (Singh et al., 2021).

In terms of student reading performance in Portugal, data from PISA 2018 show an average difference of 32 score points between students with an immigrant background and students without an immigrant background in favour of non-immigrant students (OECD, 2022). Considering the socio-economic profiles of students and schools, the gap narrowed to 26 points. Second-generation students with an immigrant background scored higher (483) than first-generation students (436), a trend observed in most countries (OECD, 2022).

In a recent study carried out in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area by Almeida et al. (2021), there are significant differences in the performance of students with an immigrant background depending on their immigrant background and place of birth. In particular, the majority of first- and second-generation immigrant students perform worse than their non-immigrant peers (Almeida et al., 2023).

The rate of transition/conclusion of primary and secondary students was consistently lower for foreign students between the 2011/2012 and the 2019/2020 school years. This rate increased from 79.0% in the 2011/2012 school year to 87.8% in 2018/2019 and 92.3% in 2019/2020 in basic education and it increased to 73.7% in secondary education, suggesting steady improvements (Oliveira, 2021).

Regarding to immigrant students, in 2015 Portugal was the OECD country where the gap between the results of immigrants and other students in science and reading had narrowed the most (PISA, 2016): from 54.9 points in 2006 to 15.7 points 2015 in science; and from 55 points to 6.7 points in 2015 in reading. An equally significant reduction, which only places Portugal in third place among the countries with data for both years, is seen in mathematics performance: from 2006 to 2015, immigrant students went from an average score of 50.1 points lower than that of their peers without a migratory background, to 25 points (Oliveira, 2022).

Nonetheless, according to Eurydice (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019), in 2017, a slightly higher percentage of students with immigrant backgrounds (13.9%) left education early compared to their native-born counterparts (12.5%).

Portugal has a comprehensive inclusive education framework; however, the education system remains mainly oriented towards the inclusion of students with special education needs (SEN). As a result of the composition of the multidisciplinary teams, which are still professionals specialized in SEN, students with an immigrant or ethnic minority background might be less of a priority and suffer

from a lack of support due to a certain resistance and lack of preparedness in the education system (OECD, 2022).

On the other hand, this could jeopardize the well-being of these children and young people, given that social relations are often imbued with prejudices against migrants (ACM, 2022; OECD, 2019b, 2022).

Portugal continues to present a mixed picture marked by some negative indicators – namely in terms of racial beliefs and ethnic discrimination (Council of Europe’s Anti-racism Commission, 2021)- alongside a pattern of somewhat positive attitudes towards immigrants and immigration (Eurobarometer Especial 519, 2021; Oliveira, 2022).

There is thus a record of awareness that ethnic and racial prejudice exists in Portugal. This reality is identified in the European Social Survey results, where Portugal had shown high levels of racism (Ramos, Vala & Pereira, 2010) and in the Report on Racism, Xenophobia and Ethnic-Racial Discrimination in Portugal where Roma communities, the Afro-descendant communities and the Brazilian community are the groups most affected by racism and xenophobia in Portugal (Marcelino, 2019). PISA 2018 also analysed the segregation of students in schools using an isolation index of immigrant students (OECD, 2019b). Portugal achieved a score of 0.48 on this index, surpassing the OECD average of 0.45. This indicates that, on average, students with immigrant backgrounds in Portugal are more likely to experience segregation from their peers without immigrant backgrounds in comparison to most other OECD countries. Portugal is one of the participating countries that have a relatively large proportion of immigrant students and which segregation of these students across schools is quite prevalent (OECD, 2019b, 2022).

Many of these children suffer intersectional discrimination- combination of forms of discrimination, which can interact simultaneously (multiple) or «in a way that makes them inseparable» (intersectional), against people on the grounds of sex, ethnic or racial origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or other characteristics, and or other characteristics, and discrimination suffered by people who possess (or are considered to possess) these characteristics (European Institute of Gender Equality, 2022).

Nevertheless, in general, studies carried out in Portugal have focused on analyzing the integration of immigrant students based only on indicators of academic (in)succes (school grades and retention and dropout rates). It doesn’t consider the importance of adopting a broader and more complex definition of integration or inclusion, taking other dimensions into account (Guerra et al., 2019; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).

International literature has highlighted this concern. The Multilevel Model of Adaptation of Immigrant Children and Young People proposed by Motti-Stefanidi et al. (2012) for example points out the importance of considering not only the academic performance of immigrant students but also the individual level, the interaction level, and the societal level. For the authors, the individual level includes factors relating to intra-individual characteristics such as personality, temperament, motivation, self-regulation, and cognition. The interaction level, which incorporates the previous level, organizes factors relating to the frequent contacts (direct or vicarious) that the child/young person establishes, in their close contexts (family, school), with other relevant individuals (peers, adults). Finally, the societal level – which incorporates the previous levels – includes broad-level factors with a potential impact on the integration of immigrant children/young people, namely ideologies, social representations and cultural beliefs (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).

Parte superior do formulário

These factors can be broadly categorized into individual and family attributes (e.g., importance of first- versus second-generation status, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, country of origin, age on arrival and language background), school system (e.g., school tracking policies and segregation issues, language supports and school resources, teacher quality) and host society characteristics (e.g., immigration and integration policies, social protection and welfare policies, levels of income inequality and social stratification features within the broader society) (Volante et al., 2019).

3. INTERSECTIONALITY

The term intersectionality was introduced through the work of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, an African-American law professor at Columbia University and at the University of California, Los Angeles. In her work *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics* (1989) e *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991), Crenshaw critiqued the frameworks of American antidiscrimination law, second-wave feminism, and the civil rights movement, demonstrating how each of these models for remedying oppression fails Black women.

Years later, Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2020) offer a broad definition of intersectionality considering that intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity of human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways.

Intersectionality is a framework that recognises and examines how various social identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability, intersect and interact with each other, creating unique experiences and forms of discrimination for individuals. It highlights that these identities cannot be considered in isolation but are interconnected and shape a person's lived experiences, privileges, and disadvantages. Intersectionality emphasises the importance of considering the complexities and intersections of multiple identities when analysing social issues and developing strategies for social justice and equality.

Intersectional discrimination is understood as negative behavior directed at members of an exogroup. This discrimination is often so subtle that it is difficult to identify. In fact, in contexts where cultural and social forces silently shape the background, these groups are often affected by other systems of subordination (Crenshaw, 1991).

Examples of intersectionality include for example first-generation immigrant and socio-economically disadvantaged girls coming from countries with strong patriarchal communities or boys whose mother tongue differs from the language of instruction who struggle with language acquisition (OECD, 2021).

Intersectionality thus emerges as a theoretical and methodological tool that makes it possible to understand the simultaneous and multiple effects of different identity categories on gender understood and located in the social, political, economic, cultural and symbolic dynamics that intersect each life context (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Rebughini, 2021).

Education places paramount importance on intersectionality, as it acknowledges and seeks to confront the intricate interplay of diverse social identities. From an intersectional point of view, social inequality is not only determined multidimensionally along different axes of inequality – such as gender, migration, socioeconomic background, age, disability and so on – but emerges particularly in the intersection of these axes as they mutually constitute each other within social contexts such as the family or the school (Gross et al., 2016).

The intersectionality framework focuses on how multiple social categories and affiliations (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) are intertwined within the individual (micro level), repeating and enforcing interlocked systems of power and oppression in society (macro level) (e.g., racism, misogyny) (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

An intersectional approach in schools relies on analyzing how multiple identities co-exist and then exploring the outcome of this interconnection, with specific attention on marginalized and underserved minorities and groups (Gross et al., 2016). Intersectional pedagogy asks educators to understand that identities and experiences compound on one another and to take those identities and experiences

into consideration when developing curricula, in their teaching practices, and inclusive education measures. By considering intersectionality, educators can better understand and respond to the diverse experiences and needs of their students (Bešić, 2020; Tefera et al., 2018).

In «The Urgency of Intersectionality»¹ presented by Crenshaw in TEDWomen 2016 she acknowledges that «Without frames that allow us to see how social problems impact all the members of a targeted group, many will fall through the cracks of our movements, left to suffer in virtual isolation». Being aware of it it's possible to consider that some experiences that converge and interact with identity may seem to be visible, but others are less readily apparent.

In that sense, intersectionality is crucial in education to acknowledge diverse experiences. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals hold multiple social identities, and these identities intersect to shape their experiences (La Barbera, 2012; Bešić, 2020; Tefera et al., 2018). By understanding this complexity, educators can avoid oversimplification and ensure that all student's unique perspectives are acknowledged and validated.

Intersectionality also can challenge systemic oppression. Intersectional pedagogy allows us to understand that different isms like racism, sexism, heterosexism or gender binarism encompass very real and intimately harmful and distinct societal systems of self-serving domination and privilege that are created by people and structure educational inequities that are, unjust, unnecessary, and preventable, also allows to understand that many times these oppression systems operate in the same time in the same person (intersectional discrimination) (Nnawulezi et al., 2020). By addressing these interconnected systems of oppression, education can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Intersectionality encourages educators to incorporate diverse perspectives, histories, and experiences allowing students to see themselves reflected in their study materials and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the world (Bešić, 2020).

Intersectional education also fosters empathy and understanding by exposing students to diverse viewpoints and experiences. It encourages dialogue, critical thinking, and respectful engagement with different perspectives, contributing to a more inclusive and tolerant society (OECD, 2021). It also empowers educators to recognize and tackle the distinct hurdles confronted by marginalized students. This insight facilitates precise support and interventions aimed at fostering their academic achievement and holistic welfare (Bešić, 2020).

¹ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o>

In that sense, intersectionality in education plays an indispensable role in shaping an all-encompassing, fair, and empowering learning milieu (Bešić, 2020).

There are some ways to apply intersectionality in schools (Dessel & Corvidae, 2016; DOPE BLACK, 2023; OECD, 2021): a) develop an inclusive curriculum that incorporates diverse perspectives, histories, and experiences. Include materials that reflect the identities and contributions of marginalised groups, and challenge stereotypes and biases. Educators can examine their curriculum to see what voices are represented and find places to expand diversity. Students are more likely to engage when they see their own identities reflected in the reading assignments, examples, and imagery; b) implement culturally responsive teaching strategies that validate and value the cultural backgrounds and identities of students. This includes using culturally relevant examples, incorporating student voice and choice, and fostering a positive and inclusive classroom environment; c) providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities for teachers and staff to enhance their understanding of intersectionality and its implications for education; d) develop and establish policies and practices that promote inclusivity and equity. This can involve analyses of course design and policies to ensure they account for the identities and experiences of every student (e.g., How might class policies about due dates and test attempts affect students of different identities? Are the textbooks, materials, and other class resources you've chosen accessible to every student and supportive of a range of cultural norms?) or the implementation of anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies; e) ensure that support services, such as counselling, mentoring, and inclusive education, are accessible and responsive to the unique needs of students from different intersectional backgrounds. This may include providing culturally sensitive counselling services and targeted interventions for marginalised students; f) fostering partnerships with parents, families, and community organisations to understand and address the intersectional needs of students; g) collecting and analysing data on student outcomes, including academic achievement, disciplinary actions, and participation in extracurricular activities, disaggregated by various intersecting identities. This helps identify disparities and informs targeted interventions and policy changes.

Applying intersectionality in schools requires an ongoing commitment to reflection, learning, and continuous improvement. It involves actively listening to students, engaging with diverse perspectives, and challenging biases and systemic inequalities to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

These ideas are in the same way with OECD (2022) recommendations to help Portugal overcome challenges related to developing capacity for inclusive education:

1. Identify and build upon effective practices that encourage collaboration and capacity building to address all dimensions of diversity.

2. Enhance opportunities for continuous professional development for educators to better support diversity and inclusion. Sustaining inclusive education would require a meaningful transformation in how teachers are trained. Without this training and knowledge, most teachers feel unprepared to deal with culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms as international research and data show.
3. Implement multicultural teacher education to mainstream diversity, equity and inclusion courses.
4. Improve the recruitment, retention, and attractiveness of the teaching profession to strengthen inclusive education.
5. Promote the recruitment of teachers from diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Evidence shows that the Portuguese teaching force has a very small number of teachers with an immigrant background. Portugal should consider taking concrete steps to bring diversity within its teacher force to realize the vision of inclusive education as projected by the 2018 legislation. To break the cycle of inequity, the education system should directly address diversity in education. This starts with attracting more ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse students into teacher education programs and then retaining them in the teaching profession. Research illustrates the importance of teacher diversity because of the substantial benefits teachers with diverse backgrounds provide to all students, especially students with diverse backgrounds.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The admission of foreign students into the Portuguese education system is an unequivocal reality that is challenging schools, teachers, and families alike in the search for new ways of promoting the integration of these students (Ministry of Education, 2022).

National studies have confirmed that foreign students tend to have an unsuccessful academic record when compared to their native peers (Hortas, 2018; OECD, 2019a, 2022; Seabra & Cândido, 2020). Multiple causes have been identified to justify this disadvantage – the students' language skills, their family's educational background, socioeconomic conditions, the territorial contexts where they live, schools' responses, and social discrimination (Almeida et al., 2023; Oliveira, 2021, 2022).

After decades of efforts to promote equity and inclusion in education, with the implementation of progressive measures aimed at addressing equality, equity and diversity among students (e.g., efforts to grant more flexibility and autonomy to

local actors, including schools, providing support for teachers and other school personnel to develop their professional practice) have been difficult to achieve. Immigrant background students continued not to be considered in inclusive education application measures (OECD, 2022). It seems that from a formal point of view, the Portuguese inclusive education framework focuses on supporting all students, however, the education system is less prepared for the inclusion of some student groups such as immigrants or Roma students. This may lead to an uneven distribution of support and resources. Intersectional discrimination is not used as a lens, tool or analytical perspective that provides a framework for understanding individual and group experiences of discrimination based on multiple identities and connecting those experiences to systems of privilege and oppression. Classroom practices also vary considerably, within and between schools. While some teachers use collaborative learning approaches to encourage greater student participation, others might be more restricted in their discretion to vary practices in response to student diversity. Professional learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders around of diversity and inclusion are also limited. In addition, there are limited strategies for monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices. Despite widespread awareness and acceptance of equity and inclusion policies, there is varying levels of successful implementation of the inclusive education framework at the school and local levels (OECD, 2022). This is a strong illustration of the fragility of inclusive education and the need for a secure commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion dedicated to the right to education of all children.

Portugal's path to an inclusive education system that works for all students will likely require not only changes in attitudes but also changes in practices at every level of the education system. It is needs to strengthen the governance and financing of inclusive education by creating stronger collaboration strategies to broaden the understanding of inclusive education and building a coherent funding system to support equity and inclusion. Developing capacity will also be a key priority for Portugal, through expanding professional learning opportunities for teachers and building on good practices to promote collaboration to address all dimensions of diversity and intersectionality, they generate insights into systematic differences in educational outcomes along social locations and the intersections of multiple social identities (Gross et al., 2016). Promoting school-level responses to student diversity, introducing a program of professional learning to promote inclusive classroom practices, and strengthening strategies for monitoring and evaluating inclusive practices at the school and local levels can lead to inclusion and prevent stigma, stereotyping and discrimination.

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THE MEANING OF DIFFERENCE TODAY.
REFLECTIONS ON THE PREVENTION OF RACISM
AND SEXISM FROM CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary social reality is increasingly characterised by multiplicity and differences in ethnic and cultural backgrounds, gender, sexual orientation, learning styles and different abilities. The concept of difference is fully suitable for describing today's society, but at the same time it is still imbued with stereotypes and prejudices that give the term negative connotations and a sense of inferiority with respect to a dominant model. In reality, neither individual nor collective identity is composed of a single category of difference. The intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989), which considers precisely the subject seen in the interaction of the various differences that distinguish it, highlighting the multiple and relational identity that distinguishes each singularity, proves to be particularly appropriate for understanding the complexity of lived lives. Starting from this theoretical framework, the paper will focus on some forms of distortion of the concept of difference, such as sexism and racism, to highlight how, in a subtle and subtle manner, they can insinuate themselves into our lives from childhood through formal, non-formal and informal education. Adequate initial and ongoing training of education professionals and constant collaboration with families is indispensable in order to make everyone more aware of the constant threats to which we are subjected, especially the youngest learners.

Keywords: difference, stereotypes, intersectionality, lifelong learning, gender.

1. THE CONCEPT OF DIFFERENCE IN EDUCATION: FROM LIMIT TO RESOURCE

THE TERM 'DIFFERENCE' has often been at the centre of philosophical, cultural and scientific debates in recent decades, even though the category of difference has always characterised human history: just think about contacts and contaminations between ancient civilisations, the various forms of colonisation that have taken place over the centuries, the internal class struggles in the various societies, the twentieth-century battles for the recognition of rights, globalisation and the recent migratory phenomena that have taken place all over the world, particularly in the Mediterranean area. In each of these historical moments, the discovery of otherness has played a strategic role in the transformation and transmission of culture as well as in the construction of the identity of subjects.

Contemporary reality is characterised by differences, real or presumed. From an early age we learn from family, school and other educational agencies that each of us is unique and unrepeatable, and this concept is presented as a value, a wealth, a peculiarity that sets us apart in the world. Despite this, however, there are more and more striking cases of stigmatisation, marginalisation, acts of bullying, cyberbullying and violence against someone who appears 'different' from an ideal model of a man or woman arbitrarily constructed by a social group (Council of Europe, 2021).

In a world that desperately tries to put order in what, in most cases, cannot be ordered, we need to become aware of how differences materialise in our daily lives: multicultural prejudices, educational poverty, gender stereotypes, often emphasised by an ill-considered use of hate speech, especially within social media, as if our existence developed in watertight compartments between reality and virtuality (Pasta, 2018).

Beyond the striking episodes of serious violence, there remain mental conditioning and stereotypes that, more or less consciously, lead us to create for ourselves a model of man and woman according to which we consider and relate to others. These models are learnt from the earliest years of life, confirmed and perpetuated through processes of formal and informal social education, in which we are immersed from the moment we live in the society. For this reason, it is particularly necessary and urgent to invest in the training of those who are involved in educational processes in various capacities, but also of each citizen, especially parents, because each subject, through informal relationships influences the other, reproduces patterns of behaviour, creates expectations in the other.

On the one hand, the diversity and variety of the characteristics and experiences of individuals in human communities appears to be a necessary and indispensable precondition for innovations to take place, but on the other hand, we are a

long way from giving due value and respect to individual and collective diversity and variety. On the contrary, the current tendency is to ignore them, undervalue them, nullify them through processes of totalitarian homologation or even make them the object of stigmatisation and social exclusion (Callari Galli et al., 1998). Where this is not possible, the tendency to hierarchise and subordinate prevails, to define a superior and an inferior, what must prevail and what must be subjected. It is a matter of creating a dominant ideal model (of male or female identity) to which individuals must conform.

The inability to interconnect entails the risk of processes of abstract universalisation and totalitarian homologation, with the consequent reduction of the variety of forms of life and culture, of intelligences and the exclusion of the possibility of being 'otherwise' and thinking 'differently'.

We are immersed in an universe of plural and conflicting codes and cultures, we move between centrifugal pushes. On the one hand there is the need for roots and identity belonging, for the recovery of community and authentic relationships, on the other hand there is the possibility of multiplication of experiences opportunities for encounters as a corrective to isolation but with the risk of fragmentation of the experiences themselves (Biagioli, 2005).

Today, the concept of difference recalls two main aspects: on the one hand, it concerns issues that are urgent on the agenda of governments and recurrent in public opinion considered as an emergency or a problem to be solved; on the other hand, difference can become a value towards which to strive, based on the fact that the pluralism of cultures can become a vector of citizenship, promoting encounter and dialogue, nourishing the possibility for everyone to actively participate in public life. It is precisely in this dual tendency that a contradiction insinuates itself that characterises today's relationship with the 'Other': political leaders use difference as a tool to garner consensus by fuelling a climate of distrust and hostility towards those who differ from a presumed majority due to their ethnic or cultural origins or sexual orientation, while pedagogical research and education seek to exalt respect, dialogue and the guarantee of equal opportunities as the tools at the basis of any educational process that ensures that all subjects can grow and educate themselves in an autonomous, critical and free manner.

The similarity/difference antinomy can be considered one of the most significant interpretative keys to understanding the subject with which pedagogy is constantly called upon to deal (Cambi, 2006; Felini, Di Bari, 2019).

Pedagogy, collaborating with other educational sciences, as Dewey (1929) had already emphasised, is not limited to knowing what has been and what is happening, but also to anticipating and acting on what will be, seeking to promote more

effective forms of education and instruction, reflecting on the fundamental values to strive for and experimenting with the most suitable strategies to achieve them.

The 'difference' in Pedagogy reminds us that the recognition of the other and its recognition as 'other than me' is the basis of every educational process and every form of democracy (Felini, Di Bari; 2019).

Morin considers inequalities to be one of the great risks and limits to the realisation of a democratic and participatory society (2011) and raises the need for an awareness of the common «individual-society-species» belonging. The consciousness of our 'Earth-Motherland' should also translate into a willingness to realise earthly citizenship (2014).

Pedagogy, today, has the extraordinary and complex task of helping individuals – through formal and non-formal educational processes – to break down all those prejudices and stereotypes that limit the appreciation of differences to make them become resources, individual riches, values that open new frontiers and make social and cultural life richer and more articulated.

2. SEXISM AND RACISM: TWO CHALLENGES FOR THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The coexistence of multiple cultures within societies produces a daily experimentation of difference, which should not result in closures and stigmatisation but in an opening of the 'space of encounter' and dialogue (Cambi, 2006; Silva, 2015) and the valorisation of the active role that each subject possesses. This applies to ethnic cultural differences as well as other diversities such as biological, religious, generational, gender, sexual orientation... Sexual difference appears as the most natural and obvious, biologically determined. Gender equality is now sanctioned by national and international ministerial documents, in fact, the data tell us (Global Gender Gap, 2023) that unemployment and job insecurity among women is much higher than among men, violence against women with cases of femicide continues to fill the crime pages of the newspapers. In Italy in particular, the phenomenon is becoming increasingly widespread in every age group and social class (Istat, 2021; Openpolis, 2023). It is difficult to delineate the causes, probably also a macho and patriarchal culture that, until a few decades ago, saw the man superior to the woman, head of the family and *pater familias* supported also by the legislative system.

The coexistence of multiple cultures within societies produces a daily experimentation of difference, which should not result in closures and stigmatisation but in openness. Hence, the current commitment on the part of political and educational

institutions to implement training programmes on respect, gender equality and to combat all forms of discrimination and violence.

Gender and ethnicity represent a challenge for education today because they pose new questions about what pedagogy must continue to be in order to call itself a science that helps women and men to design their future, helping them to find meaning and significance in their existence, and because they represent two emergencies whose origins can be found in the exasperated individualism that also denies the otherness present in each of us (Lopez, 2018, Guerrini, 2020; Tsouroufli, 2020).

In the absence, for now, of a more adequate and less compromised word, I will continue to use the term «racism», sharing Ravera's (2010) thought that race is an imaginary category applied to real human groups, it is a «naturalistic metaphor» (Guillaumin, 1972; 1992) that serves to name differences of power, class, status and to naturalise the same devaluation, stigmatisation, hierarchisation, discrimination of certain groups, minorities, populations. Although it has no scientific value, it has had and continues to have a social performativity. In the face of old and new challenges such as neo-liberalism, climate change, the spread of violence by baby gangs and cyberbullying, intercultural education represents precisely the common thread, the common basis from which to trigger other processes of change and growth.

The theory underlying this approach is that of cultural universalism, rooted in Kant's cosmopolitan education, which aims to educate a man free from barbarism, with the affirmation of the equal dignity of all human beings (Portera, 2022).

Intercultural education today, understood as education for the recognition of the rights and equal opportunities of all, for respect and educational success, which is a 'pass' for exercising active and democratic forms of citizenship, may seem obvious and taken for granted, but in fact it is increasingly indispensable, considered the numerous episodes of discrimination and violence directed against young people of non-Italian origin.

The intercultural training of teachers and educators is the indispensable prerequisite for creating educational spaces (schools, universities, childcare centres, playgrounds) in which to experience one's rights and learn to respect others.

The Italian school, for some decades now, has been particularly attentive to ensuring a welcoming environment for all, natives and non-natives alike, where everyone can feel recognised and valued in their uniqueness beyond ethnic, linguistic, cultural differences (MIUR, 2014, 2022). The European way and the Italian way is that of encounter, dialogue, collaboration, which precisely needs to be defined and implemented by the receiving society (Biagioli, 2021).

The space of encounter represents somewhat the European intercultural model, which is different from the colonial model that marginalises the various social groups and from the melting pot model, typical of some American states, which places cultures next to each other by dictating rules of behaviour established by the host country. In particular, the latter model is the one that runs the risk of establishing itself in Europe as well, creating separation and isolation between cultures, if there is no planned and effective transcultural educational intervention that goes beyond the differences to grasp the commonalities, overcome the same cultures and create something different and new that crosses cultural boundaries. Such a model is the most difficult to achieve, still in the making, at the basis of which is the very concept of culture, no longer considered as an immutable heritage to be preserved, but as a set of principles, traditions, customs, social norms and rules of behaviour constantly influenced by the encounter-contrast with the Other and therefore constantly subject to transformation.

The intercultural approach aims at promoting equal educational opportunities, with a view to preventing ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural cleavages from the culture of origin and recognising our different identities in a constructive and democratic way, based on universal and shared values. The intercultural and multilingual dimension manifests itself continuously and does not only concern geographical origin but also daily life choices and lifestyles, as stated in the Basic Document *Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato «Zerosei»* (MIUR, 2017), where the importance of avoiding classificatory definitions of the identity of the other is clearly underlined.

Intercultural education is thus characterised as a process that generates changes in each individual, promoting shared values based on mutual respect through complex and difficult relationships between subjects characterised by the risk, of misunderstanding and failure, but precisely because of this intrinsic difficulty, it must be the subject of attention, investigation and research by pedagogy.

On the part of the educational operators, a profound and constant exercise of self-observation and self-reflection is required in order to break out of the frames of reference that we inevitably use (Sclavi, 2003).

The ability to decentralise and put oneself in the shoes of others are indispensable skills in the educational professions (Fiorucci, 2020) to be honed through reflexive and self-reflective practices (Mortari, 2009).

The same skills mentioned above are indispensable to prevent and eliminate another major harmful pitfall today, that of sexism. While it may seem inconceivable today, at least in western societies, to uphold the supremacy of one sex over the other, in reality, even institutionally, until about half a century ago, in Italy, men had a recognised superiority and power over women. Suffice it to say that

in Italy and France the right of women to vote was only acquired in 1946, the Italian language unfortunately does not have neutral terms valid for both genders, but even though male and female exist, the masculine is almost always used to refer to both genders, Only in recent years have attempts to innovate the language been experimented with many policies coming from various cultural and political environments as well as from individual citizens (Sapegno, 2010; Sabatini, 1986; Robustelli, 2023).

In short, in the semantic, cultural, social order, «the majority masculine is both the referent and the measure of all things, and the universal neutral that incorporates, contains, summarises and defines them all» (Ravera, 2010, p.28).

The majority us also defines the norm of sexuality, also establishing heterosexuality as the measure (or principle) against which all forms of sexual orientation are to be measured. Consequently, «the sexual order constituted by sexism implies not only the subordination of the feminine to the masculine, but also the hierarchisation of sexualities, the foundation of homophobia» (Borrillo, 2009, p. 26).

The system of sexism, like racism, is a complex system of domination with multiple dimensions: economic, social, juridical, symbolic, linguistic, semantic, relational...Its main ideological device is naturalisation or biologisation ('sex' as 'race'). There are thus a number of affinities and continuities between forms of racism and sexism, «The tradition of androcentric and phallogocentric universalism, transmits a cultural mode where the other and not only other sex, but any 'other', is hierarchically set in an inferior role» (Tussi, 2009). Sometimes sexism creeps in more insidiously and is even more difficult to grasp and eradicate.

As Bourdieu (1998) also observed, behind the visible changes in the status of women lie invisible structures that remain almost unchanged. Even in so-called 'democratic' societies, the formal equality of citizens is not matched by substantial equality in all areas and structures remain gendered. One only has to think of the occupational segregation whereby some sectors are exclusively male or female. According to UN data, 90% of the world's wealth belongs to men, even though women perform much more than half of the working hours; for women between 16 and 44 years of age, the main cause of death or permanent disability is violence suffered by a man, usually belonging to the circle of closest relations (partner, husband, brother, father..).

In addition to these striking forms of imbalance of power and violence to the detriment of the female gender, there are today, various less obvious forms and almost incorporated as a 'normal' or natural fact, which see women relegated to conditions of disadvantage and subalternity (Guerrini, 2019; Ulivieri, 2014).

The mass and social media and advertising continue to convey ideal images of women as objects of attraction of male sexual desire or engaged in domestic

activities, while in the workplace there remains a clear female dominance in the care and teaching sector (Priulla, 2013; Leonelli & Selmi, 2013; Lipperini, 2007; Forni, 2022).

These are all forms of discrimination to which every girl child born and living in a social context is subjected. Only the knowledgeable and careful preparation and intervention of the educational agencies in which boys and girls find themselves living (educational centres, families and schools above all) can intervene to break the maintenance and transmission of certain stereotypes.

As Lopez (2018) writes, it is necessary to educate in the male-female relationship and invest in gender relations starting from the family where the presence of sexual hierarchies and the consequent characterisation of the behaviour of individual members have represented the main conditioning in the acquisition of behaviours considered peculiar to the female gender. In this way, the family, together with the school, has conditioned the biographies of girls and boys, forcing them to retrace paths already trodden and not to go further, imagining ways of thinking, styles of relating and value systems inspired by collaboration and solidarity.

Indeed, as some researches have shown (Guerrini, 2017, 2018; Biemmi, 2017), even the school that connotes itself as a neutral and equal educational space, where constitutional rights are guaranteed to all; through the disciplinary programmes, textbooks, teaching activities and the very perceptions of teachers can turn out to be a place where sexist stereotypes are reproduced, more or less unconsciously.

In particular, with regard to textbooks, there are various studies in Italy that show how they are still imbued with many sexist stereotypes that see girls and female figures relegated to domestic roles and subordinate to men, or described as witches, fairies and sorceresses, confirming a decidedly anachronistic image of families, men and women. Already in the 1970s, in Italy, Umberto Eco (1972) and Elena Gianini Belotti (1973) had denounced the low quality of school texts, sweetened and conformist, pervaded by traces of racism, sexism, authoritarianism, incapable of representing the changes of those years. Even more shocking is that careful research on content, language and images (Biemmi, 2017, Guerrini, 2017) reveals the same problems and limitations. It seems that textbooks cannot keep up with today's society in which so many different family models coexist.

Even subjects, apparently so objective, such as history, geography, science, through textbooks do not represent reality in a real and equal manner. The presence of women is very scarce or even absent, always described as an exception or an appendix on the sidelines of a world built by men and for men. Even in some professions (zoologist, scientist, historian, geographer) there seems to be no room for female figures (Guerrini, 2017).

Sexism and racism are also intertwined in everyday practice, in the lives of some women who experience multiple forms of exclusion. In this sense, the reference to the intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989), also within the framework of the Pedagogy of Differences, helps us to better understand the individual realities of the subjects by considering them in their interactions between the various differences that distinguish them. Every identity is in fact multiple and relational and can be more adequately understood if considered in its own context in interaction between the various differences that distinguish it. This is why it is essential to pay attention to how differences intersect in each person's biographies and how this can determine different conditions of inequality.

3. CHILDHOOD AS A PRIVILEGED AGE FOR EDUCATING RESPECT TO OTHERS

In the first years of life, a child's cognitive, social and emotional development is particularly fertile and receptive, and it is precisely during the early years that all educational agencies, formal and non-formal, have the task and the honour of being able to leave their mark on the youngest child's education. This is why it is important that during childhood, educational experiences are chosen and planned with awareness, the television programmes, games, illustrated books and textbooks that we place in children's hands have an effect on their imagination, their identity, and the construction of their relationship with the Other.

Specifically, referring to forms of intercultural education and gender difference education, there are many contributions by Authors in the national and international panorama (European Commission, 2023; Catarci & Fiorucci, 2015; Ringrose et al. 2018;), as well as legislative references and Guidelines (MIUR, 2014; 2016, 2022), to orient teachers, educators, school leaders and families to implement forms of education to respect the other, to counter forms of discrimination on ethnic grounds and gender-based violence, not only physical but also symbolic, institutional...

The need to transmit a differentiated pattern of behaviour according to biological sex is thus inherent to society itself: gender patterns are functional to the organisation of knowledge of social reality. The fact that we perceive the sexual differentiation of male and female roles as socially inevitable, as inherent in the natural order of things, is the clearest proof of the fact that it rests on sedimented and naturalised social schemas (Bourdieu, 1998), absorbed from very early childhood. The process of gender-role formation is so precocious that its effects manifest themselves from the earliest years of life, which is precisely why they risk being mistaken for 'natural'. The divarication of male and female destinies is structured from very early childhood when a different biographical path for males and females begins to be

woven in the family, the result of small but incessant daily choices that progressively tend to channel the paths of one and the other towards different, increasingly divergent paths. Elena Gianini Belotti wrote about fifty years ago:

«In order to produce individuals who are, to a certain extent, consenting to a pre-packaged destiny, which begins even before birth, an appropriate conditioning system must be employed. The first element of differentiation, which becomes a symbol, is the colour of the layette prepared for the unborn child [...]. The more these models are differentiated for males and females, the more the result appears guaranteed, so that from very early childhood everything that can make them similar is eliminated and everything that can make them different is exalted» (Gianini Belotti, 1973, pp. 25-27).

Pink and light blue during childhood represent two extremely effective markers that are functional in maintaining the gender order: a strictly binary order that does not foresee any trespassing and that cages not only the feminine, but also, or perhaps above all, the masculine (Abbatecola & Stagi, 2017). At the centre of it all is a system of differentiated social expectations that adults put in place on a daily basis to ensure that boys and girls gradually come to correspond to the socially acceptable image of each other (Ruspini, 2009).

Paradoxically, it is precisely in the era of 'educational polycentrism' that the role of traditional agencies should be strengthened: the school, if possible together with the family, should take on an interlocutive, intermediary and guiding role «aimed above all at the acquisition of criteria for filtering and analysing codes, messages, in an attempt to find and make sense of a communicative experience, which instead could dissolve into insignificance and indeterminacy if governed only by the power of the media» (Besozzi, 1993, 176).

The educational work to be done is indeed wide-ranging: on the one hand, school curricula, textbooks, teaching subjects, i.e. the entire culture handed down must be critically revisited so as to make visible the contributions of women in the various disciplines (Sapegno, 2014); on the other hand, it is essential that teachers be equipped with critical tools aimed at implementing a culture of equality in their daily teaching practice. In this project of global rethinking of 'doing school', one cannot think of isolating the gender variable; on the contrary, this must be continuously intersected and put into dialogue with other variables that produce inequalities: first and foremost, that relating to socio-cultural background (Bonini 2012; Romito, 2016; Ballarino and Checchi, 2006) and the intercultural variable (Bolognesi and Lorenzini, 2017).

In particular, during early childhood, when children experience life with their peers in the nursery, it is important that conditions are created for children to integrate positively into the host society, without having to give up their cultural roots

(Raccagni, 2022). A two-dimensional condition of dual ethnicity that allows the subject on the one hand to maintain the references of the family ethnic tradition and on the other to have a generative contact with the host society.

The kindergarten can thus be a place where different family models and care practices can meet and compare, a privileged opportunity to express and bring into dialogue different representations of parenting and the relationship between generations (Bove and Sharmahd, 2020).

The confrontation with the other, whether parent, mother, father, woman, man, native, immigrant or the so-called foreigner in the broadest sense, requires educational professionals to think about difference not only in ethno-cultural terms, but also in existential and educational terms. The challenge is to build practices of participation that are diverse, but above all respectful, reflective and sustainable for all parents (natives and immigrants).

An intercultural education, «is not a particular type of special education for foreigners, nor to be implemented only in the presence of foreigners, but is addressed to all and, on the contrary, works so that no human person is excluded and/or has to feel foreign» (Fiorucci et al., 2017, p. 617).

Interculture therefore calls the educator to make a choice of meaning and to mature a critical ethnocentrism. The aim is to work daily so that meeting points are built, where dialogue is possible and where new co-constructed identities grow in well-being. If, therefore, it is important to assume the perspective of a critical ethnocentrism as a precondition for any intercultural journey, at the same time it is necessary for educators to be aware of their role as intercultural mediators.

Intercultural and gender studies, in particular, lend themselves to a joint analysis aimed at analysing that complex set of practices, attitudes, beliefs, which produce discrimination and processes of inferiorisation. Although sexism and racism are two specific systems of differentiation and domination, they are in fact founded on the same interpretative paradigm of reality based on the 'naturalisation' of socially constructed relationships (Campani 2000; Rivera, 2010).

4. CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

This contribution has sought to highlight the importance of education, from the earliest years of life, in respect for the other as a subject different from myself, with particular emphasis on ethnic-cultural and gender differences. At the same time, it has opened up further avenues for investigation and research with reference to which educational model to adopt in order to educate responsible citizens capable of welcoming difference as a resource.

A fundamental aspect is the importance of the initial and in-service training of educational professionals, so that they possess those critical and reflexive skills that enable them to intercept the needs of users and build a relationship based on caring and listening to the «Other», free from conditioning and prejudices.

Education to difference is not to be understood as a further discipline but as a way of perceiving reality, of being and acting that crosses all disciplines in a transversal and transdisciplinary manner and that involves each person throughout his or her life (Gamberi et al., 2010; Guerrini 2022).

Finally, in the childhood phase, collaboration between families and educational institutions is fundamental so that children can find meaning and continuity in the messages they receive, especially if they are supported by authoritative adult figures such as parents and teachers.

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RURAL SCHOOLS AS AN INNOVATIVE EPICENTRE: THE VALUE OF DIFFERENCE IN DIGITALITY AND CIVIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Rural schools have been studied for decades in relation to aspects such as isolation or resource deficits; however, their role as a social organisation and their potential are also elements for analysis. Far from the negative views that have dominated the debate on rural schools for decades, the aim of this paper is to reflect on the enabling elements of rural schools to contribute to a civic, digital and collaborative education supported by pedagogical innovation. Data such as those from the PISA report show that eminently rural communities with a large municipal dispersion, such as Castilla y León, obtain excellent results. It concludes with the idea that rural schools offer important advantages for carrying out the necessary innovation that the challenges of today's society require for future generations. It is important for the University to show the characteristics of these centres, since they are often the first destination for students of teaching degrees in early childhood and primary education. The paper concludes with a series of proposals for intervention at the macro, meso and micro levels.

Keywords: rural schools; teacher training; innovation; digitality; civic education.

1. INTRODUCTION

WITH THIS CONTRIBUTION we reflect on the value that the differential characteristics of rural schools bring to innovations in teaching-learning processes. To this end, we will consider two pillars: digitality and civic education. These two elements will focus the analysis on close relation to two major protagonists: the rural context and the teaching staff.

Of the 47.5 million inhabitants of Spain (Padrón, 2022), 7.5 million live in rural areas. From a quantitative point of view, this is a minority compared to the urban population, but it is undoubtedly a sufficiently relevant group to be considered in the planning of policies, education, health, social services and services in general.

The World Bank estimates the annual loss of rural population in Spain at 1%, reaching 19% in 2022 (World Bank, 2022). If we add to this figure very aged population pyramids, we find an even smaller school-age population. Even so, it is considered that for criteria such as social justice or equal opportunities, it is necessary for Spanish students to have access to a quality education system regardless of whether they live in a small town or a large city.

Traditionally, the rural school has been considered inferior to its urban counterpart. As early as 1995, Ortega described the rural school as «the poor relation» at a time when the demographic figures for rural areas were more encouraging than they are today. From this contribution we intend to offer a current perspective that avoids the traditional negative stereotypes that accompanied the school for many years and focuses on its potential from the educational point of view. This is not a unique vision, as it has already been taken up by various works to which we will refer throughout this chapter.

In the PISA report that analyses educational results, Castilla y León stands out as the Spanish community with the best scores in Spain. Its data are comparable to those of Finland and much higher than the OECD average. What are the reasons for this? Two are usually highlighted: the importance that has traditionally been given to education in the community by families and the rurality of many of its schools, which have very low ratios due to depopulation, allowing a more individualised teaching, greater links between teachers and a strong connection with families and the community. In other words, the regressive population pyramids of rural areas mean that many schools are disappearing, but also that the educational quality of those that are still active is a national and world reference.

Beyond the quantitative data, in its qualitative aspects, the rural school represents elements of hope. On the one hand, different studies carried out in different Spanish autonomous communities speak of superior results in the rural medium to equal socio-economic condition and, on the other hand, different analysis refer to the added value that brings the rural school (Educational Evaluation Service, 2018) without forgetting the pedagogical challenge that supposes (Abós, 2020).

2. AN EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO: RURAL SCHOOLS

If the definition of the rural environment is complicated, the definition of a rural school is not without its difficulties. There are many studies that point to the

heterogeneity of schools in rural areas –typologies that range from the Grouped Rural Centres (GRC)¹ to the graded school, partly because of the differentiated organization of schools, but also because of other issues related to the context. Rural Spain has important demographic, social and cultural characteristics. It is more difficult to provide services in the interior and north of the country than in the south and east, where there is less geographical dispersion, with fewer and larger municipalities. This means that schools in rural areas are heterogeneous in terms of distribution, dispersion and student population.

In Spain, there is no specific typology of rural schools that provides differentiated data with respect to urban schools. Their conceptualization is given by the rural context. In turn, the concept of rurality is also complicated to define due to its historical evolution and the multiplicity of rurality, as pointed out by Gallego and Santamaría-Cárdaba (2020). To provide an estimate, we turn to García et al. (2017), who estimate that 80% of Spanish municipalities are considered rural.

Boix defines the school in the rural environment as «the unitary and/or cyclical school that has as its support the rural environment and culture, with a heterogeneous and singular organizational structure (depending on the typology of the school) and with a multidimensional pedagogical-didactic configuration» (2014: 13). With this definition the author refers fundamentally to the GRC. Although in the rural environment there are educational centres with organizational structures like those of the city, in this reflection we will focus on these centres with multilevel classrooms because they are exclusive and characteristic of the Spanish rural school.

Gallego and Santamaría-Cárdaba (2020) highlight three limitations of rural schools: the scarce educational offer that conditions displacements to other educational centres from an early age, the lack of human resources and unfair educational policies towards this type of centres.

Quantitative aspects (disappearance of GRC, low number of students and depopulation of rural areas) tend to offer negative views regarding rural schools, as has already been pointed out. In contrast, in this chapter we will focus on demonstrating the advantages of this type of centre based on research and both primary and secondary data.

Álvarez-Álvarez and Gómez-Cobo (2021) emphasise the attractiveness of rural schools for their educational possibilities, highlighting the opportunity for innovation. Low student ratios favour educational personalisation processes supported by more flexible and dynamic methodologies (Tahull and Montero, 2018). Musons (2021) points out that personalisation opportunities allow for the reevaluation of

¹ Called CRA in Spain

competences aimed at solving practical, everyday situations and this means re-thinking curricular elements from a different perspective. Day-to-day education in multilevel classrooms improves both academic and social learning, favouring interpersonal relationships and conflict management. In addition, the relationship established between the school and the families is usually closer.

Other positive elements include less conflict, a social and affective climate that is more conducive to personal and academic development, greater cooperation, and collaborative work (Bustos, 2010). Social cohesion is another recurring element in the literature. Rural schools are much more than educational centers for the towns in which they are located; previous studies have shown their symbolic value (Morales, 2017).

3. TEACHERS AS THE CORNERSTONE

Every educational center has two indisputable protagonists: the teachers and the students. In the case of rural schools, the role of these two groups is more intense due to their small number. In the case of teachers, there are unitary schools where there is only one permanent teacher who is accompanied by itinerant specialist teachers who travel to different communities on alternate days to teach subjects such as English or physical education.

If there is one indisputable fact about the quality of education, it is that its cornerstone is the teacher. There is a clear consensus that the educational quality of a school or educational center is directly related to the professionals working in it (Conor and Bunci, 2019; Chetty, Friedman and Rockoff, 2011). Therefore, the training and selection of teachers who will be responsible for educating future generations is of great importance. Consequently, an educational institution is only as good as its teachers. While there are other variables, the most critical is human capital.

The specific characteristics of rural schools mean that relationships between teachers and students are much closer and more personal. Some suggest that this aspect may partly explain the good results obtained by Spanish rural communities in the latest PISA data and in other national studies.

However, several studies have highlighted the important shortcomings in the training of teachers during their time at university, as well as the need expressed by rural teachers for better preparation and previous experience, which leads to high levels of dissatisfaction and even disengagement (Arriaga and Ruiz Gallardo, 2017). This is not new; Spanish literature has been pointing out the lack of attention to the specificity of rural schools in teacher training periods for a long time (Corchón, 2010; Boix, 2004; Bustos, 2008; Abós, 2011). Internationally, the situation seems similar according to recent survey data (Handal, Watson, Petocz

and Maher, 2018). This limitation has long been recognised by the European Commission, which has continuously called for a more flexible and personalised curriculum based on the specific needs of learners, including rural specificities. It is important to note that the level of interim, temporary, and even short working hours in rural schools tends to be high, aspects which make it difficult to ensure the continuity of a management and teaching team and the development of medium-term projects (Sebarroja, 2005).

On a continuous basis, we find a series of limitations that are cyclical for teachers at different educational levels. Another is work overload, which limits the adoption and development of innovative methodologies and policies due to the time investment they require. Lomba (2019) compiles data that reflect this work overload, to which is added the lack of leadership in educational projects, an aspect that in itself hinders innovative processes.

González and Hennig (2020), for their part, determine three profiles of teachers based on their teaching involvement: the first would be made up of motivated teachers interested in changing the educational reality, the second would be more static, although with room to incorporate small specific changes, and the third profile would represent teachers who are resistant and opposed to any change. Lomba (2019) attests to these resistances and points them out as limiting factors for participation and involvement in teaching innovation projects.

Despite this, there are numerous case studies and experiences reported both in the written press and in academic works, which speak of excellent innovation projects in rural schools led by teachers with high levels of motivation and who have one thing in common: they have been able to take advantage of the benefits offered by small rural schools.

4. FAMILIES AS A DETERMINING FACTOR

The fieldwork we have carried out in previous research (Morales, 2013; 2017) has shown us that there are municipalities with enough resident children to keep the school open, but it has had to close because it has not reached the minimum ratio of 4 pupils established by the Spanish law. The reason is that families send their children to schools in larger municipalities or in the cities where they work. The reasons given are access to more and better resources and extracurricular activities, as well as the socialisation of their children with a larger number of other children.

While the school alone may not be enough to attract new settlers, it is one of the factors that some young families often consider when deciding where to settle. The literature has identified several accounts in interviews where rural residents have expressed their feelings associating the closure of the school with «the death

of the village». Keeping the school in the community means that children of school age stay longer in the village, that several teachers come to the village every day (as they tend to live outside the village), and that social relations are established between all the educational agents (teachers, students, and especially families). The family and the school are the two main socializing agents, and it has been proven that the collaboration of both actors in the same direction guarantees better results, academically, socially and emotionally.

For Musons (2021), the lack of coordination between family and school determines an inefficient school. For their part, Belmonte et al. (2020) point to a temporary lack of a participatory culture among parents, as well as a lack of training to develop their educational functions. Once again, the small size of rural schools is key, which is a determining factor due to the contagion effect. In a small center, if the majority of families are involved in the school, it is more likely that when a new family arrives, they will do the same, and vice versa. On the other hand, in a large urban centre, there is a tendency to think that there are many other families who can participate in parents' association activities or in other tasks that the centre asks parents to do.

Another relevant aspect is that the degree of involvement of families in their children's education has a significant impact on their attitudes, their learning, their motivation and, consequently, on their educational experience and the results obtained. In rural schools, the relationship between teachers and families is very close because the number of families is small and meetings are more spontaneous and recurrent than in large urban areas.

Works such as that of Llevot and Bernard (2015) suggest the development of projects focused on teacher training to optimise their relationship with families and encourage their participation. Delval (2013) proposes opening the school to the community so that the school becomes a space for culture, encounters, and knowledge, developing meetings between different agents. This option would be feasible in rural schools where the school can be the only cultural reference point in the municipality and can host other educational, cultural, and social activities for the rural community.

The school-family relationship is a current challenge at an international level which in rural contexts has facilitated elements for fluid, complementary and collaborative relationships. As has been indicated, it is fundamental for the maintenance of many rural schools that families in small municipalities choose them to send their children to school instead of opting for other centres located in larger municipalities.

5. TWO PILLARS FOR INNOVATION: DIGITISATION AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Olivares and Lacruz (2019) believe that we could be at the beginning of a new stage in which teaching performance goes beyond teaching, expanding towards a broad concept of education in the sense of renewal used by Imbernon, Gimeno, Rodríguez and Sureda (2017). In this sense, rural schools could increase their visibility in the education system as a whole (MEFP, 2018).

There are numerous innovative experiences carried out in rural schools, although they do not always enjoy good visibility and dissemination. Some of the factors already mentioned, such as the temporary nature of teaching, which limits the consolidation of projects and actions in the medium and long term, and the loneliness of some teachers, are barriers that need to be addressed by education policies.

The rigidity of the curriculum can be another limiting factor for educational innovations based on the personalisation of learning and the construction of meaningful learning (Musons, 2021). Heavy administrative burdens are a constant in the demands for change in any work that relies on the voice of teachers.

Based on this analysis of the socio-educational context and the main actors in rural schools, we will focus on two pillars that we consider fundamental for teacher innovation in rural schools: digitality and civic education.

5.1. DIGITALITY

The technological revolution of the last decades has not stopped and, together with the processes of globalisation, has affected all areas of society, including education. The pandemic caused by Covid-19 has accelerated the digital immersion of technological processes, tasks, activities and relationships in the daily life of educational centres.

The preparation of citizens of the future cannot ignore the demands of the new social context in which technologies are at the centre of structural transformation.

We are facing a social context with a number of characteristics that are in some cases unprecedented and in others more pronounced than in the past: The curricular convergence of educational systems with a strong influence of Western models, the relevant weight of the sciences, mathematics and the English language, the structural synergy that prolongs the basic education phase, the increasing deregulation of the state in educational areas through processes of decentralisation and privatisation, the empowerment of women through greater educational attainment and the gradual increase in their qualitative and quantitative weight in the labour

market, the changes in the peculiarities of work associated with flexibility, decentralization and innovation (Beltrán Palanques, 2019). These are undoubtedly profound changes that require new responses from all social organizations, including schools in general and rural schools in particular.

Beyond some of the disadvantages of working with ICT in the classroom, the advantages are numerous (Barbosa, 2014) and enrich the learning processes, having a positive impact on both teachers and students. In rural schools, its value as a tool to mitigate rural isolation has been pointed out by several studies (Elboj, Rodríguez and Welikala, 2013).

Regarding the teaching-learning processes, they improve motivation and interest creation, favour cooperative learning, student initiative, creativity, the development of digital skills and skills such as information search and management.

For a teacher in a rural educational centre, digitalisation applied to teaching has great advantages as it allows interaction with other centres or institutions outside the classroom, accessing almost unlimited resources, facilitates assessment, enables better interaction with teachers from other units of a GRC, is a source of resources and a relevant means of reducing isolation. For rural students, it increases their living environment, favours their autonomy, broadens their educational resources, facilitates access to other learning environments and allows flexibility in multi-level classrooms.

The LOMLOE (Current Organic Law on Education of 3/2020, of 29 December) states that the use of information and communication technologies has brought about several alterations in the understanding of life and in the abilities to originate personality and learning. A more innovative, effective, and extensive approach to digital competence is required for continuous and stable learning. Digital competence, therefore, is not only about learning to use electronic devices and their resources, but also about quality digital education, where students learn to communicate and coexist with technology and its continuous advances in an appropriate way (Tilve and Méndez, 2021; Jiménez, 2022) and to cope with challenges such as misinformation.

Castells (2014) compared the Internet revolution to the electric motor in the industrial era. Schools have made numerous efforts to incorporate information and communication technologies into their daily routines, through programmes to equip technological infrastructures and teacher training processes. However, there is a digital divide in both use and access, related to different variables: educational level, economics (access costs), demographics and geography (Morales, 2016).

We find ourselves in a historical moment with a globalised society that tends to homogenise ways of life and social and cultural patterns of behaviour, while at the same time movements are appearing to safeguard the identity of communities that

want to maintain their identity signs (Bolívar, 2017). At the same time, the gap is widening between those who have access to the channels for integration into this global society and those who do not, establishing two societies or two rhythms of access to the new realities operating today. Rural schools have traditionally been on the dark side with regard to the digital divide, isolation or lack of resources. However, resources and digital literacy have allowed them to overcome many of their traditional shortcomings and turn them into windows to the outside world with great impetus due to the strong motivation of teachers and students.

This chapter joins numerous experiences and research projects that seek to solidify a rural school that takes advantage of its differential characteristics to build educational processes that go beyond traditionalist visions and adapt to new social changes, training its students within a competency framework that seeks more to know how to do than simply to know. The school is not the only institution responsible for media and digital literacy, but it has a great responsibility in this sense in order to be able to move on from the shortcomings of the past, taking advantage of the synergies of the present with a forward-looking perspective that seeks to reduce the social and digital gaps between the most and the least favoured in the inclusion within the globalising process. This will promote effective equality of opportunities among students regardless of cultural, social, and economic variables, and of the most neglected: geographical variables.

5.2. CIVIC EDUCATION

Civic education has evolved according to the socio-educational context from being an element belonging to the public sphere (Hernández, 2015), to being closely linked to the sense of justice and belonging in the contemporary era, to move nowadays to a strong link to experiences supported by cooperative learning (Torrico, Lepe and Domínguez, 2016) emerging concepts such as «Educational Community» or «Learning Community».

In this sense, the idea of the «Escuela Nueva» is based on a pedagogy that considers freedom, cooperation, mutual help, research, collaborative work and, in general, a strong orientation towards community life as key elements (Meirieu, 2022).

This vision of the school as an educational institution that goes beyond transmitting habits and knowledge, implies an active role as a socialising agent that fosters values and attitudes such as tolerance, civic sense, respect and equality. The intensity of this civic education depends on different variables, among which we again highlight the role of teachers.

The classic works of Dewey (1998) have influenced an education linked to participation and human social awareness by modelling habits and emotions. Values

education follows a process that is not identical to the transmission of knowledge and content. Values are deeply conditioned by culture, so both the general culture and the subculture of minorities, groups, or contexts such as the rural one must be considered. The main educational actors are teachers, although the relevance of students and their families in this process of civic education cannot be forgotten.

The educational community agrees that interaction and collaboration between family and school are directly proportional to the effectiveness in transmitting not only knowledge, but also values that favour better educated citizens who are better prepared to undertake different roles today, and to do so on a basis of values that respects, recognises and values the most vulnerable groups.

Civic humanism is a socio-political model that emphasises community life. Thus, Irizar (2016) points out that education is the key to the new knowledge society, although he considers that the social and economic support it receives is insufficient in many countries, including Spain.

This relevance is reflected in the curricular presence of civic education in the curricula of all European Union countries. In Spain, the latest education laws have produced a seesawing of subjects that have been implemented and suppressed with the alternation of the political sign of the government, but with a common sense that points to the relevance of these competences and values.

From the above we can deduce that the macro-social elements point to the need and relevance of producing and reproducing an education in values which, in turn, is supported by micro-social aspects such as the type of centres, the level of education or the existence of specific groups. In short, education that addresses and responds to the different forms of inequality: cultural, socio-economic, ethnic, religious, gender, special educational needs, etc. In this chapter we want to focus on rural specificity which constitutes a form of inequality, although, in the case of schools, it has differential elements that can be used to achieve this education in values more efficiently.

Rural schools have shown their potential to work from this perspective of citizenship education with different experiences. Solanilla and Arrazola (2020) have focused on how relationships in rural schools can lead to inclusion or exclusion, as has the work of Guerra, Arteaga, and Londoño (2020), who talk about the relationship between inclusive education and rural schools. Vázquez (2019) discusses how rural schools are resigning their values to an urban-centred perspective.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

This chapter has reflected on the potential of rural schools as centers with specific idiosyncrasies and differential characteristics, such as multilevel classrooms, that allow for educational opportunities not offered by other centers.

Rural schools have the space, the cultural capital and the track record to implement innovations in spaces where interaction between all educational actors is an inherent resource. There are numerous initiatives by public schools – and some private schools run by neo-ruralists – which show that rural schools can turn some of their traditional limitations into potential in a social context where it is essential to combine the local with the global. New technologies and the capacity of rural schools to innovate in education bear fruit in the case of pioneering centers of educational innovation.

The incorporation of specific competencies for working in multilevel rural schools allows teachers to be aware of the possibilities of multilevel didactics for the development of metacognitive, social and cooperative skills, among others (Kivunja and Sims, 2015).

As early as 1996, Tonucci suggested that the rural school is like a contextualized laboratory, permeable to experimentation and innovation. No school should forget its local context or forget its global context, and neither should rural schools. The characteristics presented show that this type of school makes it possible to train and educate students for a rapidly changing future, going beyond a traditional perspective of knowledge to be replaced and/or complemented by values such as cooperative work, respect for individuality, equal opportunities, humanity, and a democratic spirit, and offering a solid starting point for facing this future regardless of the context.

Finally, some proposals are made to strengthen the link between citizenship education, digitality and innovation from and towards rural schools at three levels: macro, meso and micro.

At the macro level:

- It is necessary to improve teacher training for Teacher Education Degrees by going deeper into GRC as a specific model of centre that requires a differential methodology due to their multilevel characteristics, their differentiated environment, and the methodological implications they require.
- Continuing with training, it is necessary to reinforce the training of future teachers through innovation strategies, didactic renovation, updating of contents and competences and, more generally, to encourage an education (from all spheres) that incorporates and optimises new technologies while promoting ethical and civic values.
- Encourage research in rural schools

At the meso level:

- Specific programmes are required to support rural schools and their current teachers, especially in the Spanish autonomous communities with higher rates of rurality.
- Increase the dissemination and visibility of innovative experiences that can be replicated in other schools.

At the micro level:

- Teachers in rural schools need to assume a leadership role that requires high doses of motivation. To this end, it would be important to establish incentives in terms of merit, internal promotion, marks, etc. that recognise the demands of teaching in multi-level schools.
- School practices that strengthen the relationship between the school and the rural community. Teachers can establish more and better relations with the environment that go beyond relations with families along the lines of the network-schools suggested by Fernández Enguita (2007).

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EDUCATIONAL TRENDS AND VALUES FOR EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Today's global and interconnected society demands values and pedagogical actions that have a positive impact on social transformation and education. It is necessary to form the basic principles for the moral development of society, so we must ask ourselves what are the challenges that education, and especially schools, will have to face in the coming years. The aim of this chapter is to review the theory of the school, its educational trends, the values that define them and the challenges they face, especially during the 6 to 12 school cycle, in order to promote educational change. Education must seek new pedagogical models and innovative strategies to promote the development of students' competencies. In order to improve educational practices, it is necessary to recognize and respect social diversity and cultural values by promoting inclusion and interculturality, as well as equal opportunities. Therefore, there is a need for teachers who are trained in this direction and who promote educational and transformational processes.

Keywords: educational transformation, values, innovative experiences, school.

1. INTRODUCTION

INDUSTRIALIZED SOCIETIES have undergone various changes that contrast with the slow pace of change in education, as «we live in a period characterized by a constant renewal of knowledge» (DeZubiría-Samper, 2019, p. 4). The world

presents a global and interconnected society in which values are fundamental for social transformation, how we will educate and what we will teach is one of the questions that arise in education (Buxarrais-Estrada, 2013). Therefore, the current social context requires reflection on a transformative school based on education for global citizenship, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed in the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015), in order to respond to the demands and needs of contemporary society, thus committing to a comprehensive education to form globally engaged citizens (Coma-Roselló et al., 2023).

Citizenship education allows learners to develop social and emotional skills to promote dialogue, responsibility and tolerance, and to promote social transformation by reducing inequalities, taking into account justice and respect for human rights and the environment, so that students contribute to the peaceful transformation of society, since citizenship education promotes a culture of peace (Intermón Oxfam, 2007; InteRed, 2017; Nieuwelink and Oostdam, 2021; Cauch-Alcalá & Heredia-Soberanis, 2023). Society is in crisis in terms of moral values, which is why there is a need for value education with fundamental principles for the moral development of society and, therefore, for the formation of supportive, autonomous, respectful and responsible citizens (Yaguana-Castillo et al., 2019), which requires value education based on the new principles of citizenship.

In this context, we must ask ourselves what challenges education will face in the coming years and what direction educational institutions should take. The rapid development of the 21st century demands changes, solutions and new needs in the way citizens think, live and act. Technological, industrial and educational advances pose major environmental, economic and social challenges. For this reason, education must seek new pedagogical models and innovative strategies to promote the development of skills that students need to face everyday life effectively (Cárdenas-Martínez, 2019).

In this sense, the aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical review of the school, the educational trends and the challenges it faces, especially in the 6-12 educational stage, in order to promote an educational transformation from within.

2. THE SCHOOL AND THE PROMOTION OF INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCES

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, various pedagogical transformations emerged within the New School movement to break with the traditional model of education, realizing that there were other ways of understanding and carrying out the education that had been done in schools until then. The new ideas or principles to improve the quality of human life take

into account the interests of students, the development of competencies and socio-emotional skills, experimentation, reflection, active participation of students in the teaching and learning process, problem-solving skills and responsible decision-making, autonomy and self-knowledge, perception of the environment, empathy, care and concern for others, awareness, participation, creativity and responsibility (Atiaja-Acosta et al., 2023).

This discontent and dissatisfaction with the schooling institution promoted changing and transforming the school from a more creative and equitable perspective. This way of living, thinking and building the school has marked the foundations of the pedagogical practices of the most innovative teachers of this century (Carbonell-Sebarroja, 2015).

Although all the authors of the Nueva School are based on the same principles, each of them has its own characteristics, such as: understanding education as a process of developing the qualities of the pupil; proposing more active methods; starting from the respect for the interests of the child, its nature, autonomy and individual freedom; promoting cooperation, solidarity and group work, which favors human relations.

The authors of the libertarian movement and democratic education start from a critique of the authoritarianism of traditional education and defend freedom as a principle and an end, since they want to educate in freedom for freedom. One criticism of free schools is that the academic part falls short, but they defend themselves by saying that students will acquire the knowledge necessary for their development on their own, as they understand that when learning is done out of interest, meaningful learning takes place (García, 2017).

A slow, calm and sustainable education means to stop, to reflect, to be calm, to be sustainable, to be present, to learn, to experience, to be spontaneous, to be creative, to be playful, to be autonomous, to meditate, to live in a slower pace, and therefore to criticise the time and the control of the educational administrations by means of the schedules, the adherence to the contents of the curricula and the assessment practices of the traditional education (Carbonell, 2015; Murcia-Padilla, 2021).

More recently, at the beginning of the eighties, the first Amara Berri public school was created in Donostia, with the support of Loli Anaut, and later the Amara Berri system was created. As stated by Anaut (2004) and Gorosmendi-Lazcano (2020), its pedagogical intention is based on globality, the vital process and the open system, where all the elements interact constantly, understanding the school as a society that allows to live, to be and to develop fully, not as the rigid traditional school that seeks uniformity and does not take into account the potential of the

protagonists. The approach is based on methodological principles taken from the Active School and reinterpreted.

Montessori's approach, which has remained innovative to this day, involves freedom giving way to autonomy, allowing students to choose what and how they learn; developing critical, independent, autonomous, sensitive, nurturing, orderly and self-confident individuals; promoting values of responsibility, cooperation, sociability and freedom; avoiding authoritarianism, overprotection and overindulgence; mixing ages promotes socialization; and play allows young children to develop and learn (Montessori, 2009; Gallardo-Mestanza et al., 2021; Espinoza-Freire, 2022; Sanchidrián-Blanco, 2023).

Under the motto «School by life and for life,» Ovid Decroly was a Belgian educator, psychologist, and physician who founded his first school in 1907. Based on the principles of freedom, observation and globalization, his educational method is child-centered. The author is attributed with the concept of globalization in teaching, the introduction of centers of interest and the global reading method (Besse, 2005; Decroly, 2006; Renés-Arellano, 2020).

Waldorf education helps them to be free individuals and find meaning in their lives by encouraging respect, creativity, social responsibility, imagination, intellectual curiosity and admiration for the environment and nature, and this way of understanding education in Waldorf schools responds to the growing demand from families seeking an alternative to traditional education (Quiroga-Uceda, 2014; García, 2017; Renés-Arellano, 2020).

Alexander Sutherland Neill founded the Summerhill boarding school in 1921, where his hallmark is respect for human freedom. Starting from this premise and from the students' interests and desires gives them the autonomy to develop a personalised curriculum according to their concerns and abilities, following their pace and attending to their curiosity and needs (Neill, 2012; Carbonell-Sebarroja, 2015; Renés-Arellano, 2020).

3. PRIMARY EDUCATION: VALUES AND SHAPING ELEMENTS OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

In the new social context resulting from globalization, education must focus on human development, so learning must go beyond technical aspects and enable new generations to function effectively in a connected world (Bahajin, 2018; Cauch-Alcalá & Heredia-Soberanis, 2023).

Education is responsible for providing them with the necessary tools to develop knowledge, skills and values that promote the integration of culture into the community and the exercise of assertive and responsible citizenship, in such a

way that the school responds to the demands of society at each historical moment (Rojas-Monedero, 2022). This is why education is essential for them to achieve individual progress and to be able to face the personal, social and professional challenges that life presents them in a context characterized by scientific and technological advances (Espinoza-Freire, 2022).

Schools should be spaces of reflection and participation, promoting solidarity, interculturality, inclusion, democratization and active agents of social change from a holistic and community-based approach (Morin, 2016; Sales et al., 2019; Álvarez-Álvarez et al., 2020; Coma-Roselló et al., 2023).

Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on school time and transform the traditional atmosphere of school organization in order to achieve long-term, deep, authentic, critical and contextual learning for the comprehensive education of students (Vásquez-Recio, 2007; Murcia-Padilla, 20-21; Patiño-Hurtado, 20-23).

The organization of students is another important aspect of education. The school must promote mixed-age learning to make education more beneficial. In this way, the heterogeneity of multilevel learning is an advantage that should be used in the classroom by making the most of learner's characteristics and differences, promoting individualized attention, attention to diversity and inclusion. As a result, students have a holistic development, gradually becoming more autonomous and directing their learning to improve their self-esteem and self-affirmation (Gorosmendi-Lazcano, 2020; Felipe-Duque et al., 2022).

In the current context, there is a need to move towards active, dynamic and participatory teaching methods that give students a voice, where the schedule does not hinder their organization and where work is done in a global and interdisciplinary way, with the SDGs as a cross-cutting theme. Thus, methodologies that focus on the needs of students should be promoted, encouraging their responsibility, potential and commitment so that they can improve the contexts in which they participate (Coma-Roselló et al., 2020; Coma-Roselló et al., 2023).

Gradually, school organizations are opting for active methodologies that involve students, but only by involving them in a shared and formative assessment will their participation in their learning be complete. Involving students in assessment breaks with the traditional idea that assessment and grading do not correspond to them, since an assessment that does not take into account the person being assessed is unfair and undemocratic (Mellado-Moreno et al., 2021; Barba-Martín & Hortigüela-Alcalá, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to change the assessment processes and use different formative assessment instruments and tools that not only consider the end of learning, but also assess the process (Zepeda-Hernández et al., 2016; Tirado-Olivares et al., 2021).

Society demands a quality education system with new methodologies and forms of teaching that reduce school failure, criticizing the role and value of homework (Hernández-Prados & Gil-Noguera, 2022). Therefore, the challenge is to transform traditional homework into more individualized school tasks, so as not to send the same thing to the whole class, so that homework must be interdisciplinary, motivating, individualized and optional, which implies rethinking the purpose of homework from a critical and reflective point of view (Trahtemberg, 2002; Perrenoud, 2006; Acosta, 2021).

The use of the textbook as the basic learning material for the whole group is contradictory in order to meet the diversity of students, which is why it is necessary to use different sources and resources (Gorosmendi-Lazcano, 2020). We must teach students to be critical of what they see, read and hear, so that they know how to contrast different sources of information with criteria, because information is everywhere and there are things happening every day that can be worked on in the classroom.

The cultural, social, political, economic and technological changes that we are experiencing as a result of globalization are reviving interest and concern for education in values, which had seemed to be taken for granted, and are also having an impact on educational practices (Martínez-Martín et al., 2011; Faustinelli, 2022). In recent decades, citizenship education, values education and peace education have become increasingly important in the search for the development of competences for the formation of an integral citizen and social responsibility. Therefore, one of the main questions is which values should be taught and why, allowing values education to reorient education towards objectives that are more in line with the current challenges of society (Ruiz-Corbella, 2003; Sánchez-Santamaría, 2010; Olivo, 2017; Ramírez-Molina et al., 2019; Severino-González et al., 2022).

Values education is an active and multidisciplinary process in which different socializing agents participate, so that all individuals are educated in values to achieve personal and social well-being that allows us to live together in a healthy, harmonious, inclusive and peaceful way, promoting cooperation, happiness, respect for others, making appropriate decisions, behaviors and commitments to meet personal and social demands, so that values education cannot be alien to the social context or the educational model (Guillén-de-Romero et al., 2022).

Therefore, in order to promote values education in the classroom, it is necessary to relate the fundamental and shared values, the values of the surrounding socio-cultural context and the personal values of those who participate in their education. The effective promotion and development of these values requires a safe and trustworthy environment, with respect and appreciation, where teacher-student and peer-to-peer interaction fosters choice, autonomy and initiative, and where personal differences foster identity (Parra-Ortiz, 2003).

Therefore, the school, which has the responsibility to train free, autonomous and critical personalities, must adapt to the characteristics and needs of the subjects and promote values that enable students to face different circumstances (Faustinel-li, 2022). For this reason, it must address values education from a curricular and cross-curricular perspective in order to build a more just, responsible, fair, free and happy society (Martínez-Martín et al., 2011).

4. EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Currently, there are still some educational models that do not meet citizens' needs and reduce the quality of learning (Atiaja-Acosta et al., 2023). In the face of an uncertain future, it is necessary to rethink educational practices, since in contemporary education it is necessary to teach content and skills that are essential for students to master (De-Zubiría-Samper, 2019). In a globalized world, the challenge for education is to seek a holistic and sustainable model, because although the world is constantly changing, the education system must change and reorient itself towards a 21st century school with a more flexible curriculum, giving students a leading role, restructuring methodologies or exploring other possibilities in the digital age (Galván-Cardoso & Siado-Ramos, 2021).

The challenge is to create transformative schools with participatory, active and committed educational communities, where pedagogical reflection is a dynamic and continuous process to ensure social transformation in line with the SDGs. To achieve this, it is necessary to resolve the current limitations of the administration, educational agents and the different didactic and organizational aspects, as well as to improve teacher training, resistance to change, memorization and rigid application of the curriculum, interdisciplinarity, inflexibility of schedules and limitation to work on democratic values (Blasco-Serrano et al., 2019; Dieste et al., 2019; Córica, 2020; Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2021; Vázquez et al., 2021; Coma-Roselló et al., 2023). Therefore, we have to ask ourselves questions about the contents, methodologies or forms of assessment that the educational system has as a result of historical choices, because, as we have said, in the face of the new challenges of today's society, schools need to be transformed in order to adapt to them (Furman, 2022).

One of the school's challenges is to train flexible, autonomous and free citizens who can think, act and value themselves, where education helps them create their life project and be interested in knowledge, learning, knowing, asking questions throughout their lives and making their own decisions (De-Zubiría-Samper, 2019). To form a more human and supportive being, who knows how to act cooperatively with others, who has the full development of their personality through an integral formation of values, attitudes and skills in all areas of life, whether family, social, school or professional (Blanco, 2019). These are some goals: to be engaged,

curious and creative, with critical and reflective minds, with initiative and autonomy, respectful, happy and passionate, able to solve problems, resilient and able to manage their emotions to face the new global challenges of this unequal, complex and changing world (Furman, 2022).

In recent years, the pandemic and technological advances have highlighted the need for change to improve education (Robles-Ortega et al., 2022), which is why one of the new challenges facing society today is the training and application of ICT in educational environments. Learning and knowledge construction in the digital era take place in multiple and diverse contexts of activity, not only in formal education and social interaction, since digital technologies favor new learning experiences, allow for the expression, exploration and transformation of personal, cultural and professional identities, which is why, from a holistic and systemic perspective, the use of technologies in the educational context goes beyond traditional education, prioritizing the interests of the students. For this reason, it is necessary to train teachers beyond the instrumental use of digital technologies so that they can develop digital competence together with their students and thus be able to make appropriate use of them in personal, social and educational contexts, since ICT alone do not improve learning and, in educational centres, technology continues to be used as support instruments in the teaching and learning process, which is why its use must be considered as an enriching tool (Marimon-Martí et al., 2022). In this sense, educational institutions must train critical citizens who know how to function safely and effectively in this new digital media context, equipping them with the skills to participate in the community of a connected society and be able to exercise and defend their rights and freedoms, which is why education in a global world must foster active citizenship through technologies, making meaningful use of ICT so that they are able to evaluate, reconstruct and use information appropriately.

We teach skills for collaboration, civic participation, communication or problem solving by promoting learning, empowerment, global awareness, curiosity and individual responsibility, giving students the opportunity to live better and more consciously in a global and dynamic world (Perkins, 2015).

For all the above reasons, society demands a more open and modern education system to respond to the social reality, and education laws must come closer to these new challenges, because education, to be more just and democratic, has the challenge of teaching by doing and not teaching by saying (Belavi & Murillo, 2020).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

Given that social changes will continue, it is necessary to reflect on the importance of a universal and quality education that takes into account inequalities and guarantees inclusion and equality, thus responding to new social demands (Robles-Ortega et al., 2022). And although we cannot know what the world will be like in a few years or how students will live, we can imagine what that world and their lives will be like, which is why we propose an emancipatory and critical curriculum that respects diversity; with spaces where students can build themselves, connect with the environment and have a global vision; where knowledge is integrated and the ethical, emotional and aesthetic dimensions are related to the subject and knowledge (Perkins, 2015).

In this sense, the new contexts require a change in the way we look at educational practices. The great challenge is to slow down school. That is, to leave behind the pressure to achieve in standardized times and to change the educational system so that time is related to existential experience, the search for knowledge and the recognition of particularities, taking into account their rhythms and times (Murcia-Padilla, 2021). Thus, society and schools need democracy and social justice. Therefore, in order to improve educational practice, it is necessary to recognize and respect social diversity and cultural values (Renés et al., 2021) by promoting inclusion and interculturality; equal opportunities to end inequalities; promoting a critical and participatory curriculum; and fostering a democratic school culture (Belavi & Murillo, 2020). For this reason, teachers are needed who know what has been done to improve teaching processes, taking what they like best from each alternative educational experience in order to bring about change (Sanchidrián-Blanco, 2023). Therefore, holistic schooling is an educational hope if we want a better society for the citizens of the 21st century (Quevedo-Lezama, 2020).

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PART 2.
THE VALUE OF LIFELONG
LEARNING AND THE ROLE
OF EDUCATORS

KEY TRANSFORMATIVE COMPETENCES FOR EDUCATORS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The chapter explores lifelong learning, a value that is gaining significant prominence in political, social, and educational decisions due to the unprecedented advancements in our society and the ongoing challenges it faces. It begins by providing a general overview of certain historical and conceptual antecedents of this term. Subsequently, it presents reports from international organizations that have described and supported the practical promotion of this principle, as well as strategies and actions from three European countries. Building upon the analysis of these documents and a review of the literature, it reveals the most demanding key competences linked to promoting this approach, such as learning to learn, digital literacy, and collaborative work. Finally, with the intention of providing practical-reflexive utility to the information, the chapter provides guidelines on how to address and apply these competences in the classroom to foster lifelong learning.

Keywords: lifelong learning, lifelong education, key competences, university education

«It's no longer a matter of acquiring isolated definitive knowledge, but of preparing to develop, throughout one's life, a constantly evolving body of knowledge and of «learning to be». – Edgar Faure

1. INTRODUCTION: ANTECEDENTS AND PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

THE WORDS WITH WHICH THIS TEXT begins by the French academic Edgar Faure, despite being expressed over half a century ago, have not lost their relevance. In fact, it could be said that he demonstrated a certain foresight, because in the present context, the demands and experiences of the second decade of this century have highlighted the need for an individual who is consistently engaged in the process of learning, reflecting upon their knowledge, acquiring and applying new skills and competences. In essence, a person who is willing, but more importantly, who has the opportunities to engage in «lifelong learning».

However, in order to comprehend this significant *principle*, which has recently stirred considerable attention following the global context of a health emergency and demanding technological challenges, it is pertinent to delve into its historical context, terminology, and other concepts, such as lifelong and recurrent education, which feature prominently in its analysis and objective. Of equal importance is to ask the following questions: Who is responsible for promoting lifelong learning? Is it individuals themselves? Or does some responsibility fall upon universities and education institutions?

In order to address these demands and questions, the perspectives and contributions of international organisations are of paramount importance, particularly those of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the European Commission (EC), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). UNESCO initiated its engagement through the *Learning to Be* report, authored by the statesman Edgar Faure in 1972, where the concept of lifelong education was introduced, among other aspects. Faure's report advocated for a humanistic approach to education, fostering a comprehensive concern and development of the individual, emphasising that they never cease to learn, regardless of their life stage. In this way, it underlines that «everything that must be learned must be continually reinvented and renewed» (Beltrán, 2015, p. 2).

For its part, in the following year (1973), the European Commission released a report titled *For a Community Policy on Education*, authored by Henri Janne. In this report, Janne suggested lifelong education as one of the general principles for European policy, among other contributions (Cerych, 1977). Meanwhile, in that same year (1973), the OECD published a document where the term «*recurrent* education» was used. Notably, this brought about a shift in the humanistic perspective that had been attributed to education, transitioning toward a more economic connotation. This shift implied a move away from holistic education towards viewing individuals as mere instruments and objects, contributing to the workforce and

primarily aiming to «enhance economic competitiveness and improve the standard of living for member countries» (Bajo, 2009, p. 539).

Subsequently, another perspective that extended UNESCO's vision emerged through the contributions of Jacques Delors (1997), as part of a collaborative effort with fellow scholars to lay the foundation for said institution. This report underscores, among other things, that «education requires a new conception, one that enables each individual to discover, awaken, and enhance their creative potential, thereby unlocking the hidden treasure within each of us, i.e., the fulfilment of the individual» (p. 96). Moreover, the authors projected four pillars of education, with the last one, termed «learning to be», fostering the creativity and imagination of each person to facilitate their development, growth, and transformation.

There is no doubt that these organisations, through the reports they have authored, irrespective of their stances, have prompted a reflection on the objectives or pillars that should underpin education. In this regard, priority should be given to the individual and their personal development above any other dimension or interest. Similarly, despite over five decades having passed since some of these documents were drafted, the projected challenges have not lost their relevance. In fact, owing to the excessive advancements and limitless needs in each field of knowledge, these challenges resurface as a foundation upon which to build new solutions and explore uncharted paths in the pursuit of contributing to the common good.

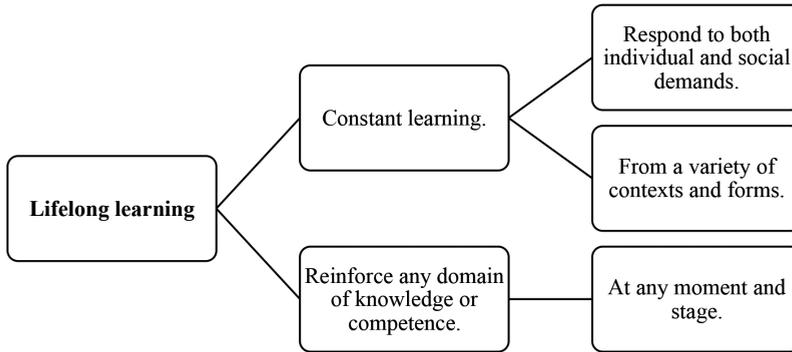
Furthermore, it should be noted that a fifth pillar has recently begun to be advocated, referred to as «learning to transform» oneself and society. This pillar aims to empower individuals to become active participants and take on the responsibility of collectively creating and enjoying a better, more sustainable future. Aligned with this objective is the promotion of new ways of thinking, including values and principles such as creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, metacognition, and continuous acquisition of new knowledge. In this context, this pillar relates to continuous and comprehensive enhancement, advocating for lifelong learning, committed and respectful towards everyone and the environment.

However, before proceeding, it is crucial to pause and address the following questions: What is lifelong learning? And what are the essential elements within this approach? To address these inquiries, the following diagram synthesises the information gathered from the documentary review of the aforementioned organisations (see Figure 1).

Advancements and new societal demands have necessitated people to continuously renew their learning. One of the objectives is to acquire or develop new knowledge in accordance with emerging needs or challenges. These demands may arise from personal circumstances or as a response to societal events. Moreover, this learning process can take place within family, occupational, and academic contexts.

However, primarily following UNESCO’s classification, there are three types of learning domains: formal, non-formal, and informal (see Table 1). Finally, this learning approach can be implemented regardless of age or life stage, encompassing both vertical and horizontal dimensions.

FIGURE 1. Essential elements of lifelong learning



Source: Based on documents from the UN, OECD and EC.

TABLE 1. Domains of learning and their connection to continuous learning

Domain of learning	Definition	Example	Driven by self / by others	Degree of interdisciplinarity
Formal learning	It is organised and structured learning. Additionally, it is mandatory in nature.	University degree or diploma.	Closed programmes directed by others, equal social demands for all.	Low. The areas and disciplines are separated into fields of knowledge.
Non-formal learning	It is intentional and complementary learning.	Courses, seminars, conferences on a subject of interest.	Closed programmes driven by the recognised demands of each individual.	Medium. Combination of knowledge and approaches from different disciplines to address complex problems.
Informal learning	It is learning that occurs spontaneously in an everyday context.	Reading books, watching videos, and interactions on social networks.	Self-directed, each person takes the initiative to seek and learn what they need or what interests them.	High. Experiential and discovery-based learning across different domains, spaces, people, or fields of knowledge to find alternative answers.

Source: adapted from UNESCO (2013)

With the intention of providing a deeper understanding of these elements, let us explore an example:

*«Julia is an academic who has been teaching for 30 years at the Faculty of Education in a Spanish university. During the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, a group of students, who are always at the forefront of advancements, asked her if they could utilise an Artificial Intelligence tool for their assignments in her subject (**social demand**). Faced with this, Julia responded that she would think about it over the weekend and discuss it in the next class.*

*Upon arriving home, she was unsure about what to do because she did not feel adequately prepared and considered herself uninformed about the topic. She also had certain fears that her students might rely solely on this tool and not learn in a meaningful way (**recognising the demand**). Nevertheless, she was certain that if she studied and prepared, she could respond effectively to her students' needs (**taking on an objective**). Therefore, she took several actions: Firstly, she searched for and read articles on the subject and watched videos, synthesising the information. Subsequently, she shared this information and these concerns with her closest colleagues and also researched the topic on social media platforms (**informal context**). Secondly, one of her colleagues recommended a training workshop explaining the benefits of AI, as well as some tools to use in class (**non-formal context**). Thirdly, her university offered a diploma course on AI (**formal context**) which Julia considered enrolling in, in addition to some MOOC courses (**non-formal context**) recommended by experts she started following on social media (**informal context**). Her aim was to continue learning and tackling the challenge (**on-going learning**) with a broad perspective, not only within her own disciplines but also across related fields (**interdisciplinarity**) that her students could explore to solve future problems using innovative technologies or tools».*

In this way, each one of the described elements reinforces the benefits of this perspective for both personal development and the common good. Bearing this in mind, according to a review and analysis conducted by Vargas (2017), lifelong learning encompasses four main aims: «to promote economic development and employment; social inclusion, cohesion, and democratic participation; personal growth and self-fulfilment; and cultural development and enrichment» (p. 5). Undoubtedly, these intentions pose significant challenges, which will acquire meaning and contribute to change if they are approached in a cohesive and balanced manner. For instance, it is not feasible to solely focus on economic development while neglecting the personal fulfilment of each individual.

Similarly, UNESCO (2022) acknowledges that lifelong learning is one of the viable options to deal with several complexities that society currently faces, including climate issues, technological transformations, health crises, and social risks.

They point out that «it has the capacity to respond to policy trends and issues that require urgent attention from policy makers» (p. 8).

In line with this, the concept of transformative learning emerges, supported by authors such as Jack Mezirow, Patricia Cranton, or Edward W. Taylor. They advocate for an educational approach that goes beyond the simple acquisition of knowledge and skills, aiming to bring about profound changes in how people think, feel, and act. It is a process that not only focuses on the transfer of information, but also on the transformation of identity, perspective, and the way in which individuals relate to one another and the world around them.

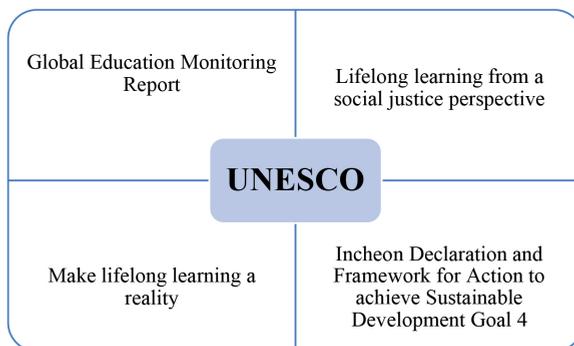
In transformative learning, learners are capable of questioning their prior beliefs and values, reflecting on their experiences, and considering new ways of seeing and approaching situations. This approach seeks to promote self-awareness, authenticity, and adaptability. The ultimate goal is to enable individuals to become critical and reflective learners who can apply their learning meaningfully across diverse contexts. This focus is closely related to education for personal development and the cultivation of engaged and aware citizens. Transformative learning is frequently utilised in non-formal and informal education settings, as well as in certain innovative approaches within formal education, aiming to prepare individuals to tackle the ever-changing challenges of the modern world.

2. REFLECTION ON THE REPORTS TO THE PRACTICAL PROMOTION OF THE VALUE

Upon analysing the documents from the aforementioned international organisations, it is evident that despite their divergent approaches, or primarily due to their historical and/or political context, there is a consensus regarding the importance of lifelong learning. Moreover, each of these organisations, from its unique standpoint, presents arguments and initiatives which point to shared concerns and objectives. Subsequently, representative reports from each institution will be examined, accompanied by a corresponding reflection on their contributions in this field.

The *Global Education Monitoring Report* is an initiative that has been carried out by UNESCO since 2003, aimed at providing evidence-based analyses and studies. It offers curriculum and policy guidance on global education issues such as inclusion and equity, gender perspective, technology in education, migration and displacement, etc. Moreover, its reports consistently underscore the significance of quality in education, aligning with the 2030 Agenda, specifically Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. One of the key objectives of Goal 4 is to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. UNESCO Initiatives



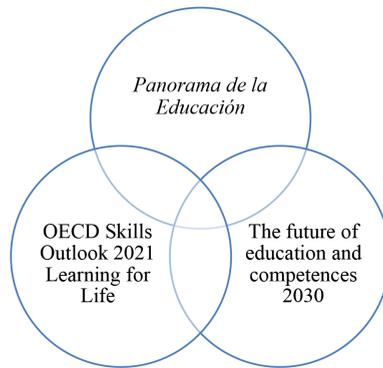
The second document is a report from the thematic section of UNESCO, in which the author provides a general overview of the historical context of lifelong learning, outlining the different perspectives from «global discourses» on the topic. One of the most pertinent aspects of this study is the argument that initiatives related to the topic must be adapted to the needs and demands of the community. As for the third document, it is a manual that defines and describes the relevance of lifelong learning while providing guidelines for making policies aimed at its development. In addition, one of its most valuable aspects is that it offers guidance and examples on how to create learning opportunities in various contexts (formal, non-formal, and informal).

Lastly, in the Incheon Declaration, representatives of organisations and officials from different institutions reinforce the historical objective of providing Education for All. To achieve this, they present various insights into the current landscape and, based on this assessment, project specific goals and strategies/actions to address and respond to pending demands by the year 2030. One of the strategic focal points is to «promote lifelong learning», asserting that all people, including adults, should be given the opportunity to continue learning.

Panorama de la Educación (Education Panorama) is an annual publication by the OECD, in which key indicators and statistics about the education systems of the member countries are provided. The reports often include data related to lifelong learning. For example, the Spanish report from 2022 emphasizes that lifelong learning is the new paradigm of education, providing tools for individuals to continuously develop their skills and respond to societal demands. Similarly, it highlights adjustments being made by some countries in their curriculum, such as «short-cycle tertiary programmes, varying-duration degrees, professional

programmes, alternative pathways, etc.» (Ministry of Education and Professional Training, 2023, p. 42).

FIGURE 3. OECD Contributions

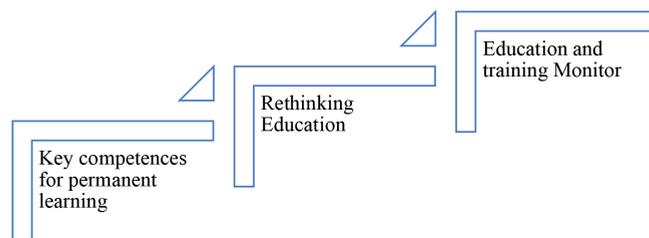


On the other hand, *The Future of Education and Skills 2030* is an initiative that explores how education systems can prepare people for the future and adapt to changing competence requirements. These reports often highlight the value of promoting diverse skills, competences, and lifelong learning to succeed in a rapidly changing world. The Future 2030 report consists of several documents among which the Learning Compass, where the knowledge, skills, attitudes or values that students need to achieve according to the present challenges are defined. It has been based on a participatory process that started in 2015 among different educational actors around the world. Four types of literacies are presented in this report: 1) basic (literacy and numeracy), 2) digital and datification, 3) for mental and physical health and 4) for emotional and social intelligence. The most relevant aspect is that curricular challenges are proposed based on the needs of different subsystems, where not only macro challenges are provided, but also micro challenges at the teacher level. In this sense, the following stand out: the primacy of traditional curricular areas, the tensions between standardized tests and the personalization of teaching, the lack of resources, teacher training or the lack of clarity or practicality of the legal documents that lead the successive educational reforms. All of which produce tensions in the way lifelong learning is understanding and promoting from the basic levels.

Lastly, the document *Skills Outlook 2021 Learning for Life* underscores the contributions of lifelong learning for individuals to adapt in a world of constant uncertainties and transformations, such as heart-wrenching inequalities, and challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it emphasises that «creating a

culture of lifelong learning gives individuals the capacity to manage change». In order to achieve this, it is essential to generate opportunities that promote lifelong learning, so that individuals can develop key competences, among which «learning to learn» stands out (see Figure 3).

Figure 4. European Commission Initiatives



The proposal *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* is a European Commission (EC) framework which considers, on the one hand, the challenges present in the early part of this century, linked to personal fulfillment, a healthy life, and participatory citizenship (Phyu & Kálmán, 2023). On the other hand, the Commission's commitment to lifelong learning has generated a framework of key competences for personal development and promoting continuous learning among the citizenry. Additionally, another intention is for this approach to be practiced comprehensively in all initiatives which emerge from each territory and within the respective European institutions.

Furthermore, *Rethinking Education* is a strategy introduced by the EC in 2013 aimed at identifying the main challenges and opportunities of European education systems and encouraging member states to take action regarding the skills and competences individuals need to navigate different contexts. Emphasis is placed on the value of fostering a culture of lifelong learning to promote personal and social development.

Finally, as depicted in Figure 4, the EC's *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (GMR) assesses the state of education and training in the 27 EU member states with regards to the committed objectives and indicators that must be achieved by 2025-2030. This initiative provides annual reports for each country, highlighting educational themes such as low performance in basic skills, early childhood care, early school leaving, and the participation of all individuals in the learning process. In this last objective, the relevance of lifelong learning stands out as one of the essential pillars of European education policies.

3. KEY COMPETENCES THAT PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING

The information described in this chapter demonstrates the relevance of making contributions to enable the practical promotion of this principle or value as an attitude that fosters learning and enhances our lives. Taking this into consideration, we believe that one of the possible pathways to realise this action is the work that should emerge from educational systems, promoting the acquisition of different key competences in the citizenry. Among other things, these competences will help standardise knowledge, attitudes, and values across the board. Drawing from the words of Perrenoud (2008), we understand a key competence as the ability to mobilise different resources (skills, knowledge, attitudes) to achieve various objectives or situations. In this regard, the European Commission (2018) emphasises that key competences «are those that every person needs for their personal fulfilment and development, employability, social integration, sustainable lifestyle, life success in peaceful societies, healthy living, and active citizenship» (p.7). Therefore, key competences not only enable personal development but also contribute to the social context.

Regarding key competences to promote lifelong learning, reports from UNESCO, the OECD, and the EC, as discussed in previous sections, have highlighted their significance, but they have also specified which ones need to be developed to achieve this goal. As a complement to this, a literature review was conducted to identify key competences linked to lifelong learning (European Commission, 2018; Luna, 2015; Sahin et al., 2010), and the most recurrent ones included the following:

3.1. LEARNING TO LEARN COMPETENCE

This competence aims to encourage individuals to plan their own learning, considering both time and information management. Equally important is the awareness of emerging needs and opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge, all while maintaining the interest and motivation towards achieving their objectives. Consequently, this competence allows people to gain confidence and an active role in their learning process, remaining constantly aware of learning opportunities. This enables them to make informed decisions about how to tackle the challenges they may encounter across different contexts.

3.2. COLLABORATIVE WORK COMPETENCE

This competence provides individuals with the necessary tools to actively integrate and collaborate with others in a variety of fields and organisations. Active

listening and respect for others' opinions are essential to achieve common goals. Furthermore, it contributes to reducing stereotypes and prejudices, promoting respect for diversity, and enhancing social skills. Within this context, this competence enables individuals to harness their skills to contribute and complement the knowledge and experiences of others within an environment characterised by empathy and appreciation for each other.

3.3. DIGITAL COMPETENCE

This competence places great significance on using digital technologies for learning and communication in various professional and personal contexts, as well as engaging in society and enhancing inquiry skills. It also encompasses information literacy, which involves effectively finding, evaluating, and utilising information from various sources to support continuous learning. Consequently, digital competence allows individuals to become familiar with and apply different resources to generate and transmit knowledge, while maintaining a creative and critical attitude.

3.4. PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND CIVIL COMPETENCE

In this competence, the knowledge one possesses about oneself and the holistic development encompassing physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects is crucial for constructive and responsible collaboration with people in one's environment. It equips individuals with tools to engage in informed and active participation within civic and social processes at both local and international levels. Given the aforementioned, this competence allows for self-reflection and contribution to collaborative environments. Moreover, it places significance on cultural and social awareness, enabling responsible and respectful engagement in a constantly evolving world.

3.5. CRITICAL THINKING

This competence provides the knowledge to comprehend and evaluate a complex problem, identifying which elements and situations are linked. Moreover, it equips individuals with resources to locate and assess various options which enable them to find solutions and make informed decisions responsibly. Consequently, critical thinking allows for the analysis of multiple perspectives of a problematic situation and provides tools to effectively navigate obstacles while continuing to learn and/or progress.

3.6. CULTURAL AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION COMPETENCE

This competence provides knowledge and skills to recognise and respect diverse cultural and artistic creations, or any medium used to express emotions and experiences. It fosters a sense of identity and belonging with one's surroundings and space of coexistence. The competence enables people to become aware of cultural elements within their environment and to value each expression, regardless of the medium used.

Considering the usefulness and significant potential of each of these competences and their respective components, developing and working on them complementarity is opportune. This allows for the establishment of dialogues and bridge building between significant learning processes and transformations. Moreover, this approach enables the development of well-rounded students capable of independently dealing with any context they may find themselves in. For instance, a student may have access to digital technologies and understand their impact, but if they are unable to reflect on and identify their needs or interests for achieving their goal, they will encounter a roadblock without a solution. Similarly, if a student can organise and manage their learning process but struggles to comprehend and empathise with differing opinions expressed by their peers, this could result in rejection and represent an obstacle in their learning.

Finally, regardless of potential variations in these competences based on the focus and context of each organisation or document being analysed, they undoubtedly support the development of lifelong, adaptable, open-minded learners prepared to thrive in diverse and ever-changing environments. Therefore, emphasising and cultivating these competences within educational settings aids in creating inclusive and dynamic learning environments that promote the value of lifelong learning.

4. CONCLUSION FOR THE APPLICATION OF LIFELONG LEARNING COMPETENCES IN THE CLASSROOM

The concept of lifelong learning has evolved and taken on a prominent role in our society, primarily driven by the global economy and the needs of the labour market (Akther, 2020). It is also considered a tool for personal fulfilment, the development of active citizenship, social inclusion, and employment. This requires collaboration and coordination between industry, education, training, and learning sectors.

Given the significance and benefits of this value in individuals' lives and society as a whole, it is necessary to teach and instil in students the key competences that promote this value. To achieve this, spaces must be created and nurtured

where students can organise their learning, taking ownership of their process. They should engage in discussions on both national and international current topics to enable them to navigate situations constructively and critically. Collaborative work should be encouraged to foster appreciation for peer opinions and to collaboratively devise solutions to common problems.

Furthermore, there is a need for citizens capable of taking initiative to identify learning needs, set learning objectives, and independently pursue knowledge. Equally important is the promotion of an open attitude towards change, enabling interdisciplinary learning of new skills and knowledge to face ever-evolving situations. This should include the ability to confront challenges and resiliently recover from unforeseen circumstances or demands. Commitment to continuous learning requires, particularly in adulthood, ongoing professional growth to enhance the skills and knowledge throughout one's professional development.

In the accomplishment of lifelong learning there are different perspectives, guided by what is somehow considered as skills and competency based or value and virtue based (Petersen, 2022), considering the first more oriented to OECD aims and the later to the UNESCO and UN reports. We conclude that any of them could exclude the other. Rather, the combination of them is required for a comprehensive view of lifelong learning and the use of transformative learning in the near future.

Considering the complexity of promoting and developing this value in the education of students and the recurrent transformations in society, from the perspective of Domenici (2021), teachers, besides being clear about what to teach, must generate experimental learning spaces in which the motivational interests of each student are recognized. To achieve this, Chiappetta and Ciraci (2021), argued that it is essential to teach in a way that articulates the disciplines with the real context, in which students actively participate.

Lastly, we highlight some key characteristics of transformative learning that must be enhanced to promote lifelong learning, with educational actions that seek to:

- **Activate critical reflection:** Identify activities where students question themselves and their assumptions, analysing how their beliefs and experiences influence their understanding of the world.
- **Promote perspective change:** Through gender role or cultural changes, students can experience shifts in how they perceive and understand their values, attitudes, and viewpoints.
- **Empower for transformation:** As students transform their thinking patterns, they may feel empowered to make informed decisions and act more effectively in situations presenting personal or societal challenges. These situ-

- ations can be monitored by the teaching staff, providing tasks for reflection, commitment, and improvement.
- **Harness digitalisation and the possibilities of global interaction and collaboration:** Technologies can facilitate open education and personalised, adaptable learning. This requires allowing room for the expansion and generalisation of learning experiences which lead to new insights that amplify and enhance transformative ideas.

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CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL PARADIGMS FOR ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of society is becoming increasingly visible. Therefore, in recent decades and in the scientific field of social sciences, a movement has emerged to promote the evolution and/or adaptation of contemporary pedagogical paradigms to the challenges of the 21st century. This change is based on three fundamental aspects: the contextual justification that motivates the transition to new models of lifelong learning, the competences needed to achieve full personal and professional development, and the pedagogical processes required for the acquisition of competences. This chapter encourages reflection on the above issues, prioritizing the process of lifelong learning within the framework of contemporary pedagogy, without losing sight of current social demands and needs, and the much needed training for employment. It also explores in depth how pedagogical processes must be inclusive and promote development from perspectives that are fair, dignified and respectful of existing diversity and rights, and in line with sustainable development strategies.

Keywords: lifelong learning, employability, vocational training, contemporary pedagogy.

1. INTRODUCTION

DIGITALIZATION HAS BROUGHT about a major transformation in society and has become one of the fundamental factors in the changes that have taken place in recent decades. This fact makes it necessary for educational

institutions, and more specifically for university students of the Bachelor's Degree in Education and Pedagogy and other related degrees, to reflect on their current and future practices in order to find out whether they address and incorporate the necessary aspects to respond to the new needs and to promote lifelong learning.

It is necessary to begin by indicating that the current role of educational institutions could become obsolete if they do not consider the transformation of social scenarios in the educational sphere and propose approaches in which people become protagonists in a world mediated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (Escamilla, 2022). This does not mean disregarding the contributions of classical educational theories, but rather considering their contributions and the characteristics of today's knowledge society. In today's knowledge society, interconnectedness is fundamental and the ability to learn is more important than knowledge itself. In this line, the pedagogical model proposed by Siemens, connectivism, which «considers that the individual is part of a network and that through the connections established with others to share information and with the use of technology he creates his own knowledge» (Intellectun, 2020, conclusions section, paragraph 2), acquires importance, as we have defended in other spaces (Alonso, 2015). This proposal considers the educator as a «learning organiser: it facilitates students with strategies and tools using nodes to form a network, these nodes can be people, organisations, libraries, websites, databases, journals, books or any other source of information» (Solórzano and García, 2016, as cited in Escamilla, 2022).

However, connectivism is controversial in terms of whether it is a theory of learning or rather a pedagogical proposal in line with the new ICT-mediated reality that reduces knowledge to the association of connections (Sobrinho, 2014). The criticism, in this sense, is based on the fact that:

(...) the links between nodes are usually much more complex than those that appear in these networks and, above all, because the representation of a network is a way of making explicit the relationships between units of information, which is not necessarily equivalent to the representation of knowledge (it is left to the student to internalise the structure and interpret the meanings). When a student creates connections in a network, he/she is doing an activity not very different qualitatively from when he/she makes annotations in the margin of a textbook or, more directly, when he/she elaborates a concept map. In both cases he writes his own «documents» (nodes) and creates his own links (which, of course, has an undoubted didactic value: see for example the potential of concept maps). But what no connectionist system can guarantee is adequate external feedback on these descriptions, nor the possibility of acting on the real world – or a simulation of the real world (pp. 41-42).

In any case, its impact is evident and it has been a milestone for other more recent theoretical perspectives such as ubiquitous learning, invisible learning or socio-training. Ubiquitous learning (*u-learning*) implies, according to Velázquez and López (2021), the use of ICT to learn anywhere and at any time. They emphasise how the concept has evolved in the educational field considering its implication beyond applying technology to the educational context. Invisible learning aims to include ICT in educational processes to make visible the skills and knowledge acquired in informal learning (Escamilla, 2022), thus improving competences and increasing the employability levels of future graduates (Chancusig et al., 2017). Socio-training is an approach that aims to develop talent by solving everyday problems, from the local context with a global vision, based on experience. Tobón et al. (2015) emphasise how socio-training facilitates the development of people in any field if they have the necessary resources to face everyday challenges. In fact, Ambrosio (2018) also points out how it is a benchmark in learning contexts:

(...) that will give way to a subsequent professional practice, this will be achieved by taking into account the articulation of knowledge and disciplines where theory and practice are combined to solve problems as a real challenge, as well as situations that have to do with professional practice among graduates of higher education and at postgraduate level, where socio-training is already a reality and the student thoroughly analyses complex situations that require an assimilation of problems (Chrobak, 2017). (p. 76)

All these theoretical perspectives on learning have in common the importance of context, the consideration that knowledge and curriculum must be managed by the educational community and that «learning does not occur only in the classroom, but also in the home, the workplace, the playground, the library, the museum, the park and the daily interactions established with others» (Cabero and Llorente, 2015, p.191). Furthermore, they allude to the development of competences for inclusion in the new society, in many cases making explicit their relevance for the employability of future graduates.

In short, it can be said that the above examples show an evaluation of classical education theories as they try to adapt to social change and transformation, in which globalisation and the impact of ICT have been central. Broadly speaking, they are underpinned by three fundamental aspects:

1. The contextual justification motivating the transition to lifelong learning.
2. The skills necessary to achieve full personal and professional development.
3. The pedagogical processes necessary for the acquisition of competences demanded by society.

In the following pages, these aspects are developed after a reflection on the postulates of contemporary pedagogy, on how it should approach lifelong learning in response to social needs and, above all, with an emphasis on training for employment.

2. CHARACTERISATION OF CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGY: PRINCIPLES

When considering pedagogy as a science of education, it can be affirmed that it is not the only one that explains educational facts, but that it must draw on other sciences such as philosophy, sociology or psychology to offer such an explanation.

Pedagogy goes beyond explaining knowledge, the curriculum or the educational event itself. Pedagogy involves a theoretical reflection that considers the spatio-temporal conditioning factors of society, its values and principles, in order to reflect on how educational processes should be developed, under what conditions and why (Liscano, 2010). It is therefore a philosophical discipline of education that is heuristic, proactive, transformative, critical and transdisciplinary, capable of promoting community change (García and Sánchez, 2023). In other words, pedagogical currents aim to respond to the specific needs of each educational era and depend on how the person who learns, how he or she learns and the society in which he or she learns are conceived (Cantor and Altavaz, 2019). This is why pedagogy reflects on the context in which educational processes take place, the agents involved and the practices that are developed through models with which to represent the social context. They are therefore dynamic.

This effort to redesign pedagogical practices is responsible for what has come to be known as contemporary pedagogy. Cerezo (2007) defines them as follows:

Contemporary pedagogical currents refer to movements and/or theories that are characterised by having a defined line of thought and research on which contributions are permanently made, and which give coherence, solidity and presence over time to the discourses that constitute it. These «currents» describe, explain, lead and allow the understanding of pedagogy in the face of the demands of the context and become referents that modify the social and pedagogical contexts of the school and the lines of discourse or practice in which different pedagogies are defined. (Section by way of introduction, paragraph 3).

García and Sánchez (2023) indicate that, thanks to contemporary pedagogy, current and relevant problems can be defined and addressed through pedagogical projects that respond to general social needs and, specifically, to curricular needs. In this way, they allude to how pedagogy, adapting to changes, becomes a tool with which to offer answers and contribute to the individual and sustainable development of the community. So much so that pedagogy becomes a fundamental aspect

to achieve opportunities and improve the conditions of future life, guaranteeing the enjoyment of rights. Hence, lifelong learning acquires value so that current and future generations can critically discern in the knowledge society, face future challenges and possess the collaboration and communication skills to interact in digital ecosystems and insert themselves professionally.

Although the aim of these pages is not to delve into contemporary pedagogical proposals, but to reflect on how they promote lifelong learning in order to face new challenges, a summary of the most relevant ones is shown below (Figure 1).

2.1. CHARACTERISTICS AND PRINCIPLES OF CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGY

Maica (2020, section on characteristics of contemporary pedagogy) summarises the characteristics of contemporary pedagogy very well:

- It identifies the learner as the centre of interest.
- Motivation, creativity, interest and playful activity become important as enablers of learning.
- It promotes cooperation and assertiveness.
- It seeks the integral development of the individual, motivating them to be an active part of their learning process.
- Attempt to adapt to the needs of individuals.
- It encourages learning to be, to think and to do.
- In constant relationship with the social environment.

Furthermore, in his effort to outline the mission and vision of contemporary pedagogy, he clarifies the principles that guide and underpin it (Maica, 2020, section on principles of contemporary pedagogy):

- Individualisation: the individual is unique.
- Different ways and paces of learning: everyone has a different way of learning.
- Activity: individual activity motivates the different learning actions.
- Socialisation: if you learn in a group, you learn better. Cooperative activity is encouraged.
- Intuition: Learning is of quality if it is experienced with the senses.

2.2. ORIENTATION OF CURRENT LEARNING MODELS

Taking into account the characteristics and principles that underpin contemporary pedagogy, it can be said that contemporary pedagogy presents some differentiating aspects from traditional pedagogy (considering it to be more primitive in that it considers educational processes to be standard, centred exclusively on the knowledge possessed by the person teaching) (Figure 2).

FIGURE 1. Contemporary pedagogical currents

<i>Currents</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Characteristics and Contributions</i>	<i>Precursors</i>
Escuela Nueva (1889-1920)	<p>It proposes a pedagogical attitude of respect for the needs and interests of the child, through an active methodology.</p> <p>Students learn through action and reflection.</p>	<p>The child is at the centre of education and the topics should be interesting for the child.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individualisation of teaching. - Play is the primary educational medium. - School prepares for life. - The teacher-pupil relationship must be based on trust and affection. <p>Contributions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active methodologies such as projects, centres of interest. - Incorporation of procedural and attitudinal contents. - Thematic incorporation of social, political and cultural reality. 	<p>J. J. Rousseau L. Tolstoy J. H. Pestalozzi F. Fröbel R. and C. Agazzi -M. Montessori O. Decroly A. Ferrière C. Freinet J. Dewey W. H. Kilpatrick P. Cáreres</p>
Liberation Pedagogy (1921-1997)	<p>It emerges as a transformation of the world through a new education that helps the student to be critical and to transform society for the better.</p>	<p>The learner approaches learning with critical thinking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The application of the teaching-learning process requires the application of an active method. - Consensual elaboration of the rules of coexistence. - Development of classroom assemblies. <p>Contributions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue as a pedagogical tool. - Valuing social issues in the curriculum. 	<p>P. Freire H. Giroux M. W. Apple S. Kemmis P. McLaren A. Hargreaves T. S. Popkewitz</p>
Cognitive Pedagogy (1960-1970)	<p>An approach that establishes strategies to guide the mental processes of information, representation and action. It holds that learning is a process in which meanings are changed internally.</p>	<p>Emphasis on active student participation in the learning process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The teacher is a mediator. - It is made up of basic sciences, instrumental sciences and philosophy. 	<p>L. S. Vigotsky H. A. Simon M. Chomsky</p>

	<p>Learning produced as a result of the interaction between the information coming from the environment and of the active subject.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology development is another pillar of cognitive support. <p>Contributions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of pre-organisers of information. - Diversity of ways of presenting and working with information. - Cooperative work techniques. 	
<p>Behavioural Pedagogy (1901-2000)</p>	<p>Behaviourism equates learning with changes in observable behaviour, either in the form or frequency of those behaviours. Learning is achieved when an appropriate response is demonstrated or exhibited following the presentation of a specific environmental stimulus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Behaviour is the result of the subject's learned experience, not of innate or genetic factors. - Behaviours are to be treated as observable. - Association between stimuli and responses. - Only the observable is valid. <p>Contributions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two variants are proposed: classical conditioning and instrumental and operant conditioning. The former describes an association between stimulus and contiguous response; the latter aims to consolidate the response according to the stimulus. 	<p>B. F. Skinner</p>
<p>Constructivist Pedagogy (1900...)</p>	<p>It argues that the learner is no longer seen as passive but as active and responsible for his or her own learning, which he or she constructs by himself or herself.</p>	<p>The student constructs his or her learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The learner is responsible for his or her own intellectual development. - Learning according to individual maturation. <p>Contributions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of cognitive conflict. - Need to respect the level of development of students' thinking. 	<p>E. von Glasersfeld J. W F. Piaget B. Inhelder J.S. Bruner D. Ausubel P. Bourdieu</p>
<p>Socio-critical theory</p>	<p>Social influence on the physical, mental and spiritual development of human beings. Education and social environment are inseparable.</p>	<p>Vygotsky's social concern has its origins in the thought of Marx who vigorously defended the idea that the ideology of a society is shaped in the social (in particular</p>	<p>Lev Semyonovich L. S. Vygotsky</p>

		social and productive) activities in which the individual participates, not within his or her brain exclusively. Likewise, 'authentic learning' is only that which promotes cognitive development, whereas 'learning' is simply the incorporation of facts into permanent memory.	E. Morin
Complex Thinking (2000...)	It is the ability to interconnect different dimensions of reality. Faced with the emergence of multidimensional, interactive facts or objects with random or random components, the subject is forced to develop a thinking strategy that is neither reductive nor totalising, but reflective. Complex Thinking is the internal characteristic of differentiating the real from the imaginary.	To understand the human being as a physical, biological, social, psychological, cultural and historical entity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The teacher must conceptualise the human being in a holistic way. Contributions: <p>Human understanding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The development of knowledge. - The environmental education process. - It provides students with the possibility of becoming reflective, critical and proactive individuals. 	
Competency-based approach	The competency-based approach proposes the integration and mobilisation of knowledge to face and solve situations and problems in a given context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They provide the ability to know, to know how to do and to know how to be. - They prepare the student to face new challenges. - They promote autonomous learning processes. Contributions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They allow learning to be integrated and related to different types of content. - They promote lifelong learning. - Definition of basic competences for life. 	P. Perrenaud C. Coll

Image 1. Castro (2022)

FIGURE 2. Traditional Pedagogy & Contemporary Pedagogy

	<i>Traditional pedagogy</i>	<i>Contemporary pedagogy</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	Aimed at building character. Discipline becomes relevant in educational processes.	Aimed at comprehensive capacity building.
<i>Educational process</i>	Systematic and cumulative transmission of knowledge.	Transmission by a multitude of means according to the individual and context. Emphasises the social reinforcement of the educational process.
<i>Approach</i>	Focused on content delivery.	Focused on the learner's ability to locate relevant information to enable him/her to learn.
<i>Roles</i>	Educator: protagonist, transmitter of knowledge. Individual learner: passive, receiver of information.	Educator: guide, motivator and incentiviser of learning. Learning individual: active, involved in the search for knowledge.

Image 2. Adaptation of Maica's proposal (2020)

The perspectives that have emerged within the framework of contemporary pedagogy show in a general way how these models are based on three fundamental aspects:

1. *The contextual rationale motivating the transition towards lifelong learning-centred models.*

In 1960, three international organisations (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Council of Europe) alluded to the renewal of the concept of education and mentioned lifelong learning, conceptualising it from a broader educational perspective, focusing on context and the development of opportunities. Although the definitions varied (UNESCO defined it directly with ALTV; the OECD used the term recurrent education; and the Council of Europe used the term lifelong learning), they all emphasised the importance of orienting educational processes towards human capital and the labour market, giving the right to be educated to promote learning opportunities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2020).

This vision of education, from the outset, is committed to the construction of a learning society that enables lifelong learning within and outside the formal education system in order to meet the challenges of society and to resolve the difficulties of societal change (UNESCO, 1972). Later, in the

publication «Learning: The Treasure Within», a reference report for lifelong learning, this aspect is reiterated as a priority, but linked to the changing requirements of the labour market (UNESCO, 1996). This vision has been maintained to the present day, being crucial in Spain the definition offered by the Council of the European Union (2012) which defines it as a continuous and lifelong process: «from quality early childhood education to post-retirement training. Moreover, it is also learned outside formal learning environments, especially in the workplace» (p. 13).

2. *The skills necessary to achieve full personal and professional development.*

In addition to the context, and in order for lifelong and lifewide learning to develop, it is assumed that such learning provides the necessary skills to be able to play an active part in society. The European Union, in 2000, put it in the following way in the publication of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning: «All learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, competences and skills in a personal, civic, social or employment-related perspective» (UNESCO, 2020, p. 9). Indeed, they specify that lifelong learning should contribute to the development of active citizenship, but also to employability.

Express linkage to the development of competences, specifically learning to learn in order to face the constant challenges of the knowledge society. So much so that in the UNESCO Education Strategy 2014-2021, the goals of the first stage (2014-2017) were established as contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in three areas: literacy, skills for work and higher education (UNESCO, 2014). In this way, it alludes to sustainability, empowerment, the generation of a more critical citizenship and guarantees the right to education in an increasingly globalised culture. The World Bank proposed in 2019 to emphasize three areas for the attainment of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the new and changing society: «child development starting with early childhood education, adult education outside of work (literacy, job training and entrepreneurship programmes) and higher education» (UNESCO, 2020, p.11).

Achieving the acquisition and improvement of competences involves generating in citizens a taste, interest and capacity to continue learning. This means being aware of the need for continuous adaptation to the condition of loss of value of acquired skills and the need to foster autonomy in learning.

3. *The pedagogical processes necessary for the acquisition of competences demanded by society.*

These must be inclusive and favour development from perspectives that are fair, dignified and respectful of existing diversity, rights and in line with

sustainable development strategies. To this end, it is necessary to make educational goals visible, taking into account individual characteristics and the context, but also to make educational action effective for the entire population throughout life. In this process, the cooperative culture must be strengthened by promoting, if necessary, learning communities.

It is therefore necessary to adopt an approach that looks at pedagogical processes beyond the structuring of the formal education system, going beyond the established levels and favouring the interrelation of all sectors and areas that contribute to lifelong learning. In this way, all actors and sectors involved in the lifelong learning process are considered and valued.

Alongside this, there must be a common commitment to ensure learning opportunities in all settings in formal, non-formal and informal education, considering the new approach of educational ubiquity: time and space.

By promoting pedagogical processes that take these issues into account, it is possible to move towards educational proposals in line with the transformation of society, in which ICTs play a fundamental role and in which age is not a conditioning factor for learning.

3. TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN SPAIN

Considering the different agreements adopted by the European Union such as the Skills Agenda for Europe: Coalition for Skills and Digital Jobs and the Skills Improvement Pathway and the European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Equity and Resilience: Pact for Skills, it can be said that a development model has been consolidated in the continent in which knowledge has gained relevance. However, this model has emerged taking into account factors that have brought about change and transformation of culture and society, such as digitalisation, competitiveness, growth and employment, and poses a great challenge for the countries that make it up. It is a challenge in terms of the qualification of citizens, which is why lifelong learning has become a priority (Consejería de Educación, Juventud y Deportes, 2015).

For this reason, the Council of the European Union in 2018 proposed a recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, an action already envisaged in the Skills Agenda for Europe on the basis of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. Since then, the Recommendation has become an instrument to ensure the implementation of key competences in the strategies of the education

systems of the various European countries, especially with regard to lifelong learning (Valle, 2014).

In the text of the 2018 Recommendation, the need to provide citizens with opportunities to «acquire the skills and competences necessary for personal development, health, employability and social inclusion is expressly stated, as this contributes to strengthening Europe’s resilience at a time of rapid and profound change» (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 1). According to Núñez (2016), these proposals within the framework of the European Union reveal the trend in European policies, especially with regard to education systems, towards competence-based approaches to lifelong and lifewide learning.

In this context, lifelong learning encompasses all forms and situations of learning that enable the acquisition and improvement of competences in today’s society in all areas, including work (Amber and Domingo, 2019). This implies that vocational training is a priority in lifelong learning.

In the following pages, and to conclude this chapter, we show the evolution that Vocational Training for Employment has had in Spain, within the framework of contemporary pedagogy, and how it has become a fundamental tool in lifelong learning.

3.1 LIFELONG LEARNING IN SPAIN IN A CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In Spain, lifelong learning has evolved in the last decades from approaches that initially contemplated the training of adults in purely educational contexts to approaches that contemplate training in other non-formal settings, implying a learning culture within the framework of lifelong learning. According to the European Commission (2023), the following stages can be distinguished in this evolution:

In the 1970s, it focused on offering alternative training to the adult population.

In the 1990s, lifelong learning began to be discussed from an approach that went beyond adult education, with the following characteristics:

- emphasising the importance of preparing students to learn by themselves and to adapt to the changing demands of the knowledge society;
- promoting distance education through the creation, in 1992, of the Centre for the Innovation and Development of Distance Education (CIDE-AD), to facilitate access to education for adults and school-age students who, due to personal, social, geographical or other circumstances, could not attend classes through the ordinary face-to-face system.

In 2002 the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications was established. This catalogue organises the professional qualifications that can be acquired, both through training processes (formal and non-formal) and through work experience.

The vocational training subsystem for employment was created in 2007. It involved the integration of different initiatives aimed at training the active population, employed and unemployed people, in order to promote training that responds to the needs of a knowledge-based economy.

At the end of 2019, the 1st Strategic Plan for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the education system (2019-2022) was presented.

At the beginning of 2020, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP) assumed the competences related to VET for employment through the General Secretariat for Vocational Training. This was intended to promote vocational training and to create a system that would bring together both VET in the education system and VET for employment.

At the end of 2020, the organic laws on education expressly include non-formal education in the framework of a culture of lifelong learning (Article 5 bis of Organic Law 2/2006 on Education [LOE], added by Organic Law 3/2020 amending it [LOMLOE]). (Paragraphs 1-10)

3.2. VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT IN SPAIN

Training is currently considered a key element for employability without which it would be impossible to achieve quality, professionalised and efficient employment and to adapt to the requirements of the labour market. In Spain, a model of vocational training for employment has been established that provides both job-seekers and those in active employment with the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to promote professional development. In fact, VET is consolidated as «a fundamental tool to correct mismatches in the labour market and to stimulate competitiveness. Moreover, VET is a more agile tool to respond to the needs of the labour market» (Gamboa et al., 2020, p. 20). The Ministry of Labour and Social Economy (2023) states that it aims to:

(...) to promote and carry out training that contributes to the personal and professional development of workers (employed and unemployed), improving their employability and promotion at work. This training responds to the needs of the labour market and is aimed at improving business competitiveness (paragraph 1).

Furthermore, and in the case of Spain, this training has been successfully integrated into the education system in such a way that vocational training and

employment advance in parallel, integrated in a training model that favours students and workers –employed and unemployed–, as is reflected in the preliminary draft of the Organic Law for the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training, approved in September 2021 by the Spanish Council of Ministers (European Commission, 2022).

The relevance of VET becomes even greater if we consider that there is a group of unskilled people, either because many of them have not been able to complete their studies or because they need to improve the skills they have acquired. In this sense, Sancha and Gutiérrez (2019) give value to VET and define it as the set of programmes made available to workers, employed and unemployed, to improve their employability. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (n.d.) defines it as a training system that «has the mission to train and qualify people for work and update their skills and knowledge throughout their professional life» (paragraph 3).

At present, the types of VET that aim to improve the employability of the population and respond to the needs of organizations in the field of employment are:

- Training programmed by companies for their employees. These are subsidized training actions adapted to the needs of each organization.
- Training offered by the Administrations for employed workers or unemployed people; an example of this training are the courses to obtain a Certificate of Professionalism.
- Other Vocational Training for Employment initiatives, such as work-linked training or training for public employees (Educaweb, n.d., section on types of VET courses).

In addition to those mentioned above, there is another group of programmes and projects, included in the field of non-formal education, which do not aim at the direct attainment of an official qualification but which aim to improve employability through training processes. These initiatives can be promoted by public and private entities, the usual examples of promoting entities being the autonomous communities, city councils, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as social development entities and private training centres, and may be financed with public funds (Sancha and Gutiérrez, 2019).

However, despite Spain's efforts to promote the employability of the population by means of VET proposals, two major difficulties continue to be observed in the labour market insertion of the population (Gamboa et al., 2020): under-qualification (low level of education) and over-qualification (university studies and/or higher vocational training). In fact, Gómez (2017) points out the pressing need to incentivize VET in view of the high level of unemployment of the Spanish population, its lack of qualifications (at that time 46% considered unskilled compared

to 25% of the OECD average), the shortage of workers with the skills required by companies and the shortage of specialised professionals. Furthermore, and as published in the newspaper *El País*, and according to the results of the ManpowerGroup Employment Projection Study for the 2022 quarter, the trend is that the Spanish population is increasing its level of training but is not doing so considering the requirements of the new jobs that are being created (Colegio Nacional de Ingenieros del ICAIE, 2021; Lara, 2021). Therefore, the level of qualification of the working population does not yet reach the minimum required to combat job insecurity.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

The above reflections show the need to guarantee the acquisition and improvement of knowledge and skills of the population from an early age in order to promote effective, efficient and highly relevant learning in accordance with the needs of society. This requires pedagogical paradigms that evolve and adapt to the current context, as well as renewing and adapting the requirements of the community to adopt lifelong learning as a model to be followed in practices for continuous and lifelong learning. We understand that this is the way to achieve an education based on the development of competences that will enable citizens to participate actively and develop autonomously in the different community spheres.

In the labour sphere, and more specifically, FPE is a fundamental tool for potential talent and ensuring that people have the right skills. In fact, as we have argued previously (Deocano and Alonso, 2017), we see digital empowerment as a key to improving employability through citizen participation.

In this regard, a legislative measure resulting from the Skills Agenda for Europe was the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on Skills Enhancement Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, adopted by European members in December 2016. This measure involves ensuring the «right to inclusive and quality education, training and lifelong learning» (European Commission, 2017). Whether they are employed, unemployed or economically inactive, the Skills Pathways initiative will provide them with a fresh start by identifying and recognising the knowledge and skills they already possess, offering them further education and training, and ultimately enabling them to obtain a new qualification (European Commission, 2022, *Why Skills Pathways?*).

All this should promote reflection on how to propose actions to reduce the mismatch between professional qualifications (supply and demand) and to renew education systems so that they offer vocational training that meets the new require-

ments (Bachmann, 2020; Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2020) from current pedagogical approaches.

In short, pedagogical practices must be renewed, identifying the key axes of transformation in order to respond to the requirements of society and guarantee the development of competences from the educational sphere (in any of its spheres and modalities).

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THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL EDUCATION PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the development of the European Digital Education Plan, the reasons behind it and the strategic lines proposed for its implementation in the different countries. The development of digital transformation in schools requires the development of adequate infrastructures to enable digital transformation as a basic aspect. The cornerstone of all this digital transformation lies in the development of skills and competences of teachers and trainers, who are the real drivers of this digital transformation. The implementation of the Digital Education Plan is carried out from a dual perspective, from the development of a high-performance digital education ecosystem and from the improvement of the skills and capacities of educators and trainers, which make the digital transformation of education in schools possible.

Keywords: Digital Education Plan, Digital Competences, Teacher Training, European Policy Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

DIGITAL EDUCATION HAS BEEN one of the concerns and strategic approaches of the European Union and of the strategic lines of the main political leaders, as an example, the guidelines put forward by the President of the Commission Von der Leyen (2019) in her proposals for European development in the next period 2019-2024, in her candidacy speech to the Parliament (European Parliament, 2019), underlining the importance of developing the digital skills of all European citizens, as well as the need to develop the potential of information and communication technologies when properly integrated into teaching and learning

processes, highlighting the importance at the stages of compulsory education, and throughout life, through lifelong learning processes.

The development of education and training of European citizens is needed to make Europe's development a reality, by fostering economic growth, innovation, the integration of people into society and the personal development of citizens, they enable the quality of education to be increased and the skills of citizens to be upgraded (European Commission, 2020a, p. 2).

The political strategy proposed by Von der Leyen (2019) does not respond to a capricious decision, or to propose a new fashion, it responds to a need of society, where in recent decades, and fundamentally in the last one, there has been a technological and digital transformation of the whole of society, of the spheres of production, The development of different social networks, the way we communicate, with the proliferation of synchronous communication tools, both based on video-conferencing and text-based systems, through messaging programmes; changes in media consumption, from print media (e.g. newspapers) to digital consumption; or leisure time in our homes, which has gone from watching the information available on television channels to on-demand consumption with the incorporation of streaming platforms.

In the case of Spain, television consumption among the population has fallen by 30% in a decade (García Jaén, 2023); this does not mean that no time is spent in front of a screen, on the contrary, it has increased, but instead of using traditional media, the consumption of audiovisual content by citizens under 25 years of age is done through screens other than television, mainly through mobile devices, the most used medium being the phone itself, followed by devices such as tablets or iPads, and in third position laptops. Traffic has shifted towards video channels, with YouTube and Tic Tok standing out. Young Spaniards aged 18 to 24 spend more time on YouTube than on the six free-to-air television channels combined, with the highest percentages of television consumption in Spain among people over 60 years of age (García Jaén, 2023).

The development of the social network TicTok has been exponential in Spain, since its launch it has had a huge acceptance among young people and there is a displacement of audiences in Spain and worldwide of this network, in fact, one billion people are using this social network in the world (Gómez Urzaiz & Quesada Webb, 2023).

This change is not only occurring in Spain, or in Europe, but globally, where the consumption of more traditional content for children and young people, such as that broadcast by Disney, is being replaced by the consumption of video games, reducing the consumption of these specific channels, both on free-to-air and cable television (The Economist, 2023).

A digitalisation process as important as the one developed in the audiovisual consumption sector has also occurred in the business sector, through the digitalisation of industry, transforming the forms of production, work processes and, consequently, the labour market. New professional profiles are needed to be incorporated into the jobs demanded by companies, and the need for people with high technological qualifications is posing a major challenge for many companies and economic sectors; not as many workers as required can be found in Europe, leaving job vacancies empty. It also requires constant updating and retraining of workers, in order to adapt and adapt to the conditions of a changing labour market driven by constant digitalisation processes (European Commission, 2020a, p. 2).

The education systems of the different countries of the European Union have a very important role to play in this process of change and digital transformation, starting with early childhood education and ending with university education, which allows them to take advantage of the opportunities and potential provided by technology; it is necessary to develop appropriate management processes throughout the European Union so that an adequate digital transformation can take place in the entire education sector and overcome the digital divides that tend to appear. Currently, in many countries there is a technological infrastructure gap, for example, the availability of broadband internet, between populations; it is generally available to the urban population, while there is a lack of broadband development in rural areas, as is the case in Spain (López Menacho, 2023).

However, this situation is not the same between the different Autonomous Communities in Spain, it is concentrated in the so-called «empty Spain», where 66% of households in these areas lack fibre optic connection at home, with very significant percentages such as in the case of our Community, Castilla y León (30%), followed by Galicia (17%) and Andalusia (12.5%) (Levanta la Cabeza, 2023).

Having analysed the difficulties of extending fibre optics to rural areas, due to the enormous economic cost and the lack of return on investment for companies, the government has decided to promote the UNICO Rural Demand Programme, which will try to bring high-speed connectivity to 1.3 million homes and businesses in rural areas, through the development of 5G technology via the Hispasat satellite, which will enable speeds of 100 Mbps to users, at a reasonable cost of €35 per month; initiative financed with Next Generation funds, to fight the digital divide (La Moncloa, 2023).

The availability of adequate technological infrastructures for internet access throughout the European Union is an important prerequisite for the digital transformation in education, communication, cultural and leisure development of all citizens. One of the strategic development lines of the European Union is firstly to promote connectivity in all countries and regions of the European Union, sec-

only to facilitate the availability of digital devices for internet access, and thirdly to have digital applications that enable the provision of services for citizens, from education, health, the labour market, e-commerce, the consumption of cultural products, or leisure, and the increase in citizens' communications. All this technological development has been boosted by the crisis situation experienced during the beginning of the development of COVID in the different countries of the European Union, where the limitations and shortcomings in all sectors, specifically in the educational field and in training processes, have become evident.

The success of COVID in the last three years has highlighted the need to make changes in education, in the development of training in schools (European Commission, 2022); it is a matter of taking advantage of the experiences lived during the COVID to carry out a profound transformation in education, to overcome the shortcomings and to propose new alternatives that allow the fight against pandemics, such as the one lived by the COVID, which has shown the need to introduce changes in educational systems and on the other hand has served as a field of experiments and analysis of new methodologies, new digital tools, which if the pandemic had not occurred, would have taken many years to be implemented in a large number of less innovative educational centres. It has addressed the need to overcome the situation of confinement and analogue isolation of remaining in the home, the massive adoption of technology by all citizens, for all activities, which has meant a major transformation in education, which needs to continue.

The appropriate integration of technology in the classroom by teachers and educators allows the development of the didactic proposals put forward by teachers, the training processes and the integration of students, consequently improving the quality of the entire education system, in its different stages, enabling greater adaptation and flexibility of students and teachers, adapting to the different rhythms, interests and learning styles of students. It allows to break out of isolation, to work individually, collaborating with other classmates in carrying out their tasks, consulting doubts and developing active collaborative methodologies, enhanced by the integration of technology.

The integration of different technological tools by teachers in the teaching process, in the creation and edition of digital teaching materials and resources, facilitates the creative work of teachers, and the possibility of sharing open digital resources with other teachers; it allows them to go beyond the walls of the classroom, to be able to develop on-line training processes, which can be carried out by students from their homes or study spaces, as opposed to the limitations and conditioning factors involved in the development of activities in the classroom; it allows them to adapt the learning pace of students.

However, in this digital transformation that is taking place, the advances have been notorious, however it has been observed that the design of resources, tools

and technology that we currently have, many of them do not meet the criteria of accessibility, of universal design for all possible users, and both during the use of technology during the pandemic and the subsequent period, technological barriers have been observed for students with disabilities; this implies the need to rethink both the technology to make it more accessible and the teaching methodologies implemented in classrooms to ensure universality of education for all learners (European Commission, 2020a, p. 2).

To address this situation, the European Union proposed the first Action Plan on Digital Education, which was developed between 2018 and 2020, and represents an important step forward in the digital transformation of schools, establishing three priorities in its development (COM(2018) 22 final, p. 5):

Better use of technologies in the integration of teaching and learning processes.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL COMPETENCES AND SKILLS OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS FOR A NECESSARY DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The modernisation of education, through data collection and analysis.

This first Plan was ambitious and in the midst of it came the COVID 19 pandemic with all the associated problems for education at all levels, especially in compulsory education, where the integration of digital technology in teaching had been less developed in the past decades (European Commission, 2022a).

The reality in the centres was evident, progress had been made in the digitisation of the centres, but there was still a lot of work to be done, consequently the European Commission considers that one of its strategic lines to be developed will be a second Digital Education Action Plan, at the end of the previous one, from 2021 to 2027, aimed at improving the digital literacy of citizens, developing digital skills and competences at all levels of education, and also in the field of lifelong learning, in a progressive development from the most basic levels of digital skills to levels of excellence (COM(2020) 624 final, p. 4).

In order to encourage the participation of all European citizens, the different institutions, governments, researchers and people interested in the development of the Digital Education Plan, the European Commission organised an open consultation between July and September 2020 to gather the opinions, experiences and initiatives of citizens regarding the way to approach education in the face of the dilemma posed by the COVID pandemic throughout the European Union, with the aim of gathering the opinions of the participants in the development of the next Digital Education Plan 2021-2027. The participation of people from some 60 countries was obtained, involving 2700 participants, which served as a basis for

the development of the proposal for the Digital Education Action Plan presented by the Commission on 30 September 2020 (European Commission, 2020a, p. 5).

The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) is not an isolated initiative of the European Commission (2020b), but is closely linked to other strategies that have a direct impact on its development, such as the initiatives «A Europe fit for the digital age» (European Commission, 2023a), and the Recovery Plan for Europe in the face of the COVID pandemic, «Next Generation EU» (European Commission, 2023b), and supports «The Recovery and Resilience Facility» (European Commission, 2023c) with the aim of developing a European Community where a digital transformation is promoted, from a sustainable development approach, that is more respectful of the environment, that allows the development of the European Green Pact; that offers greater resilience and capacity to overcome adversity; and constitutes a strategic commitment of the European Union to make a European Education Area a reality by 2025 (European Commission, 2023d).

The Digital Education Action Plan is in line with the objectives set out in the European Commission's Skills Agenda (2023e), which sets the challenge that by 2025, 70% of people aged 16 to 74 should have basic digital skills.

The following is a presentation of the two strategic lines of the Digital Education Plan, for the period 2021-2027, and the measures that drive the Plan (European Commission, 2020b), which are interrelated, firstly the integration of different digital technologies that are currently available in the classroom didactic planning of teachers in their training plans, from educational platforms to different types of software that allow the development of active methodologies, driven by the use of mobile digital devices, promoting blended learning, and enabling new teaching methodologies for the development of online teaching.

A second line of action is aimed at providing students with the appropriate digital competences, in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, to enable lifelong learning, employability and integration into an increasingly digitised society. The development of these two lines of action requires various political strategies from the European Union, support for the development of infrastructures and a direct impact on education systems, on educational approaches and programmes, on the curriculum, on the development of assessments and on the legal aspects of the curriculum (COM(2020) 624 final, p. 2).

3. STRATEGY 1. FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIGITAL EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

Technological changes in society require the development of an inclusive and inclusive digital education, not exclusive, integrating all people, paying special at-

tention to people with special needs, overcoming the barriers and obstacles that they experienced during the time of COVID. It requires the joint participation of all parties involved, from the strategic planning of the European Commission, with a general European Plan, to the governments of the different countries, the different regions responsible for educational development in their territories, as in Spain, where educational competences are transferred from the State, and the organisation, development and monitoring of compulsory education is the responsibility of the Autonomous Communities; involving the entire network of educational centres, both public and private, or subsidised, and citizens in general, in this challenge (COM(2020) 624 final, p. 12).

For the development of this ecosystem, the first steps have been oriented towards the development of infrastructures, the connectivity of educational centres, their municipalities and citizens' homes. As indicated in the introductory section of the document, this is not a finished phase, work must continue both in 2023 and in the coming year for the development of high-speed networks in the different territories, fundamentally in rural areas, from the Government and the Autonomous Communities, in Spain, to reach centres and classrooms, since most of the different applications used require greater bandwidth, for the exchange of audiovisual content (La Moncloa, 2023).

To make the development of the Digital Education Plan (2021-2027) a reality, teachers and trainers are the key elements, firstly they need to have the appropriate technological means, both at a personal level and in their work centres, and secondly they need to have sufficient training and the necessary digital skills to enable them to develop innovative active educational proposals, which are planned and implemented interactively, in an institutionalised manner in educational centres.

In order to make a digital education ecosystem a reality in schools, user-friendly tools must be incorporated, allowing for easy incorporation and editing of high quality content, platforms that allow secure access for users, respect for the privacy of user data and ethical rules of conduct, accessibility for all students and inclusiveness, and the development of active methodologies focused on student learning processes (COM(2020) 624 final, p. 13).

To realise this digital education ecosystem, geared towards educational excellence, the following actions are proposed (European Commission, 2020b):

Develop strategic communication with the different EU member states to enable the establishment of a common work programme on digital education and skills.

A wide range of learning and teaching proposals must be promoted, both in the formal sphere in educational centres and in the non-formal sphere, in other institutions, foundations or organisations that promote education at all levels and lifelong learning, enabling both students in formal education processes and citizens

in non-formal education processes to develop the skills they need for their development in training processes or integration in a digitalised society, including digital competences.

A major challenge for European countries is to transform their education systems and curricula in this process of digital transformation, and to promote the development and digital training of teachers and educators at all levels, with greater emphasis on compulsory education. Since the launch of the Digital Education Plan in September 2020, it has been a topic that has been addressed in the State of the Union speeches by the President, Ursula von der Leyen, both in the years 2021 and 2022, and we believe that it will also be carried out this year, on 13 September (Von der Leyen, 2023), as this topic is included in the information provided on the Internet.

Meetings have been held at the highest level between the different Ministers of Education of the European countries to promote education and the development of citizens' digital skills, and proposals have been put forward to the European Council to promote the improvement of citizens' digital education; the European Digital Education programme has been integrated into the respective educational programmes of the countries of the European Union, with the aim of implementation and development.

Experiences and good practices have been shared between countries to raise awareness among policy makers and to promote the digital transformation of education systems.

Recommendation to the Council on the promotion of blended learning, e-learning and distance learning in compulsory education and to promote inclusive and quality education.

The development of education during the period of COVID-19 confinement, as in the subsequent stages, highlighted the enormous variety of responses from pre-school to university education. The pattern in most EU countries was similar, with higher education institutions quickly continuing their teaching on-line, while many schools and colleges at both primary and secondary level had problems and shortcomings in the development of teaching. Having overcome some problems of lack of technological infrastructure in some students' homes, and connectivity, the most important challenge was the monitoring of classes, with low or even zero levels of digital competence of students and teachers posing a problem for the development of online classes.

In view of this situation during the pandemic, the need has arisen in education to have a mixed model that would make it possible to move from a face-to-face model to an online teaching model in a simple, non-traumatic way. This is something we have experienced in universities in recent years, especially in the 2020-2021

academic year, where it was not possible to have all the students in class, due to the lack of classrooms of sufficient size, so face-to-face teaching of students in class was combined with videoconference transmission of the sessions to students who were at home. A similar situation to that experienced in schools, when cases of COVID-19 were diagnosed in the classroom, and the students were unable to continue in the classroom due to the risk of contagion of the teaching staff and the rest of the students in the classroom, they were confined for the period established by the doctors, until it became clear that they had passed COVID-19 and were not transmitting the disease to others.

The European Commission provided guidance manuals for teachers of compulsory education, aimed at promoting the development of mixed teaching systems during the period of the fight against COVID-19, or in the event of the development of another type of pandemic (European Commission, 2021a, 2021b); a situation that in Spain in the 2023-2024 school year apparently seems to have been overcome, however, in Ukraine, due to the war, in all areas whose schools do not have an air-raid shelter, they will continue this school year with online teaching, in many cases face-to-face teaching is not possible as the schools have been destroyed, as the RTVE/AGENCIAS report (2023) reports.

Develop a European Digital Education Content Framework.

Once again, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have observed the importance of having quality digital content, as opposed to the analogue content that is commonly used in classroom teaching, with cardboard, markers, pens, paints, photocopies, notebooks, murals, etc.

The digital transition that we have been experiencing over the last five years has led to the creation of new digital educational content, increasingly interactive and creative, and with new possibilities. An example of creative content innovation can be found in the use of augmented reality as a didactic resource in teaching, in a generalised way in classrooms (Clemares, 2023); at a higher technological level, the development of virtual reality in classrooms is currently more ad hoc, through educational pilot projects, such as the «*Metaverse School*» project, developed by the Insipartion Education group and currently implemented in 84 schools in 24 countries (Sánchez, 2023).

At the higher education level, the aim is to have a platform that allows the exchange of educational content and data between European states.

Promote the development of broadband connectivity in educational centres and the incorporation of digital equipment for education and training.

In order to make the development of digital education a reality, it is necessary to have the appropriate infrastructures for the use of audiovisual media in teaching, fundamentally the use of video through streaming systems.

Likewise, for the development of communication in collaborative work projects between different centres, which is promoted with videoconferencing systems, broadband connections are required, so that both video and audio in videoconferences flow quickly.

The integration of management platforms in educational centres, with the possibility of simultaneous management of several hundred concurrent users, requires high-capacity lines; likewise, the development of active methodologies, using technologies, requires broadband internet.

The strategic lines of development of broadband connectivity in schools are based on the development of 5G connectivity (European Commission, 2020a, p. 10); extending broadband to the whole territory of the countries, not limiting high-speed connections to the development of fibre optics, to the detriment of rural areas.

Action 5.- The digital transformation of education and training institutions.

Educational and training institutions must develop strategic plans that allow the development of teaching from different teaching perspectives and methodologies. They should not be limited to a face-to-face approach to education, but should plan from blended learning teaching methodologies, which allow the combination of online teaching processes with face-to-face processes; and even, in the face of adversities such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or situations of war crises, such as the one experienced in Ukraine, to be able to develop totally online teaching (European Commission, 2021a).

The development of online teaching, or blended learning, poses important challenges for both students and teachers, the development of new skills, the use of different online tools and resources, and the implementation of new active methodologies, mainly driven by mobile digital devices (European Commission, 2021b).

Develop ethical guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence, data in teaching and learning for educational actors.

We are incorporating artificial intelligence systems into our lives on a daily basis, which allow for new educational and training potential in the teaching and learning processes; this is an educational resource with enormous potential, which must be used appropriately for the training of students and teachers in the centres.

The European Commission has set out ethical guidelines on the use of Artificial Intelligence and data in teaching and learning for teachers and trainers (European Commission, 2022b).

The guidelines provide guidance to teachers, mainly in compulsory education, on the use of Artificial Intelligence in schools, by students and teachers, as well as on the ethical implications of its use, in order to ensure its appropriate use.

4. STRATEGY 2. DEVELOPING DIGITAL COMPETENCES AND SKILLS FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Develop common guidelines for teachers and educators on the use of education and training as a means of developing digital literacy and combating misinformation.

Digital literacy is a key component for the transformation of education, the use of information in an appropriate and critical way, to fight against disinformation and fake news, which are increasingly proliferating on the Internet and social networks.

The development of digital literacy in pupils, mainly in compulsory education, to enable them to differentiate and distinguish false information from real facts and information; also to fight against the infoxification of information, the saturation of information that is currently taking place in educational centres, a fact that teachers and pupils must take into consideration.

In order for teachers and educators to develop didactic proposals aimed at eradicating misinformation in schools, it requires systematic support from European institutions, the provision of open educational resources for teachers and appropriate guidance (European Commission, 2022c).

Update the European Digital Skills Framework to include artificial intelligence and data management skills.

The European Digital Competences Framework has a dynamic approach, and is open to updates, depending on the technological development of society. The latest published version is the DigComp Framework 2.2 (Vuorikari, Kluzer, & Punie, 2022).

The DigComp Framework 2.2 includes an annex with a wealth of examples of the use of artificial intelligence in ordinary citizens' actions, and how these emerging technologies impact on citizens' daily lives.

Develop a European Certificate of Digital Competences (ECDC).

The purpose of the European Digital Skills Certificate is twofold: firstly, to provide an instrument that allows employers, who are responsible for training, to facilitate recognition of the digital skills of citizens and workers.

This Framework takes as a reference the European Digital Capabilities Framework, DigComp 2.2 (Vuorikari, Kluzer, & Punie, 2022) and the establishment of different levels of digital competence, which allows the identification, classification and recognition of citizens' digital skills.

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training.

In view of the digital transformation of society and the technological advances that are being developed and incorporated into society, all citizens are required to have basic digital skills; consequently, trainers need to have a higher level of digital competence development.

The European Council promotes European cooperation in education and training by issuing regulations aimed at the development of a European Education Area in the decade 2021 – 2030 (European Commission, 2023g).

The initiatives encourage education and training systems in the different countries to intensify their proposals and programmes so that more students have the appropriate digital competences and skills for the development of teaching and learning processes, for leisure development and for the labour market.

Transnational data collection, European target, on learners' digital skills.

The International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) challenges the myth of «digital natives» – growing up and using different digital devices does not lead to young people having advanced digital skills (IEA-ICILS, 2023).

The European Union's strategy aims to achieve by 2030 that less than 15% of pupils finishing the eighth year of compulsory education (2nd year of Compulsory Secondary Education) have a low level of computer literacy.

The ICILS studies will be used to collect information and provide the corresponding data. If all European countries provide their data, it will allow better monitoring and understanding of trends and the development of digital education.

Through the *Education and Training Monitor* tool¹, data will be obtained to enable annual reporting on the extent of digital skills development.

Digital opportunity practices.

Given the relentless advance of digital transformation in today's society, most jobs will require the worker to have the necessary digital skills, depending on the type of job.

In Europe, it is difficult to find people with high digital skills who can drive and develop digital transformation in the business environment.

In order to make highly qualified workers available, the European Commission launched the «*Digital Opportunity Traineeship*»² (DOT) project to enable students

¹ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/es/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan/action-11?>

² <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/actions/european-initiatives/digital-opportunity-traineeships>

in the final years of their studies at universities and higher education institutions to gain practical work experience in European companies.

It is oriented towards the development of high technological skills in areas such as cybersecurity, big data management, machine learning strategies, involving the development of digital competences for software development or web design, for example.

The development and participation of women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects.

Bearing in mind that more women than men are studying at university in the European Union, their interests, however, are oriented towards other fields, for example, towards pre-school or primary education, as opposed to engineering or science studies in general.

According to European data, women represent a quarter of graduates in Science, Engineering, or working in the field of Information and Communication Technologies.

The objective set by the European Union is clear, to awaken motivation among women, so that the percentage of female students pursuing technical careers increases, so that the number of women scientists and engineers in the countries of the European Union will increase in the coming decades.

The lines of action are aimed at secondary school students, so that students can access training in digital skills and sustainable entrepreneurship, through participation in virtual learning communities, via virtual learning platforms, such as *Girls to Circular*³, promoted by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology⁴.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

The European Digital Education Plan is a strategy aimed at promoting digital transformation in educational centres, in order to achieve an appropriate integration of digital technological resources in the development of teaching and learning processes in the classroom.

The digital transformation in the field of education transcends the walls of educational centres, to move on to the Internet and society, and involves a digital transformation of society, in the labour, cultural and social spheres, in the communication and information processes developed by citizens.

³ <https://eit-girlsgocircular.eu/>

⁴ <https://eit.europa.eu/our-communities/eit-innovation-communities>

The development of the Digital Education Action Plan involves, as a first strategic line, the development of a high-performance digital educational ecosystem, which implies the adoption of measures aimed at the digital transformation of educational centres that involve the entire educational community: teachers, students, families, political leaders, making this digital transformation a reality in the centres, with the provision of network infrastructures, computer equipment and open digital resources.

Digitalisation makes it possible to take advantage of the potential of technologies by developing new, more active, participatory and inclusive teaching methodologies that allow for greater personalisation and adaptation of the teaching and learning processes to the students.

In order to make the European Digital Education Plan a reality, it is necessary for teachers and trainers to improve the levels of digital competences and skills for the adequate development of students' digital competence, mainly in the compulsory education stages, but bearing in mind that digital training is a continuous lifelong learning process; new technological tools appear on the market, new devices with new didactic functionalities, while others are disappearing, new versions of software, or even new operating systems, linked to the use of different devices.

This constant digital transformation requires open-mindedness on the part of educators and trainers, allowing for a constant and permanent updating of the skills and competences of teachers, educators and citizens in general.

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PART 3.
ENVIRONMENTS
AND STRATEGIES
FOR VALUING DIFFERENCE
AND LIFELONG LEARNING

IMPROVING SPANISH READING AND WRITING SKILLS IN A CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) CLASS. OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This article shows several strategies carried out in the class Spanish 4230 (Spanish Dialectology) –one of the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classes offered in the Spanish Program at CSUB– to improve students' reading and writing skills. The project resulted from participating in the «Reading and Writing across the Curriculum» workshop at this university¹, which was intended to help faculty guide students through their textbooks with new critical reading skills while using writing to help them learn. The first step was to develop a series of objectives or outcomes to be included in the course syllabus related to reading and writing skills and then select several strategies to improve them. There was a comparison of the grades at the beginning and the end of the course for some of the assignments, and a survey asking students about the activities related to the various strategies.

Keywords: reading, writing, CLIL.

¹ Directed by Dr. Kim Flachman, Writing Program Coordinator. My thanks to her and Christopher Chrobak, MA, in the Composition Program, for their guidance in the implementation of the strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE SHOWS SEVERAL strategies carried out in the class Spanish 4230 (Spanish Dialectology), one of the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classes offered in the Spanish Program at CSUB, to improve students' reading and writing skills. The project resulted from participating in the «Reading and Writing across the Curriculum» (RWAC) workshop at this university, which was intended to help faculty guide students through their textbooks with new critical reading skills while using writing to help them learn. The first step was to develop a series of objectives or outcomes to be included in the course syllabus related to reading and writing skills and then select several strategies to improve those skills. There were also some outcomes and techniques related to vocabulary acquisition, but those are not shown here due to space constraints. There was a comparison of the grades at the beginning and the end of the course for some of the assignments, and a survey asking students about the activities related to the various strategies.

The course was hybrid, so students attended class once a week and then prepared work at home, alone or in groups, plus the assignments done in the classroom. The purpose of the course, as described on the syllabus, was to «examine variant features within the Spanish language, their history, differences in form and meaning, interrelationships, distribution, and how to deal with them when teaching Spanish».

The basis for creating the different activities, in some of which new technologies and group work were used, was «lifelong learning» (LLL), which includes the perception that knowledge is a dynamic process. It is about encouraging the construction of knowledge to be a constant and active part of the life of each one of the students. The idea of lifelong learning became important with UNESCO's publication *Learning to be* (Faure et al, 1972; second edition in 2013). As Power and Maclean state, «the report argued that lifelong learning needs to be the keystone or organising principle for education policies and that the creation of the learning society should become a key strategy for facilitating learning throughout life for individuals and societies» (2013: 29). They also mention UNESCO's later report (1996), where it was emphasized that «lifelong learning implies the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values throughout life, a continuous process of learning to know, to do, to live together and to be the 'four pillars' of education» (2013: 39).

UNESCO has also published a recent report (UNESCO, 2020), where it mentions the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and how LLL has become «more apparent» (p. 8). It also establishes «its significance for the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development» (p. 17).

Although, at first, terms such as «lifelong education» and «recurrent education» were widely used, they were later replaced with the expression «lifelong learning».

This means that the focus is not the education but the learning, which may occur at any time anywhere. This suits perfectly online and hybrid education, where the learning process is very much decided by the student, whereas the teacher has a different role; the emphasis is more on motivating and directing students on the right path, the path of acquiring skills that they will use longer than when the course is finished, rather than on educating/teaching content to them.

The definition used by the European Commission (2000: 3) is one of the most widely accepted among researchers and policymakers. Lifelong learning is «all purposeful learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective». So, although sometimes the focus has been on the individual, it is necessary to realize that learning institutions, and those individuals in them (instructors, in this case) also need to keep learning and have a duty to foster students' skills and knowledge. So, we should talk about a «lifelong learning society» and «lifelong learning instructors».

Some organizations such as Lifelong Learning Council Queensland (LLCQ²), an entity that studies and disseminates lifelong learning, institutionalized and disseminated the theory and its four pillars, namely: learning to know (acquiring knowledge must be a stimulating task), learning to do (learn from practice), learning to live (interaction and coexistence), and learning to be (self-management of knowledge).

In this class (Spanish Dialectology) some steps were followed to implement lifelong learning, particularly establishing precise learning purposes or objectives, planning, measuring (observing the objectives achieved during the course and comparing them with those of the same course when we have not implemented the strategies now used), which is not discussed in this work, stimulating knowledge (active methodologies connected to the present moment), and designing activities in which students had time for themselves, reflecting on their challenges and their learning during the course.

2. LEARNING STRATEGIES

There are several types of learning throughout life according to the spaces where they are obtained and their rigor. Most of these are broken down into six main groups: formal, self-directed, professional, personal, indirect, and informal or free³ (García-Bullé, 2019).

² See <https://www.llcq.org/>

³ Generally, learning is classified in formal, non-formal and informal.

In this case, we will focus on the formal and self-directed branches of lifelong learning. The reason for this is that the learning occurred partly in a class setting, but also online since the course was hybrid. Formal learning is normally part of programs with a defined agenda and a consistent monitoring sequence based on face-to-face attendance. It is not available all the time, but rather at times determined by the institutions that teach it. Instances of this type of formal learning can be courses at the university or diplomas.

Self-directed learning occurs when students are in control of the direction and pace of the learning in question. Online courses that are not tied to an agenda, workshops from educational institutions, or certified professionals are good examples of teaching efforts in this subcategory. In hybrid courses, part of the learning happens at home, and it is somewhat in the control of the students.

Indirect learning could even be included in the case explained here. It is the one generated from the human experience, and it is triggered by casual situations such as conversations, debates, and interpersonal relationships, among others. This was the case of the learning resulting from the written reflection at the beginning and the end of the course, as will be shown. We could say that its nature was informal, and the skills it helped to improve were useful for the repertoire of non-traditional abilities and power skills.

Since students could also watch videos on YouTube for some assignments, and use Smarthinking⁴ as much as they wanted, there was also «informal or free» learning up to an extent. Students had control over the contents and the didactic process in this case, and they could exercise this learning with actions such as watching videos or through tutoring (when they submitted their assignments to Smarthinking for comments).

Regarding the learning methods used, first, it is necessary to remember that learning strategies have been classified in different ways, depending on the researchers. Oxford (1990) considers learning strategies to be direct or indirect, as the learning process.

The first type, direct learning strategies, has cognitive, memory-related, and compensatory strategies. Oxford (2003) indicated cognitive strategies are those that allow learners to handle information in a direct form. Among the strategies found in this first category are reasoning, analyzing, note-taking, outlining, and

⁴ A service of online tutoring provided by Pearson. It was founded in 1999, and it offered service in 150 subject areas. It could be integrated into our Canvas courses. Students just logged in and uploaded their assignments to receive feedback in no more than 24 hours. Tutors had an average of 12 years of experience working with students, and over 90% had advanced degrees; many also had deep industry experience. The service closed in August 2023.

summarizing; so, some of the activities we incorporated and will be shown here are connected to these cognitive strategies. Memory-related strategies make concept linkage possible, which may be facilitated by using images (students had to create semantic maps; one of the strategies used to improve vocabulary). Compensatory strategies, as the first word implies, compensate for missing knowledge. All these direct strategies are linked to the mental processing of language, that is, they «are in charge of helping the students internalize and retrieve the information to achieve language proficiency» (Olivares Garita and Brenes Sánchez, 2021).

Indirect learning strategies are likewise divided into three categories: metacognitive, affective, and social. Oxford (2001: 12) detailed that metacognitive strategies help students manage the learning process entirely. This was intended in our class as students had to gather and organize materials, plan for the tasks, and (we are assuming that) create a study/work schedule. In an old study, Chamot (1998: 3) emphasized the importance of creating this kind of self-awareness that promotes «reflection, to planning how to proceed with a learning task, to monitoring one's own performance on an ongoing basis, and to self-evaluation upon task completion. In other words, it leads to self-regulation of one's learning».

As Oxford (2001: 14) also explained, affective strategies are those related to students' moods and feelings. Some of these strategies could be being aware of the levels of anxiety, deep breathing, praising oneself, and thinking and talking positively. Although Oxford states that «over time there might be less need for affective strategies as learners progress to higher proficiency» (2001: 14), some of her studies have shown that those strategies are significantly related to L2 proficiency (Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Dreyer and Oxford, 1996).

Finally, social strategies

have to do with the sense of community, and as a community, people interact and communicate. Asking questions to get verification, working collaboratively, taking part in conversations, and understanding the target culture are among the most common social strategies suggested by the author. In short, indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social) allow for control of the learning process; they allow students to decide what to do and how to effectively do it (Olivares Garita and Brenes Sánchez, 2021).

Ehrman and Oxford (1990: 313-314) include a detailed figure of Oxford's taxonomy, as shown below (Figs. 1 and 2).

FIGURE 1 and 2. Oxford's taxonomy.

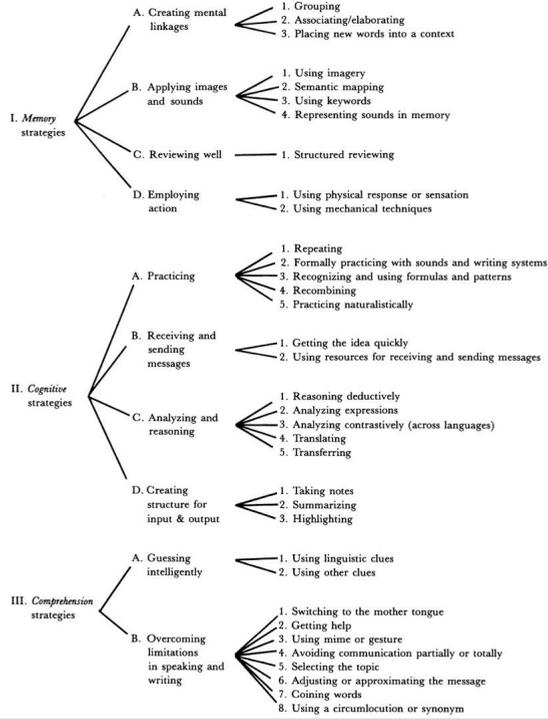
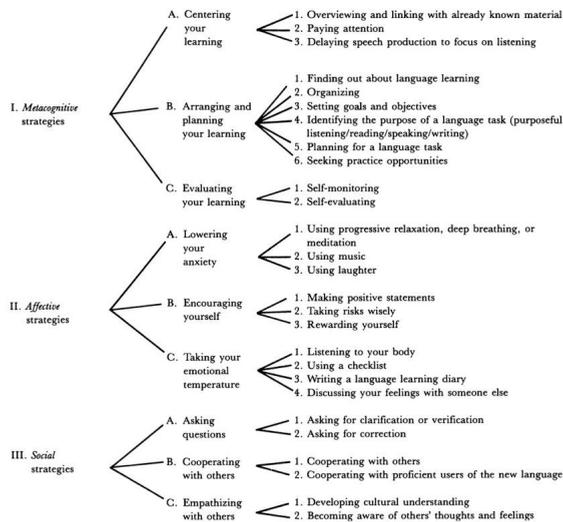


FIGURE 2. Oxford's taxonomy.



Source: Ehrman and Oxford (1990: 313-314)

3. READING

When discussing strategies that we might use in the classroom to improve reading (and writing), it is necessary to clarify first what is a «strategy»: «in education, a systematic plan, consciously adapted and monitored, to improve one's performance in learning. (Harris and Hodges, 1995: 244). And then, when distinguishing the difference between strategy and skill («an acquired ability to perform well; proficiency», Harris and Hodges, 1995: 235), «we must remember that a particular reading skill is often preceded by a period in which the developing reader must be strategic» (Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris, 2008: 371-372). And they continue,

Young readers must learn decoding strategies before they can be expected to apply them accurately and automatically. Developing readers must learn to be metacognitive, and it is in the stage of conscious application of strategies that readers come to understand how reading works and how to identify and fix problems. [...]

When skill and strategy complement each other, they can provide student readers with motivation and self-efficacy from both sources (I am good at this *and* I can work through the tough spots) and encourage an appreciation of the value of reading (p. 372).

In a class like this one, at an upper level, the idea is to teach strategically, helping students to analyze what they must do and consider various approaches to perform a specific task. During the whole course we dedicated time to learning some strategies related to vocabulary, reading, and writing so they could, precisely, know how to approach those tasks in the future.

Outcomes and strategies related to reading improvement included in the syllabus,

Outcome 1. Students will be able to clearly answer questions providing details (concepts and ideas) from the texts related to Spanish dialectology.

Strategy: Say/Mean/Matter.

Students had to read two articles, one about the Spanish language in the world (López García, 2006), and other about the model of Spanish language used in the classroom (Soler Montes, 2015), and prepare some sheets following the template of Say/Mean/Matter (they needed to include at least 6 sentences or short excerpts from each reading). They did this individually.

See a template in Fig. 3 and a rubric in Fig. 4:

FIGURE 3. Template for the activity «Say/Mean/Matter»

Say, Mean, Matter

This strategy is the process of answering three questions as they relate to a reading selection:

- What does it say?
- What does it mean?
- Why does it matter?

The purpose of this exercise is to move beyond literal-level thinking.

Say (Copia aquí la oración/pon página)	Mean (Explica aquí la oración)	Matter (Explica por qué es importante)

Source: The template was facilitated during the workshop RWAC, and then the explanation in Spanish was added.

FIGURE 4. Rubric for «Say/Mean/Matter» assignment

Criteria	Desirable goal	Grade (1-3)
Say	Accurate paraphrase or quote	
Mean	Shows perceptive understanding of the quote’s meaning	
Matter	Shows insightful application of quote’s content	
---Mechanics---	No errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, accents and use of capital letters.	

Source: The author of this chapter.

An explanation and an example were provided, as seen in Figs. 5 and 6.

FIGURE 5. Explanation of «Say/Mean/Matter» assignment

When you write about a topic or claim, you will need to use supporting evidence/details. To demonstrate that you are knowledgeable about your topic or claim, you will need to use analysis. «Say, Mean, Matter» is a strategy to help you create an analysis of evidence.

SAY	MEAN	MATTER
What does the text actually say ?	What does the quotation you wrote mean ?	Why is the passage you chose important?
-Write the exact words from the text, surrounded by quotation marks.	-Put the quotation from the say column into your own words (paraphrase) and use a dictionary when necessary for new vocabulary.	-Write what the passage you chose has to say about a bigger life issue . This should be something outside the text.
- Introduce this quote with a signal phrase (this should make clear who the speaker of these words is).	-You may need to write a sentence or two describing what comes before or after the quotation. This is context .	-This may provide a solution to a problem, or it may provide insight into a complicated situation.
-Choose short passages that are important for your question (no longer than a sentence).	-Be thorough and detailed . Make sure you can explain every part of the quotation you are analyzing.	-Don't only write what the passage is about, make sure that you connect it to your answer to the prompt . Your evidence matters because it answers the prompt/question.

Source: Westrup (n.d.)

FIGURE 6. Example of «Say/Mean/Matter» assignment

Say	Mean	Matter
"Perhaps the two work together, one boosting the other, so that those remarkable genes give rise to remarkable talent only if those skills are suitably nurtured" (Bradley 1).	David Bradley describes why some people are more successful than others. Some argue that genes are responsible for excellence; others argue it is an individual's environment that leads to success. Here, Bradley suggests that inherited skills only lead to success if they are practiced regularly.	Bradley's argument is important because it implies that being excellent at anything requires dedication and effort. His conclusion suggests that only those individuals who are willing to dedicate themselves to hours of practice will become truly great.

Source: Westrup (n.d.)

See the example of the assignment done by one of the students in Fig. 7 (some grammar mistakes were marked on the text, and the instructor gave feedback to the student in Canvas). Students had to discuss the articles in class first –in small groups; half of the class worked with one article and half with the other, and then, they needed to share the most important things with the class. Later, at home,

each one needed to retake their notes and work with the article assigned, now individually.

FIGURE 7. Example of one of the student's work for «Say/Mean/Matter» assignment

Ejercicio de Say, Mean y Matter

Say	Mean	Matter
“Factores diacráticos, diacrónicos y especialmente diatópicos impiden que la lengua española se aprecie como unitaria y sencilla ante los ojos de los estudiantes” (página 1237)	La lengua es una diversidad donde es dividida por factores como diacráticos, diacrónicos y en especial diatópicos.	Es importante saber la diversidad porque al enseñar el instructor debe que considerar los factores diacráticos, diacrónicos y diatópicos.
“El término [norma], entendido como lo acuñó Coseriu (1973), es una abstracción que reúne hechos característicos de una lengua determinada correspondientes a un mismo espacio funcional” (página 1238).	La lengua “norma culta” depende en el espacio donde se encuentra el individuo. En otras palabras, una norma general.	Es importante porque el instructor enseñará la lengua escrita culta al igual que el uso general hablante.
“El español más adecuado para enseñar, por tanto, siempre será aquel que responda, según el criterio del profesor, a los intereses y actitudes de sus alumnos” (página 1239).	La enseñanza tiene que ser basada en el lugar y interés de los alumnos.	Es importante porque al enseñar el instructor debe cumplir con las necesidades de los alumnos.
Las llamadas lenguas simplex son aquellas caracterizadas por su buena intercomunicación dialectal...en las que la	Las lenguas simplex son aquellos dialectos que se	Es importante reconocer el dialecto donde el instructor se pueda comunicar mejor con

The is also a way to go beyond this strategy with the thinking routine called «The three whys»:

- Why might this [topic, question] matter to me?
- Why might it matter to people around me [family, friends, city, nation]?
- Why might it matter to the world?

This is a «Perspective-taking routine», one of the visible thinking routines described in Project Zero (Harvard Graduate School of Education⁵). It cultivates

⁵ It started in 1967 with a first intention of carrying out research on the education of arts. Over time it has extended to cover other areas of the curriculum, with the aim of understanding human expression and development.

students' capacity to look beyond their perspective and to consider others' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. This was done in an informal way in the classroom, but it will be done in writing next time. This routine nurtures a disposition to discern the significance of a situation, topic, or issue, considering global, local, and personal connections.

There other outcome related to reading was:

Outcome 2. Students will be able to clearly summarize concepts and ideas from the texts and videos related to Spanish dialectology.

Strategy: Cornell notes and «chunking» technique.

The «chunking» technique involves marking in the article «chunks» (underlying sentences) that have to do with the main ideas. Some of those will be quotes in the summary.

They also had to use Smarthinking to review their summary and include the report.

The so-called «Cornell notes» were developed in the 1950s by Walter Pauk, at Cornell University, and explained in his book *How to study in college*, later updated with Owens (Pauk and Owens, 2013). A template for the Cornell notes can be seen in Fig. 8:

FIGURE 8. Cornell Notes. Template provided to students

Nombre:		Clase y fecha:	
Título y tema del vídeo:			
Ideas clave:	Información más relevante (notas concretas):		
Conceptos	Desarrollo de conceptos		
Ideas	Frases importantes		
Dudas/preguntas que te surgen	Ejemplos		
	Cifras		
	Lugares		
Resumen breve con tus propias palabras			

Source: The author of this chapter.

The structure of the notes offers the possibility of folding the page and leaving only the left margin visible, that is, the column of doubts and key data, to review all the information, expand it, and learn it... This method condenses, orders, and synthesizes the ideas students need for the next task.

The notes and the small summary incorporated into them were the basis for the summary they had to compose. The rubric used to evaluate the summaries appears in Fig. 9:

FIGURE 9. Rubric to evaluate the summary

CRITERIA	4-3	3-2	2-1	1-0	POINTS
Summary skills and purpose	The summary is excellent: all major points are restated clearly and concisely, and minor details and opinions are avoided.	The summary is good: key information is restated well, and minor details and author opinions are avoided.	The summary is short; some important information is missing. Summary is relatively free of insignificant details.	The summary is very short; key information is missing, and minor details are given too much attention.	
Organization	The summary is organized well and invites readers to read more. Information follows a logical order and creates flow and clarity. There are different paragraphs for different ideas, and it includes an introduction and a conclusion.	The summary is organized well. Information follows a logical order.	The summary is organized in a reasonable manner but needs revision. Some information is misplaced.	The summary's organization follows no logical or coherent order.	
Grammar and mechanics	The summary is free of grammatical or mechanical errors. It adheres to instructions.	Minimal errors exist and do not impede meaning. Mostly, it adheres to instructions.	Some errors exist but only occasionally impede meaning. Follow the instructions somewhat.	Errors make summary unreadable (spelling, punctuation, accent marks...). It does not adhere to instruction	
Content	Clear thesis, there is no repetition of ideas, or lack of comprehensibility or objectivity.	Minimal errors regarding thesis; minimal or no repetition or ideas. Summary is comprehensible, and mostly objective.	Some errors regarding thesis. Some repetitions and/or lack of comprehensibility; some examples of lack of objectivity.	Many errors regarding thesis. Many repetitions of ideas, lack of comprehensibility. Lack of objectivity.	
Vocabulary	Vocabulary has no errors or repetition. It is appropriate to the subject (uses the vocabulary from the lesson correctly).	Minimal vocabulary errors.	Some use of false cognates. Some repetition, anglicisms... Some errors or lack of scientific vocabulary (vocabulary that is learned in this course).	Use of false cognates, anglicisms, repetition of words, vulgarisms... Not appropriate to the subject, with errors in the use of words.	
TOTAL POINTS					

There were two similar assignments, at the beginning and at the end of the course, and grades were parallel both times, although students who did not do well the first time, got better results the second time, as seen in Figs. 10 and 11 (those with 67.5% and 65% went up to 100% and 90%).

This was not a course with many long readings or written assignments (there were more questions, quizzes, semantic maps, and posters). In the future, it may be useful to incorporate this strategy (chunking and Cornell notes) when reading articles to answer those questions and create maps and posters.

FIGURES 10 and 11. Grades (summaries)
at the beginning and the end of the course

Resumen de las dos lecturas Out of 20	LECTURA-"EL ESPAÑOL EN ESTADOS UNIDOS" Out of 20
97.5%	98.75%
92.5%	87.5%
67.5%	100%
75%	75%
100%	97.5%
100%	100%
83.75%	81.25%
100%	100%
93.75%	100%
100%	95%
0%	0%
65%	90%
100%	100%
100%	0%
80%	65%
100%	100%

4. WRITING

Especially after COVID-19 times, and being the first class that many of them took face to face (one day), there was a need to improve their social and emotional skills. The pandemic put students under stress and created in many of them some form of trauma. During class time, there were some activities to foster interaction and trust, such as assignments involving creating a physical poster in groups. The simple act of touching the poster and looking at each other when they were talking was difficult, but it was a step forward in coming back to class collaboration.

Some of the writing activities were intended to be «healing» in that students could stop and reflect on their circumstances. As McGee (2022) indicates,

[...] the act of composing can be a powerful tool for developing one's emotional intelligence and resilience. Students who are able to access their thoughts, emotions, and self-stories and then put them on the page literally and figuratively give voice to their selves. Over time they come to rely on writing to communicate, navigate, and come to terms with what life brings. Writing even helps students from the most chaotic backgrounds feel they can assert some measure of control and organize their experiences.

She continues, «writing, no matter how formal or informal, begins from within. So, the more emotionally intelligent the writer is, the more powerful the writing is».

There are many ways to pair emotional learning and writing. Some examples can be found in Granado Reyes, Cuan Rojas and González Fernández (2023), who used short stories for socio-affective exploration after the pandemic. Also, some websites such as noredink.com provide prompts for students to integrate socio-emotional learning in class⁶.

The CASEL framework (casel.org), which creates a foundation for applying evidence-based SEL strategies to the community⁷, defines self-awareness as: «The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts» (CASEL'S SEL framework). Sometimes look-

⁶ Also, Organizations such as mindfulschools.org facilitates workshops, readings and practices on how to incorporate mindful practices in the classroom to face mental crisis among teachers and students.

⁷ The beginning was in 1968, when Dr. James Comer and his colleagues at Yale University's Child Study Center began a program to put their ideas about supporting the «whole child» into practice at two schools in New Haven, Connecticut. The goal was, and still is, to establish high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education.

ing at emotions head-on and writing stories of moments when those emotions were predominant is the healthiest way of building self-awareness. That is, writing personal narratives.

The key to implementing this in the classrooms is to give students time to reflect and to offer some writing-focused reflection prompts.

Outcome related to writing were:

1. Students will be able to write analytically (explaining, examining) in Spanish.
2. Students will be able to reflect on, revise, and edit their own writing.

Strategies (there were several written assignments, such as the summary shown in the reading section, but one was especially interesting and had sequences, one at the beginning of the course and one at the end):

1. Writing to belong.
 - a. At the beginning of the course, students wrote a summary, explaining and analyzing (cause-effect) the main fears and concerns they had about the class/course, and ways they could think of to overcome them.
 - b. At the end of the course, students wrote another reflection, considering how well they dealt with things throughout the course, how their perspectives had changed, what they had learned, and how/why they felt more confident in their abilities.

2. Writing Reflection.

Students had to write a short paragraph reflecting on their writing (specifically after using Smarthinking, at the beginning and at the end).

First «write to belong» exercise:

Write a short expository essay (around a page) explaining and analyzing the main fears and concerns you have about the class/course, and ways you can think of to overcome them. Include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Submit it to Smarthinking. When you turn in your assignment, include the report, and the last version modified. Pay attention to the report and incorporate the corrections needed. If you have time, submit it again to Smarthinking. Include a reflection on what you improved in the last version submitted:

1. *One aspect of this assignment you revised and why.*
2. *Something you are going to focus on in your next assignment.*
3. *What goals do you still want to accomplish in this class regarding writing skills (not content knowledge)?*

The rubric appears in Fig. 12:

FIGURE 12. Rubric to evaluate the written reflection

CRITERIA	4-3	3-2	2-1	1-0	POINTS
Reflection skills and purpose	Reflection is excellent; several significant points are indicated clearly and concisely, and minor details and opinions are avoided. No generalities.	Reflection is good; some main ideas are stated well, and minor details are avoided.	Reflection is short, it does not include a lot of main ideas. Reflection is relatively free of insignificant details.	Reflection is very short; just a few significant ideas and/or minor details are given too much attention. The student ignores instructions (length, focus...)	
Organization	Reflection is organized well and invites readers to read more. Information follows a logical order and creates flow and clarity. There are different paragraphs for different ideas, including an introduction and a conclusion with the content they should include.	The reflection is organized well. Information follows a logical order. Some room for improvement in the introduction and conclusion, or selection ideas in each section.	Reflection is organized reasonably but needs revision. Some information is misplaced.	Reflection's organization follows no logical or coherent order.	
Grammar and mechanics	Reflection is free of grammatical or mechanical errors.	Minimal errors exist and do not impede meaning.	Some errors exist but only occasionally impede meaning.	Errors make summary unreadable (spelling, punctuation, accent marks...).	
Content	Clear thesis. There is no repetition of <u>ideas</u> , or lack of comprehensibility or objectivity.	Minimal errors regarding thesis; minimal or no repetition or ideas. Summary is comprehensible, and mostly objective.	Some errors regarding thesis. Some repetitions and/or lack of comprehensibility; some examples of lack of objectivity	Many errors regarding thesis. Many repetitions of ideas, lack of comprehensibility. Lack of objectivity.	
Vocabulary	Vocabulary has no errors or repetition. It is appropriate to the subject (uses the vocabulary from the lesson correctly).	Minimal vocabulary errors.	Some of false cognates. Some repetition, anglicisms, colloquialisms... Some errors or lack of scientific vocabulary (vocabulary learned in this course).	Use of false cognates, anglicisms, repetition of words, vulgarisms, colloquial words, literary expressions... Not appropriate to the subject/not academic, with errors in the use of words.	
TOTAL POINTS					

One student indicated fears such as (my translation from Spanish):

However, accompanied by all the information I want to learn, there are some worries and insecurities that I hope to master throughout the semester such as spelling, the correct organization of an essay, the proper use of words and my bad habit of procrastinating when I must do my homework.

Other student stated (my translation):

Spanish is difficult to understand and speak, even if you are a native speaker. The language has been taught to many of us since we were children. As a result, many of us speak the language in an informal way instead of formally [...]. Spanish may have been my first language, but I still need help with my pronunciation and communication skills, which I hope to improve during this course. (Not) Talking correctly in Spanish, stuttering, and voicing my opinions accurately are some of my main fears for the course. [...] About my writing skills, I want to be able to write formally and correctly in Spanish, which I know will be difficult since I still have a hard time doing it. Besides, I would like to be able to communicate accurately with others, even if I still have trouble speaking the language correctly.

Examples of reflections on the Smarthinking report (part 2 of the assignment):

1. *One aspect of this assignment you reviewed and why:*

One aspect that I checked was my writing, I used a lot of words incorrectly and I did not structure my sentences correctly, either.

One aspect that I checked after submitting my document was the spelling and structure of my sentences. Also, the accents and a little bit the words that had been selected. This is because it caused a great disorganization and confusion when reading it.

2. *Something you are going to focus on in your next assignment:*

I am going to concentrate on making sure that my sentences are well written, my grammar, and the flow of my writing.

For the next assignment, I will try to read it several times to improve the organization and fluency of my ideas; as well as improve my grammar.

3. *What goals do you still want to accomplish in this class regarding writing skills (not content knowledge)?*

What I want to achieve in this class is to be able to write a complete essay with few errors. Learning more words in Spanish and writing them correctly; that my writing improves so much as my ideas.

At the end of the course, they had a post-reflection. Instructions were,

Remember that, at the beginning of the course, you wrote a reflection (expository essay) explaining and analyzing your main fears and concerns about the class/course and ways you thought you could overcome them. You used Smarthinking and reflected on that too. Now,

1. Write another reflection with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion (no more than two pages). Talk about how your perspectives have changed, what you have learned, and how/why you feel (hopefully) more confident, how you overcome or solved your fears.

2. Include a reflection about your writing: what you improved in the last version submitted (if you used Smarthinking), and/or if you think there are some writing aspects you have improved in this course (remember that you have been doing some assignments such as Cornell notes, chunking, mind maps, posters... —think of how these have helped your skills). This is related to writing/organizing skills rather than content knowledge. Remember that you should always create an outline to help you organize your ideas. Submit it to Smarthinking only if you want. Include here the report, and the last version of your essay. Pay attention to the report and make the necessary changes in your reflection to improve your grade.

The rubric used to grade this writing was the same as in Fig. 12.

Comments from the example (part 2, reflection on writing; in all cases, the translation from Spanish is mine):

I was happy after receiving the Smarthinking report on the second reflection of the course since there were not many errors. The tutor of Smarthinking mentioned that I had to check punctuation and word choice. I used the commas incorrectly in four parts, which was not much, and I used the verb «pass» incorrectly twice. I made the changes to make sure there were no errors, and the text flowed in a better way. As I mentioned previously, I was happy to see that there weren't many mistakes in comparison with the first reflection that I made at the beginning of the course.

Throughout the dialectology class, we were assigned different projects in a team where we had to create mental maps and informative posters. These tasks were very helpful because they allowed us to share our best skills with the team members. In addition, the works allowed us to improve and correct the spelling of ourselves and others by giving constructive criticism when required. Doing work such as mental maps helped us to understand the topics better because we could break them down and synthesize them more efficiently. Methods such as Cornell notes helped to organize essays and discussions since the texts had better fluency and helped us communicate our critical thinking about the topics.

See a comparison of the grades for both assignments in Figs. 13 and 14. Grades were, in general, a little better the second time.

FIGURES 13 and 14. Grades at the beginning and at the end of the course (reflection)

REFLEXIÓN DE PRINCIPIO Out of 20	SEGUNDA REFLEXIÓN DE Out of 20
98.75%	100%
87.5%	95%
100%	93.75%
75%	-
97.5%	100%
100%	100%
81.25%	95%
100%	100%
100%	100%
95%	90%
0%	96.25%
90%	95%
100%	100%
0%	92.5%
65%	92.5%
100%	95%
	-

5. CONCLUSIONS

As can be seen in the survey⁸ prepared in Qualtrics and offered to the students, most were very satisfied with the assignments and thought they had learned to write and read better with them. Around 70-75% marked «strongly agree» for all (with a little less satisfaction on written assignments: 64.29%). Only one student marked the category of «strongly disagree» for all of the questions (probably one student who missed several classes and did not turn in many assignments).

⁸ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/oj6zorb96shrnc/Default%20Report.pdf?dl=0>

Concerning reading, it was quite an experience to use Cornell notes (along with the chunking technique), something they have employed since they were in school, and it was taught again to them in introductory courses for freshmen at the university. I was a little surprised that they liked such a frequently used strategy; probably that was because they needed more «physical» strategies, where they could interact with the texts. They worked in groups in class and then alone, and the results were excellent. The chunking technique, although it seemed too simple, was very useful because they tend to forget to include citations in their written assignments (summaries, essays) and to support their answers to questions, and this was a reminder. The Say/Mean/Matter strategy was also a powerful tool not only to stop and reflect on the meaning of what they read but also to relate topics to themselves (“matter”). A comment from one student (original in English):

The two different note taking tools introduced in this class really helped me make sure that I was taking from the readings was relevant and important. In the Say/mean/Matter note taking assignment I learned how to paraphrase important information in the readings, rewrite the message in my own words. Cornell notes and chunking helped with citing sources correctly.

The writing technique I used at the beginning and end of the course was a combination of a «write to belong» and a «reflection about writing», and the results were remarkable. Since they had to submit their assignments to Smarthinking both times, reflect on their mistakes the first time, and then comment on their improvement the second time, they paid attention to the reports (also because they could tell their grades improved that way). They could realize how helpful that tool was. Although instructors provide thorough feedback about writing too, especially because our classes in Spanish integrate content and learning of language, still, students paid more attention to Smarthinking than to that feedback. It was mandatory to submit the assignments there, and then I double-checked that they had incorporated some changes after that (so it was like a «draft» for them, and they knew their grades were going to improve). One of the students' comments was,

Some of the assignments that helped me improved my writing were creating summaries and sending them to Smarthinking. This service allowed me to improve my grammar and organization of my assignments. The teacher's feedback also helped me to improve my writing skills.

I was also surprised to see how candid students were about their fears and how this mindful practice of writing made them more aware of them and, I think, helped them overcome those. They also included in the last reflection some thoughts about what they had learned in the course (content), and not only about writing and themselves. I was pleasantly surprised about how well they expressed

themselves in that exercise, concisely and accurately, and how much they valued the reflections. Some of the comments:

I liked the activity where we wrote a self reflection about our fears for the start of the semester and how we plan to confront them. I feel like it helped me mentally prepare for the semester and also helped me improve my writing.

I think the course reflections have been a good aid at helping me think of all the things I have or have had trouble in before when it comes to writing, and being able to look back at that and see if I've improved or not helps a lot, not just for confidence but for future aspects of my writing.

Finally, something that helped me a lot this semester was going to the counseling center and talking to a mental health counselor. As previously mentioned, at the beginning of the semester, I was struggling with negative feelings about school and other things that were happening in my personal life. After talking with my counselor about my worries, he helped me change my perspective of the semester. We did this through some sessions where we explored the different measures by which I could face my school fears. Among the things we did, the counselor helped me form a plan to manage my time.

The dialectology class has changed my perspective on language and culture; it has taught me a lot about the diversity of Spanish and has given me confidence in my ability to understand and differentiate Spanish and its dialectal varieties. I learned that Spanish is a living language that is constantly evolving, which reflects the history, culture, and identity of the countries that speak it.

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CULTURAL INTERFERENCE AS A DISTORTING ELEMENT IN THE DIDACTICS OF ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

In the field of language learning, one of the primary objectives is to attain sufficient linguistic fluency for successful communicative exchange. However, this fluency is evidently insufficient if not accompanied by an equivalent cultural fluency. In educational contexts, communication interferences are more often due to deficiencies in cultural competence than linguistic shortcomings, thereby rendering cultural competency a vital component in language didactics and consequently, in intercultural education. In this chapter, we begin with the concept of culture and subsequently propose a survey that can be conveniently administered by education professionals. The aim is to gather necessary cultural data pertaining to customs and social habits within a specific geographic area. This collection of encultural content is essential for achieving the aforementioned cultural fluency and, consequently, for attaining success in communication, which represents the ultimate aim of the educational process within the context of language learning.

Keywords: intercultural competence, education, language learning, didactic

1. INTRODUCTION

S PERBER AND WILSON'S RELEVANCE THEORY ([1986] (1994: 28-29)) understands communication as a process of encoding and interpretation. The language system intervenes in encoding, utilising signs to which a series of conventional meanings are attached to create the message. These signs must pass through an inferential process, a cognitive process where information is filtered

through a series of social and innate ideas stored in the brain. These ideas imbibe the message and serve to arrive at the correct interpretation. These data are the result of millions of years of human evolution and socialisation, encompassing and conditioning the entire communicative process.

This collection of cognitive structures, based on past experiences that filter and shape perceptions, assists in processing and understanding new information. It is referred to as a «frame» (Bateson, 1955). This notion of a frame aligns with anthropologist Hymes (1974) and sociologist Goffman (1974), or Greenwald's (1968) cognitive response theory. According to Greenwald, individuals compare new information received with existing memories, along with the emotions that we have linked to those memories and biographical experiences.

In the Theory of Cognitive Frames, Lakoff (1996, 2004) states that frames are mental structures that shape our way of seeing the world. When a word is heard, its corresponding frame is activated in the brain. This frame can be an image or another form of knowledge. The Theory of Frames partly explains an individual's interpretation of received messages, as each decoded word passes through the filter of the corresponding frame. Each individual, in accordance with their experience and socialisation (i.e., their culture), interprets terms to which various meanings, connotations, and emotions are attached.

Therefore, a generalised agreement exists when explaining the correct interpretation of a message. Innate and social ideas are fundamental elements for interpreting both verbal and nonverbal communication in a communicative exchange.

The anthropological aspects of communication encompass signs, perceptions, and behaviours that are universal: uncertainty in specific situations, predictability, cognitive economy that reduces uncertainty, gregariousness, image, the need to maintain said image in the face of attacks which cause cognitive dissonance that needs to be resolved, submission, and the authority derived from it, etc. All of the above represent a significant part of communicative exchange (Santiago-Guervós, 2005).

Moreover, it is also necessary to understand the social information that exists in the context to attain linguistic fluency, as well as cultural fluency without interference. This involves understanding the human being as both a species and an individual who forms part of a society. We need to immerse ourselves in their customs, in other words, in their culture, in the social meanings of objects, smells, and flavours. This is where the differences and potential interferences that can affect communication are to be found. As the *Talmud* states, we do not see things as they are, we see them as we are. In other words, the interpretation of messages we receive passes through the filter of our own essence, genetics and socialisation.

2. THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

The study of culture constitutes a fundamental ingredient in communication for the accurate interpretation of messages, particularly within the context of learning an additional language.

As Oliveras points out (2000: 26),

the notion of communicative competence thus transcends its sense of linguistic code knowledge, evolving into an understanding of the capacity to discern what to say to whom, when and how to say it, and when to remain silent. The aim of the ethnography of communication is to uncover and describe the various communication situations within the studied group, as well as the distinct types of communicative acts through which the members of the given group organise their daily activities. Ultimately, it consists of an awareness of the psychological, cultural, and social rules underlying communication.

Thus, ethnography of communication and sociopragmatics essentially represent the same concept. Both serve as theoretical frameworks within which to situate cultural studies aimed at achieving communicative competence.

The concept of culture, much like the concept of interculturality, has been defined across various disciplines. Anthropologists, ethnographers, and sociologists perceive the culture of different human groups through the lenses of their respective fields; they examine the cultural attributes of tribes, ethnicities, and countries, describing and categorising them.

Perhaps the most precise definition of the term comes from García (2004: 43), as it encapsulates the essential elements of the social interpretation of the message:

Human communication depends on the speakers' shared understanding of the world. We all possess common human universals, which we characterise through our own cultures, resulting in a distinct and unique value attributed to each culture.

(...)

The concept of culture is defined through a wide range of variables, such as: environmental, climatic, and atmospheric characteristics; the landscape; demographic conditions; patterns of behaviour associated with ceremonies, festivities, ritual practices, and magical-religious beliefs; social conventions (punctuality, gifts, clothing, taboos related to conversational behaviour, etc.); the social and technological development levels of different societies; family dynamics; gender relations; social structures and the interactions among their members; physical contact (greetings, farewells, offerings, etc.); daily habits (meals, transportation, shopping, hobbies and leisure, workplace practices and schedules); language/s and their literatures; traditions; health and body care; education; gestures and facial expressions; religion;

housing and home life; myths, rituals, tales, beliefs, superstitions, and humour. Each one of these parameters shape and define specific cultural environments.

(...)

Every culture establishes a framework for social interaction, with shared patterns to inhabit and survive in everyday situations (schedules, eating habits, clothing, social norms and conventions, etc.). Through these, the world is structured and social interpretations of events that occur within it are formulated.

(...)

The values and criteria of a culture inevitably delineate what is deemed right or wrong, the positive from the negative, and what is considered indifferent. They determine what is accepted and rejected, even extending to what is not understood and excluded.

In essence, «the culture of a society consists of everything that one must know or believe in order to behave acceptably as a member, taking on any role they adopt for themselves» (Duranti, 2000: 15).

There are also other definitions of culture that move along the same lines. For instance, Siever (2006) begins from the anthropological concept of culture. In this context, culture can be understood as everything that an outsider must know or believe in advance to navigate, without drawing attention, in any role as a member within a culture that is foreign to them. Building upon this definition, Siever follows the studies of Göhring (2002: 117) to define culture as...

...everything that an individual must be able to know and feel,

1. So that they can judge in which situations natives behave as expected in their various roles (conforming to expectations), and in which situations they deviate from expectations;
2. So that they can behave as expected in the roles of the target society to which they have access, provided that this individual is willing and not reluctant to accept the consequences of behaviour that deviates from expectations.
3. Additionally, culture encompasses everything an individual must be able to know and feel in order to perceive the natural world and the one shaped by human beings as a native would.

This definition of culture foregrounds the behaviour and knowledge of the individual, as well as their cognitive and emotional interpretations. In a general sense, culture can be seen as a system of universal orientation, which is highly characteristic of a specific society or social group (Thomas, 1993: 380). The term «culturema» (Poyatos, 1994) embodies the idea of a unit carrying cultural meaning

in an effort to achieve a detailed classification of everything that the concept of culture encompasses. Ultimately, it is an expansive concept with numerous facets that have been examined by authors such as Trujillo (2005) or González Plasencia (2019).

3. THE CONCEPT OF INTERCULTURE

Multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturality are closely related concepts, but not synonymous. The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR hereafter) defines sociocultural knowledge as «knowledge of the society and culture of the community or communities where the language is spoken» (Council of Europe, 2002: 100). From this point, the foundations are laid for the development of pluriculturalism and interculturality.

Individuals learn languages and integrate that knowledge with cultural understanding to achieve plurilingual and pluricultural competence. As indicated by the CEFR (2001: 168),

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for communicative purposes and to engage in intercultural relationships, in which a person, as a social agent, possesses varying degrees of proficiency in several languages and has experience with various cultures.

Based on this definition, the concept of intercultural skill can be utilised to address a cognitive and communicative phenomenon and ascertain that pluriculturalism is acquired during the process of learning an additional language. An additional language is understood as «any language an individual learns in addition to their home language/s. By focusing on the individual's developing plurilingual repertoire rather than specific languages, the term avoids the confusion that can arise» (Council of Europe, 2022).

Mediation, an important concept introduced in the CEFR and further emphasised in the *Companion Volume* (2020), has gained even greater significance in light of the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity within our societies. It serves as a bridge to overcome the interferences that can occur in communication. In the realm of language assessment and certification, the *Companion Volume* creates validated and calibrated descriptors that were previously lacking. These descriptors are highly useful not only for second languages or additional languages, but also for languages used in schooling and curriculum development to promote plurilingual and intercultural education. This document provides scales of descriptors for text mediation, concept mediation, and communication mediation, as well as for mediation strategies and plurilingual/pluricultural competences.

Olmo (2000: 65) points out that «the intercultural project has three fundamental objectives:

- Teaching acceptance of cultural differences on an equal footing.
- Teaching enrichment through the acceptance of these differences.
- Teaching resolution of incompatibilities that may arise among them.”

The incompatibilities mentioned by Olmo (2000: 67) pertain to situations such as «What will happen when our Human Rights are incompatible with certain religious or cultural practices of other peoples?»

Within the field of language teaching, interculturality should take precedence over such appreciations. Interculturality is an effort to foster communication and mutual integration between different cultures. In the context of language teaching, it involves the ability to navigate between cultures and communicate through the understanding of said cultures.

A student of foreign languages gains access to a «rich socialisation» (Trujillo Sáez, 2003), thereby developing interculturality through interactions with other cultures.

Thus, the fundamental objective is to facilitate intercultural communication for those who are already aware of the need to understand their interlocutor’s culture in order to communicate effectively. This cultural fluency in communication is largely achieved by applying a basic principle of empathy, in other words, putting oneself in the interlocutor’s shoes and immersing oneself in their culture. Understanding how they live, what they talk about, and especially their likes and dislikes is crucial for fluid communication.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to provide strategies to be able to work on these interpretive procedures which aid in overcoming cultural interferences.

4. ENCULTURE

We will begin with a series of concepts that are addressed in anthropological studies in general, and ethnographic studies in particular.

In line with Harris (1981: 167-181), culture consists of the socially acquired ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of the members of a specific society. Within this general concept of culture, it is important to distinguish a *predominant culture* that forms the foundation of the society it is embedded in, and a set of *subcultures* within each society formed by groups of individuals whose lifestyles are not shared by the rest. The *predominant culture* is closely related to the concept of *enculturation*, a partially conscious and partially unconscious learning experience through which the older generation transmits traditional ways of thinking and behaving to the next generation. In recent years, newer generations have increasingly dis-

tanced themselves from the older ones, leading to what is often referred to as the *generational gap*. However, despite this gap, a part of this enculturation persists (Santiago-Guervós, 2012, 2013). It must be noted that although enculturation can certainly explain the continuity of some cultural aspects, it cannot account for the evolution of culture.

The objective of this research is to obtain the maximum amount of data from those who form part of the predominant culture, which has been acquired through the process of enculturation. The goal is to uncover what is general, unaffected by passing trends or minor societal changes. All of this while acknowledging that culture is not static and can undergo rapid changes, especially in an increasingly globalised and digitised world. Harris (1981: 166) points out,

...cultures change rapidly, as is the case in most parts of the world today. For instance, prior to the 1970s, married American women with school-aged children believed that wives should depend on their husbands to support the family. Fuelled by rising prices and the desire to maintain or improve their standard of living, an increasing number of married women with school-aged children deviated from this «norm» and entered the workforce. (...) Nowadays (...) it is widely thought to be appropriate and fitting for women to do so.

Hence, this research may not achieve all the objectives we could set out to accomplish. As mentioned earlier, culture varies, but it will provide us with access to enduring data, which has been passed down through the years, from generation to generation – and others that may reveal cultural shifts within a specific society over time.

Therefore, while the standard approach would involve variables such as age, gender, socio-cultural level, etc., our intention is to obtain data collectively. The aim is to focus on the broader aspects, considering the particular as exceptional and centring our attention on the predominant culture. In subsequent research, we will delve into subcultures to obtain detailed data about specific cultures of particular languages.

From the proposed survey, we seek to extract data concerning communicative behaviour, customs, and social habits of the community we are evaluating. It is not the same to inquire about meal times as it is to explore whether one must always eat with the right hand. One pertains to information while the other pertains to communicative behaviour. The former is important as it can influence attitudes, while the latter is intrinsically significant.

For the development of the survey, we have primarily considered various works in the field of teaching additional languages, the CEFR (2002), the work of Oliveras (2000), the PCIC (Curriculum Plan of the Cervantes Institute, 2006), or

the *Companion Volume* (2020) as samples of widely accepted modern language curricula.

According to the CEFR (2002: 97-98),

The distinctive features of a specific European society and its culture can be related to, for example, daily life, living conditions, interpersonal relationships, values, beliefs and attitudes towards various factors, body language, and knowledge of the conventions governing such behaviour, which are part of the socio-cultural competence of the user or learner, social conventions and ritual behaviour.

While they may hold some significance in communicative exchanges, we have omitted geographical, environmental, demographic, economic, and political characteristics, among others, of each of the analysed countries. We consider these data to be part of the general knowledge that students should possess about the country of the language they are studying, and they can easily access this information. We have chosen those aspects that could hinder communication and lead to interferences, although we are aware that the remaining factors are equally important as cultural knowledge.

The questions that informants must answer, and which constitute the working framework, are those presented in the following survey.

5. THE SURVEY: CUSTOMS, SOCIAL HABITS, AND COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOURS

5.1. DAILY LIFE

- What are the rules of etiquette and social habits at the dinner table?
- At what time is eating customary in your culture?
- Typical food and drink. When are they consumed?
- What are some popular festivals in your culture?
- Leisure. Daily and weekend activities, social life: Eating out, nightlife...
- The lives of young/elderly people

5.2. LIVING CONDITIONS

- What are the houses like? Are there rooms with specific uses, such as a pantry?
- Work schedules
- Life attitude: work, the ideal life.
- Social conditions (social security, cost of education, etc.)

5.3. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Social habits and rules of etiquette in social contexts: giving up seats, letting women go first...
- Business interactions: meals, behaviour, customs...
- Romantic relationships, dating, how to relate to people, common-law couples, single people, LGBTQ+, divorced people
- Gender relationships: the role of men and women in society
- Family: traditional and new family structures, roles within the family unit, at what age do young people leave home?

5.4. SOCIAL CONVENTIONS

1. Punctuality/Chronemics
2. Clothes. Image and aesthetics: fashion, physical appearance, how to dress in different social situations.
3. Conventions and taboos regarding behaviour and conversations. What topics can be discussed and which ones are off-limits? Money, the weather, health...
4. Greetings, introductions and farewells (handshake, hug, kiss...).
5. Conversation: eye contact, smiling, turn-taking, tone of voice, overlapping. Conversation rituals
6. Communication distances, physical contact, postures, gestures, face, eyes. Proxemics
7. Politeness formulas: informal/formal address, thank you, please
8. Compliments and flattery. Responding to praise.
9. Dates and appointments
10. Gifts: what to say when receiving or giving gifts, how to act...
11. Events (birthdays, weddings, baptisms, communions, celebrations...) What are they? If invited, would you bring something in these situations? If so, what would you bring? birthdays, name days, work dinners, weddings, engagement parties, debutantes ball, ceremonies and banquets, anniversaries, baptisms, funerals, communions, visiting a sick person, etc.
12. Bad manners: burping, not giving up a seat for an elderly person, spitting, stretching, sneezing, taking shoes off, using swear words, etc.
13. Good manners: At the table, in a restaurant, in a lift, on a bus, in class, on the street, etc. For example: giving up your seat, greeting in an elevator, declining an offer the first time around ...

14. Behaviour within the home: what clothes/shoes to wear, how to eat...
15. Visits, hospitality, accepting offers, invitation routines...
16. Bars, restaurants and entertainment venues (how to pay, how to behave, standing or sitting, tipping, how to dress, social function...)
17. Gambling and lotteries
18. Family expenses
19. Other social conventions, for instance, what type of communication do you engage in within a lift, if any? How do you position yourself? Do you say anything?
20. Respect. To whom? To what?

5.5. RITUAL BEHAVIOUR

1. Death: funerals, mourning, etc.
2. Expressions of approval (applause) and disapproval (whistles/boos)
3. Superstitions: bad luck and good luck. Religion

To conclude the survey, we could suggest a more general question that may help us gather data to enrich our cultural repertoire, such as:

Any specific anecdote that exemplifies communicative interference due to cultural reasons?

Lastly, we would like to highlight, perhaps for a separate survey, data concerning nonverbal communication. As this is a comprehensive and no less crucial aspect of cultural and communicative fluency, a dedicated survey could be devised to obtain significant data about a component of communication that is typically not covered in additional language classes (García, 2002).

We acknowledge that surveys of this magnitude may cause demotivation and fatigue because responding to them can be quite time-consuming. However, when the respondent is well-informed about the importance of the information, it can be successfully completed. Furthermore, it can also serve to extract certain aspects to be addressed in the classroom in a specific and/or individualised manner. Worksheets can be created covering some of these topics and integrated into the classroom curriculum. This way, we would raise students' awareness from the early stages of school about the cultural differences that exist in different countries. This education would focus on interculturality, multilingualism, and plurilingualism, guiding students to view certain attitudes, customs, or social habits as differentiating elements that enrich us, rather than being judged as better or worse.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

In conclusion, we must overcome cultural interferences to achieve communicative success. The role of teachers of additional languages is to highlight this inherent aspect of language learning, which seldom appears in textbooks or in school or higher education curricula.

Surveys serve as a means to delve into the teaching and learning of cultural differences, a way to extract relevant information to acquaint learners with the culture of the language they are learning and attain the necessary cultural fluency.

One way to introduce intercultural awareness in the classroom is to demonstrate, through contrasting cultural worksheets, distinct aspects in common communicative situations to students. Subsequently, we propose an illustrative example: a template for a primary school teacher. This could be provided to Spanish students, facilitating a discussion of the differences that may be encountered in a classroom of children from another language and culture. In this case, the template aims to gather data about German culture in the school context.

WORKSHEET 1: IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM

Children in primary school	In Germany	In Spain
Do students address the teacher formally? (formal pronouns, use of Mr./Mrs.?)		
When the teacher enters the classroom, are they greeted in any special way?		
When a student wishes to participate, how do they ask for the floor? (raising their hand, for example)		
If someone wants to go to the bathroom, how do they ask for permission?		
Where is the teacher's desk located in the classroom?		
Layout of the desks: in pairs, individually, in a semicircle		
School material: pencil case? What is it like? Notebooks: grid/line spacing, size		
How are the walls of the classroom decorated?		
Start and end time of classes		
What is break time like? Do the children bring something to eat? Are there any foods that are not permitted?		
What happens when someone in the class exhibits inappropriate behaviour?		

For subsequent studies, due to the influence of culture on expression, we suggest a second phase to validate the language model used in various communication situations.

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THE VALUE OF DIFFERENCE THROUGH THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUITY IN THE SPANISH LITERATURE CLASSROOM FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality is a universal legal principle, while gender equity goes further by adding an ethical dimension to ensure true equality. It seeks to address the existing imbalance that women face, particularly in terms of political representation and job opportunities. This study focuses on literary texts by authors who highlight gender disparities, aiming to capture the attention of their contemporaries, especially women. The objective is to deal with themes related to restrictive laws that curtailed women's freedoms. In the classroom, through text analysis, and activities, students are encouraged to view these issues from a contemporary perspective. By studying the past, students can better comprehend how our present circumstances have been reached. This learning experience aims to leave a lasting impression.

Keywords: difference, equity, gender, Spanish literature, sustainable education

1. EDUCATING IN THE VALUE OF DIFFERENCE

NUMEROUS CHANGES ARE TAKING place in the field of education in order to ensure that students feel like active community members. They are also encouraged to understand the importance of embracing differences to promote peaceful, tolerant, and equitable coexistence. In the words of Barone, «education is the most important factor that determines the opportunities one will

have in life» (2019: 1). Through education, perspectives on reality are broadened, and knowledge is acquired that enables the evaluation of certain facts as being beneficial or detrimental to a community. These skills enhance the qualities that should define a human being—within their personality, their relationships with the social group, and as moral agents. For these reasons, educational trends focus on the value of difference, emerging in the presence of ‘otherness’ in the classroom (Parra Gómez and Maravé Vivas, 2022: 130-150). Embracing difference entails recognising that an excessive pursuit of equality can result in a culture of uniformity. Therefore, it is beneficial to shed light on the differences that have existed among cultures, races, genders, and nationalities throughout human history (Valores360, 2019). In this sense, the visibility and treatment of differences in the classroom cultivates tolerance, providing the necessary tools to promote a sense of solidarity. This approach aims to curb such inequalities in favour of building equitable environments, and, most importantly, ensuring respect for human dignity.

Among the differences that can be found in these educational contexts are those related to gender. Benería (1987) states that gender can be defined as «the set of beliefs, personal traits, attitudes, feelings, values, behaviours, and activities that differentiate men and women through a process of social construction». This social construction of gender exhibits several characteristics. On one hand, gender differentiation is entrenched in the labour market, the media, family, interpersonal relationships, and certainly within the school system. On the other hand, among the traits typically attributed to one sex or another, those considered masculine have been understood as superior in the hierarchical value scale. Consequently, men have remained in a superior position to women (Benería, 1987: 46). Comas d’Argemir (1995: 39), however, states that gender is «a social construction that expresses each society’s conceptualisation of the masculine and feminine (or other possible genders) in relation to the categories of man and woman as sexed beings, and therefore, biologically differentiated». In order to properly understand the meaning of the term ‘gender’, it must be isolated from the word ‘sex’, as the latter relates to biological aspects that classify men and women. However, as mentioned earlier, gender is tied to arbitrary processes of behaviour, functions, and attitudes that have been attributed as qualities inherent to one sex or another, which society has internalised and traditionally perpetuated, as indicated by Espinar and Mateo (2007: 192). Therefore, gender, as described by Risman (2004), should be understood as a structure of institutionalised social relations that organise power at all levels.

2. EQUALITY, GENDER EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION

Gender equality aims to end the discriminations that have persisted over time due to sex, especially against women, and also to value the differences between both sexes as sources of enrichment. It is evident that the feminist perspective has contributed to these issues being taken into consideration by society. With the introduction of the term 'equity', progress is being made as it goes beyond the notion of considering everyone as equal and instead emphasises the importance of acknowledging the context and circumstances of each person. This approach involves the provision of resources to address adversities and rectify potential disadvantages. In this regard, Brighouse (2009) explores social justice within the educational context, highlighting the concept of 'meritocratic equality'. This concept posits that «an individual's educational prospects should be the result of that individual's effort and talent».

Nevertheless, in the realm of equity, women have faced their own challenges. For centuries, they have shouldered the burden of tradition which deemed them inferior to men. As a result, they would often have to give up professional and personal projects, ways of being and thinking, aspirations, and endure restrictions and controls to favour the other segment of the population, men. Hence, school is a fitting place to instill and promote social justice, in accordance with the Eurydice Report (2021). This report is based on the fundamental premise that «all human beings are equal», as indicated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). In such an environment, social justice is closely linked to equality, regardless of a person's specific traits.

On the other hand, in 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as an opportunity to improve the lives of human beings. Among the seventeen proposed goals, relevant to this work are Goal 4: «Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all», and Goal 5: «Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls». Regarding Goal 4, it is stated that «education enables upward socio-economic mobility and is key to escaping poverty», and in relation to Goal 5, it emphasises that «gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also one of the essential foundations for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world». The targets of this goal are varied, but some of the key ones include the following: «5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere» and «5.5. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life» (United Nations, 2018).

Coeducation emerges as a highly effective tool for imparting these values. One of its primary objectives is to convey the idea that there are different forms and

visions of the world, unique experiences and contributions made by both men and women over time that constitute a diverse and plural reality (Iglesias Crespo, 2015: 150). Blanco García (2007: 52) argues that coeducation should involve the establishment of new references, new models of men and women, fostering educational trajectories «outside the dominant model» and rethinking what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man, in line with contemporary society. To achieve this, Sánchez Torrejón states that teachers should emphasise and instill in the teaching process «the key role of democratic values», as these «promote respect and equity between genders» (2020: 42). In this way, situations of discrimination are avoided, as the acquired knowledge endures in memory over time.

3. SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION AND FEMALE ROLE MODELS THROUGHSPANISH LITERATURE

Literature, serving as a mirror to reflect societal realities, represents a valuable resource for classroom discussions on coeducation culture and gender equity. It emphasises the importance of respecting differences and acknowledging the shared commitment to ensuring that men and women possess equal rights and opportunities throughout their lives. Literary texts offer passages depicting instances where women are the victims of episodes of discrimination and violence. Presently, these texts can foster debate and reflection, striving to prevent such occurrences from recurring. This study focuses on two female Spanish authors of the 20th century, Carmen de Burgos and Mercedes Formica. Two of their respective works, *El artículo 438* (Article 438) and *A instancia de parte* (At the Instance of the Party), have been selected for examination.

In Spanish literature classes, themes such as the invisibility of female authors in textbooks and course materials should be addressed. It is essential to question why their contribution to literature, as well as their social, economic, and political impact, have not been valued. This can be achieved through reflections on the ways in which gender stereotypes persisted and how women were denied access to productivity and empowerment.

It is well-known that women are conspicuously absent from the worldview crafted within the educational system (López-Navajas, 2014 & 2021). This situation has resulted in a skewed cultural history that has been passed down through generations and continues to exist in the present day. A significant portion of this history has been concealed or disregarded due to its perceived lesser significance merely for being produced by women. This phenomenon leads to a lack of recognition and social delegitimation, as artistic merits are not socially valued when not highlighted. According to López-Navajas (2021), the limited attention and recognition received by works authored by women may explain the exceptional

status accorded to the few women who emerge as singular figures in a male-dominated world. This leads to their portrayal not as integral parts of the collective and enduring cultural tradition, but rather as isolated elements that only contribute to societal development in a specific and punctual manner. As a result, their role as protagonists of history and culture is denied.

The recovery of the names and works of women and their integration into the classroom, in this case, within the context of Spanish literature, also facilitates the creation of female role models, which are generally lacking across all disciplines. This approach ensures that students are aware of the achievements of women. Female students, in particular, gain an appreciation for role models from which they can draw inspiration shaping their own aspirations, developing them, and bringing them to fruition. In order to establish an education system characterised by equal opportunities and devoid of sexist stereotypes, it is essential to recognise the historical absence of female contributions in the world of culture. By gaining an understanding of their works, the fictional universes that these stories contained can be examined, shedding light on the challenges faced by women in a world tailored solely to men's needs. This is particularly relevant in those literary works where a social critique was the objective.

The proposal presented here for working in the Spanish literature classroom with texts by Carmen de Burgos and Mercedes Formica, two of the authors mentioned by López-Navajas in his essay (2021), shines a spotlight on women in two distinct aspects. On one hand, it recognises them as authors contributing creative works to culture, and on the other hand, it does so through the female characters they create and the lessons learned from the stories about them. These stories contribute to the creation of fairer and more equitable societies. It is customary for male role models to be showcased in the classroom, however, this proposal intends to shift the focus onto the contributions of women, both as writers and the characters they create, symbolising realities that have existed and may persist. Both Burgos and Formica are introduced to students in elevated social positions, as intellectuals and professionals. They are women who effectively shaped public opinion through their assessments of the world around them, and who crafted their futures to achieve economic independence despite the gender-related restrictions they had to face. Through their literary works, they conveyed messages to society with the aim of prompting reflection on gender discrimination and injustice. Thus, this approach proves to be an effective means of awakening students' critical awareness, an essential step towards activating their social engagement.

Therefore, in contemporary societies, it is imperative to question the patriarchal system of understanding reality from two perspectives: that of men and that of women, based on the roles tradition has constructed as inherent to their respective sexes. As asserted by Sánchez Torrejón (2020: 44), the potential to deconstruct this

opposition, through analysis and critique of gender stereotypes, can lead to highly engaging pedagogical approaches, incorporating more inspirational and realistic models.

The two authors proposed in this study are being revindicated in recent research. They were previously somewhat disregarded by the official Spanish literary canon, which was established arbitrarily based on a mix of ideologically aligned or divergent criteria in accordance with the prevailing modes of thought during moments when decisions were made regarding inclusion or exclusion of names. This revindication ensures that their life trajectories and works can be known and studied within classrooms. This is not only important due to their artistic merit but also due to their commitment to gender inequalities evident within their works, along with the various forms of violence that these discriminations entail. In the case of Carmen Burgos, notable works include those by Núñez Rey (2005, 2018a, 2018b) and Palomo Vázquez and Núñez Rey (2021); for Mercedes Formica, the contributions of Soler Gallo (2020, 2021, 2023) stand out.

In the following table, the most prominent aspects of the authors, details about their works, and the characteristics that make them suitable for classroom discussions on the topics of equality, equity, rights, and justice are presented (see Figure 1):

FIGURE 1. Description of the authors and their works

Subject	Spanish Literature (this content could also be related to subjects such as History, Civilisation, Culture, Civic Values, when addressing the legal status of women or any topic related to gender-based inequality)
Stage/Phase	Secondary/ University/ Students of Spanish as a foreign language
CARMEN DE BURGOS SEGUÍ (Almería, 1867 – Madrid, 1932)	
Alias	Carmen de Burgos / Colombine
Literary production	1905-1932
Cultural group	Generation of '98 / Silver Age
Biographical milestones	She excelled in journalism and literature. She is considered the first female war correspondent. She wrote numerous press articles. She founded a female Masonic lodge and served as the president of the International League of Iberian and Latin American Women. In 1927, she published <i>La mujer moderna y sus derechos</i> (The Modern Woman and Her Rights), a pivotal work in the history of Spanish feminism that sheds light on the evolution and status of women during that period.

Work		<p><i>El artículo 438</i> (Article 438). Short Novel published in 1921 in the collection <i>La Novela Semanal</i>, No. 15 (December). It has not been reissued.</p>
Plot	<p>María de las Angustias Lozano lives in Granada with her husband Alfredo Sánchez and their daughter Pepita. Their marriage is far from harmonious. The husband's motivations for being with Angustias are solely driven by her fortune, which comes from her parents. Alfredo mistreats his wife, who must also endure infidelity and the scrutiny of those around her. Angustias repeatedly consents to property sales to facilitate Alfredo's frequent travels and business ventures, allowing him to stay at home with their daughter. He is aware that she does not love him and threatens to remain in Granada, claiming his marital rights if she refuses to provide him with money. Before going on another trip, he introduces his wife to his friend Jaime González, so that Jaime can take care of her, their daughter, and the house in his absence. Angustias falls in love with Jaime, and it seems the feeling is mutual. However, he explains that if the romance is discovered, she would be the one to suffer, not him or even her husband, even though he mistreated her and even incited infidelity, with suspicions of prostitution. The husband returns from his trip and catches the couple in the act. He proceeds to shoot the woman, killing her. The jury reached a verdict in the court case, finding Jaime guilty as an accomplice of María de las Angustias and declaring the husband not guilty. The husband's actions were seen as an attempt to cleanse his honour.</p>	
Setting	<p>The plot is contemporary to the publication date of the work, in the 1920s. Spanish political system: Monarchy of Alfonso XIII.</p>	
Real context	<p>Article 438 of the Penal Code of 1870 established: «The husband who, upon catching his wife in adultery and killing her or the adulterer on the spot, or causing them any serious injuries, shall be subject to the penalty of exile. If he inflicts injuries of the second class, he shall be exempt from punishment. These rules also apply to fathers in the same circumstances concerning their daughters under the age of twenty-three and their seducers, provided the daughters reside in the father's household. The benefits of this article do not extend to those who have promoted or facilitated the prostitution of their wives or daughters».</p>	
<p>MERCEDES FORMICA-CORSI HEZODE (Cádiz, 1913 – Málaga, 2002)</p>		
Alias	<p>Mercedes Formica</p>	

Literary production	1942-1998	
Cultural group	Generation of '36 / Civil War	
Biographical milestones	<p>Writer, lawyer, jurist, essayist, columnist, and researcher of historical topics related to women, she was one of the first women to study Law in Spain. She enrolled in the 1931-1932 academic year at the University of Seville. She became one of the three active female lawyers in Madrid during the 1950s. On November 7th, 1953, she published an article titled «The Conjugal Domicile» in <i>ABC</i>, which had been held back by censorship for three months. In the article, she denounced the subjugation of married women to the will of their husbands and their inability to separate even in cases of abuse. This was because the marital home was considered the «husband's property», and in cases where separation occurred, women were often «deposited» in the homes of relatives or convents, always arranged by the husbands. This period could extend between seven and nine years due to appeals in the legal process. Following an intense campaign advocating for gender equality, which garnered international attention from media outlets such as <i>The New York Times</i>, <i>Time</i> magazine, and <i>The Daily Telegraph</i>, she successfully led the reform of 66 articles of the Civil Code on April 24th, 1958. This reform marked the first instance in which rights for women were included in the Civil Code since its enactment in 1889. She was affectionately known as the 'reformica,' a play on words based on her last name.</p>	
Work		<p><i>A instancia de parte</i> (At the Instance of the Party). Novel published in 1955, awarded the <i>Cid de Novelas</i> prize by the SER radio network. Reissues: 1991, Castalia Publishing, Library of Women Writers, by María Elena Bravo; 2018, Renacimiento Publishing, Espuela de Plata, by Miguel Soler Gallo.</p>
Plot	<p>Esperanza is unfaithful to her husband Chano Maldonado and goes to live with her lover Manuel in Seville. Following Manuel's death, she returns to Cádiz, where she lived with her husband, staying in an abandoned train carriage until Chano finds her and offers forgiveness. This act of forgiveness towards his wife leads to societal rejection, as he was expected to repudiate or even kill her. Consequently, he loses his job. Julián, the instigator of Chano's social rejection, travels to the Philippines, where he meets Aurelia. They are married and have a son, Gregorio. Upon returning to Spain, Julián meets another woman and feels racial prejudice against his wife. To restore his reputation in society, he devises a scheme to have Aurelia accused of adultery, manipulating Chano to participate in this plan. Aurelia visits the home of this accomplice to collect some documents at the request of her husband Julián. Her presence is witnessed there in a scenario that gives the impression of a clandestine romantic encounter. The court's verdict, relying on witnesses who had seen her at Chano's residence, led to a ten-year prison sentence, to be served in the Philippines as requested by her husband and approved by the justice system. In this</p>	

	manner, Julián retained custody of their son, who held a very negative opinion of his mother. This situation allowed Julián to publicly disclose his new relationship, as aside from being a crime, adultery was grounds for separation.
Setting	Despite the work being published in 1955, the events are set around 1928. This was done to prevent the censors from associating the events with the Franco regime. Therefore, any criticism would not be misunderstood as referring to that context. Had this been the case, it would have remained unpublished. Spanish political system: Dictatorship of General Franco. Nevertheless, the legal status of adultery was the same during both the Franco era and the timeframe in which the plot is set.
Real context	Article 105 of the Civil Code of 1889 established, among the grounds for marital separation, «the adultery of the woman in any case, and the adultery of the husband when it results in public scandal and contempt for the woman». It was deemed a public scandal when the man completely disregarded his wife or if he had his lover in the family home or nearby. In other cases, he could have a mistress. Until the trial took place, in cases of routine separation, the woman would be «deposited» in the home of a relative or someone close, who would act as the «custodian». This arrangement had to be coordinated by the husband. Alternatively, she might be placed in a convent or a mental institution. However, in cases involving adultery, it was common for the woman to be interned in a House of Repentance, deprived of her assets, and separated from her children. This was due to the fact that the conjugal domicile, as such, did not exist; it was considered the «husband's house» as per Article 68 of the Civil Code, which in turn reflected Article 1,880, and subsequent articles, of the Law of Civil Procedure. At the criminal level, Article 449 of the Penal Code of 1944 stipulated that adultery was punishable by a minor prison sentence. The transgressor of this offense was defined as «the married woman who lies with a man other than her husband, and the man who lies with her knowing that she is married, even if the marriage is subsequently declared null and void». Additionally, Article 450 established that «a penalty for the crime of adultery shall not be imposed unless at the request of the aggrieved husband». On the other hand, if the husband opted to kill the adulterous wife (uxoricide), Article 428 of the Penal Code sanctioned such an act, commonly known in the era as a «license to kill» (in force until 1961-63): «The husband who, upon catching his wife in adultery, kills one or both of the adulterers on the spot, or inflicts upon them any serious injuries, shall be punished with the penalty of exile. If he causes them injuries of a different nature, he shall be exempt from penalty». This article drew from Article 438 of the 1870 Penal Code.
COMMON ELEMENTS IN BOTH WORKS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The reflection of laws that heavily favoured men in marriage. – The complete vulnerability of women who could be killed or sentenced to prison without solid evidence, if accused of adultery, which was grounds for separation and a criminal offence. – The impartiality of a legislative system that permits false evidence and testimony without guarantees. – Raising awareness about legal discrimination between men and women. – The general lack of awareness among women about their status in laws and, consequently, in society. – The passivity of judicial authorities and society itself towards the fact that underage children lived away from their mothers, regardless of the case being judged. – The commitment towards eradicating unjust laws and constructing fairer and more equitable societies. 	

Source: Author's own work.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

Through the selected works, one can understand the existing gender differences in the legal treatment of adultery, a phenomenon which, since time immemorial, was monitored and penalised solely in the case of women. For instance, no article of the Code permitted women to 'kill' the unfaithful husband. Not even the aforementioned Article 438, which inspired the work of Carmen de Burgos, said: 'Either spouse who caught the other in adultery', but rather: «The husband who caught his wife in adultery» (or Article 428 of the 1944 Penal Code, which remained identical). It was solely a male privilege. On the other hand, as stipulated in the legal texts derived from a deeply ingrained oral tradition, which gradually evolved into a customary practice – a tradition that can be seen in the honour dramas of Calderón de la Barca – any woman could be accused of such a deed. Merely falling into an 'trap' orchestrated by a husband who wanted to 'rid' himself of his wife with the help of an accomplice and manipulated witnesses, would suffice to lend credibility to a false accusation. Consequently, regardless of the cases in which women had committed adultery, they could even be accused of it without having committed the act. As mentioned earlier, adultery had civil implications since it was grounds for marital separation, as well as criminal implications. It was not decriminalised in Spain until May 26th, 1978.

As a didactic proposal for the selected works, certain thinking routines provided by Harvard University's Project Zero are incorporated. Firstly, the thinking routine known as «See [Read], Think, Wonder»¹ is introduced, where the following questions are posed: «What do you see [read]?», «What do you think?», «What questions come to mind?» This routine assists students in making careful observations and thoughtful interpretations. It stimulates curiosity and sets the stage for investigation. In this context, it is advisable to encourage students to substantiate their interpretations with reasoned arguments. Secondly, the thinking routine «Same, Different, Connect, Participate»² is employed to address questions such as the following: Same – In what way(s) is this person similar to you? Different – Where are the key differences between this person and you? Connect – In what way(s) could a connection be established between this person and you? Participate – What would you like to ask, say, or do with the person in question if you had the opportunity? These questions should be related to the protagonists of both works. The same approach could be taken with the protagonists, aiming to engage in a dialogue about their experiences, attitudes, reactions, and the consequences of their actions from the past to the present. The purpose is to examine gender differences from a historical perspective, allowing for an appreciation of the efforts made by previous generations to secure the laws that guarantee gender equality today. However, this ongoing fight must continue, in addition to a heightened social awareness. The work by Carmen de Burgos lends itself to a selection of four excerpts that can be

effectively used to explore these issues within the classroom. Based on the only edition published to date in 1921, the first excerpt is drawn from chapter one, pages 7-8 [Alfredo argues with María de las Angustias, asserting his dominance within the marriage and exerting violence over her]; the second corresponds to chapter two, page 26 [María de las Angustias becomes romantically involved with Jaime behind her husband's back]; the third is taken from chapter eight, page 52 [Alfredo catches María de las Angustias with Jaime]; and the fourth takes place in chapter nine, page 55 [Resolution of the murder of María de las Angustias as an adulteress, the imprisonment of Jaime, her lover, and the exoneration of her husband, Alfredo, who 'cleanses' his honour through uxoricide]. Regarding Mercedes Formica's work, three representative excerpts can be selected. According to the 2018 edition being used, the first excerpt is taken from chapter fourteen, pages 271-272 [Aurelia arrives at Chano's house at her husband Julián's behest to collect some documents. She is unaware that she is walking into a trap and will be accused of adultery]; the second corresponds to chapter nineteen, pages 289-290 [Aurelia finds herself 'deposited' in a House of Repentance, where other women in the same situation await trial for adultery]; and the third is to be found in chapter twenty-one, pages 302-303 [Aurelia, wrongfully accused of adultery, attends the trial in which everything is set up to convict her and send her to prison]. Naturally, if the entire books are read, more ideas and commentary on the subject will emerge, but these selected excerpts suffice to serve the intended purpose.

In this regard, the work can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Using a piece of cardboard or poster divided into two parts, students can be encouraged to write down ideas from each fragment they have read. As described in the thinking routines of Harvard University's Project Zero, this exercise serves to foster empathetic perspective-taking and «bridge building». This cultivates students' ability to look beyond their own perspective. They learn to consider the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of others, even from a past temporal context. This process is integral to understanding a collective history that should not be forgotten as it aids in comprehending the present moment and the advances that have taken place. This is particularly relevant as societal attitudes regarding adultery are no longer the same. If the students are international, it would be interesting for them to conduct a comparative analysis of the same situation in their respective countries through a small research project and subsequently give a presentation to the group.

Continuing with this «perspective-taking» routine from Harvard University, students are encouraged to work around the concept of «the three whys»³. The main objective is for students to be able to discern the significance of a situation, topic, stereotype, or considering global, local, and personal connections. In this manner, students are asked the following questions:

- Why might this issue [the treatment of adultery in laws and society based on gender] matter to me?
- Why might it matter to the people around me [family, friends, city, nation]?
- Why might it matter to the world [the issue of adultery in the world]?

The aim is to promote intrinsic motivation, a key factor in deep learning, as motivation to learn is evoked when a subject is considered significant. This routine leads students to three domains: personal, local, and global. While encouraging them to develop intrinsic motivation to investigate a topic by uncovering its importance in diverse contexts, it also helps them to establish local-global connections. As a means of both consolidating and expanding on the themes of difference, injustice, and equality, reading Mercedes Formica's article *El problema del adulterio en las leyes civiles y canónicas* (The Problem of Adultery in Civil and Canonical Laws) would be an interesting activity. This article was published in the *Semana* magazine (issue no. 733) on March 9th, 1954, and is included in the 2018 edition of the author's novel proposed in this study, *A instancia de parte* (At the Instance of the Party). The aim is then to prepare a final project, oral presentation, or written essay that offers an overall summary of the examined theme. Once again, reading and reflecting on this text proves to be a useful tool for establishing a personal connection with a subject that may seem remote at first (in time or space). The author wrote the article after completing the novel. On this occasion, she not only highlights the existing gender difference in cases of adultery but also the differences between civil and canonical laws. There seemed to be a challenge in such an endeavor, given Spain's significant position in the Catholic tradition. Notably, attention had not been paid to what adultery meant within this religious context. The words of Jesus in the biblical passage of the adulterous woman reduced the act to a sin, which could be forgiven through repentance and penance. However, as Formica states, 'men' had transformed this transgression into a crime, justifying even the killing the 'adulterous' woman. Dishonour always came from a woman's 'slip-up'. This dishonour could then drive the 'wronged' husband to commit violent acts, turning his house into a pool of blood. This portrayal is reflected in Calderonian dramas such as *El médico de su honra* (The Doctor of His Honor) or *El pintor de su deshonra* (The Painter of His Dishonor). Thus, we are dealing with an issue that spans centuries of history and tradition, and can still be found today, not necessarily in laws, but in certain social opinions regarding whether infidelity is committed by a man or a woman.

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DESIGNING SERIOUS GAMES AS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES: REFLECTING THE VALUE OF DIFFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

Serious games such as videogames with purposes beyond entertainment have become valuable resources for achieving diverse learning goals across educational stages. However, like other teaching materials and educational resources, they need to be designed to embrace diversity and foster inclusive education for all students. This is in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Considering the above, this chapter initially introduces an approach to serious games as teaching materials and experiences of their application in educational settings from the literature. Following this, the chapter highlights studies in which diversity is addressed in serious games. Subsequently, the paper proposes a set of criteria and guidelines for designing educational resources in serious game format from a pedagogical point of view. In addition, we present examples of how these guidelines are reflected in serious games of our own authorship and from other institutions, so that in-service and pre-service teachers can design their resources and serious games, placing value on diversity.

Keywords: serious games; teaching materials; game design; diversity; Sustainable Development Goal 4.

1. SERIOUS GAMES AS A RESOURCE AND TEACHING MATERIAL.

IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING process, teachers can use a wide variety of resources and teaching materials, including interactive resources such as videogames. In this regard, as Manrique Orozco and Gallego Henao (2013) pointed out, teaching materials are understood as those resources available to teachers in their instructional practice that allow students to acquire skills and knowledge. In this regard, these resources provide a response to the student's learning process.

Teaching materials can be digital or non-digital, focusing in this case on digital materials, which, according to Area Moreira (2020) can be classified into several typologies: digital object, digital learning object, digital textbook, educational resource portal or platform, digital teaching environment, digital materials for teachers, tangible teaching materials (educational robots), intelligent adaptive learning environments, and online applications (apps), tools and platforms. In this regard, following Area Moreira's classification (2020), videogames and serious games can be classified within the category of digital learning environments.

Serious games are commonly defined through the words of Michael and Chen (2006) who indicate that those are videogames that do not have entertainment as their main purpose, but have other main purposes, such as providing an experience to the player or teaching an issue. In fact, they have been created and/or used for a variety of fields, such as health (Batista et al., 2019; Boada et al., 2020), advertising (De La Hera Conde-Pumpido, 2019; Garrido-Pintado, 2021), public awareness (Adam, 2020; Mannsverk et al., 2014) and the learning process in education (Fernández-Sánchez et al., 2020; Martín-del-Pozo et al., 2017).

Thus, this chapter is framed within the field of education, where we can find a great diversity of experiences within educational centres where serious games have been used as a resource and didactic material, making it possible to work on different contents and competencies, adapting them to each educational level. On the one hand, with regard to the primary education stage, we can highlight the study by Fraga-Varela et al. (2021) in which twelve classrooms from first to fourth grade took part. The educational software *Reflex Math* (ExploreLearning, 2011) was used, with the aim of finding out the impact of the use of serious games in the classroom, specifically on students' mathematical fluency. In this study, a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design was used, using the *Basic Math Operations Task* developed by Foegen and Deno (2001) as an instrument to assess the learning of mathematical calculation. After using this resource in the classroom, a statistically significant improvement in mathematical fluency was obtained. Likewise, in the classrooms where this methodology was used, a greater use of the programme and of solved activities was observed, thus indicating a positive impact on the students' motivation and performance.

Another example at the primary education stage can be found in the study by Fernández-Robles et al. (2019), where a serious game is used with the aim of improving quantitative literacy in third level students. This research also uses a quasi-experimental design with pretest and posttest. The results obtained from the study indicated that there was an increase in the students' skills in terms of working with natural numbers, as well as in the understanding of the relationships between them and the resolution of mathematical operations.

In turn, in secondary education we can also find several studies based on educational experiences in different subjects that make use of serious games as a resource and teaching material. In the study by Loula et al. (2014), a simulation and action game called *Calangos* is used as part of a sequence for teaching ecology to secondary school students. To evaluate the role of the resource, a pretest-posttest design is again used to assess the understanding of the concept of ecological niche, along with other aspects related to ectothermic animals. After implementing *Calangos*, very promising results were obtained in the students' conceptual learning of the ecological contents addressed, in addition to motivating a greater behavioural commitment in the interpretation and discussion of biological phenomena simulated in the game.

Another example in secondary education can be found in the study by Evaristo Chiyong et al. (2016), comprising 561 students, where the videogame *1814: La Rebelión del Cusco* (Avatar Group, Pontificia Universidad Católica of Peru, 2013) was implemented with the aim of improving performance in their learning tests in the teaching of history. The students were divided into three groups, one of which used a serious game to teach the history class, another received only the traditional theoretical class, and the third group had both resources. The results obtained in the three types of intervention showed a significant improvement between the pre-test and post-test, however, the groups that made use of the videogame showed a greater increase in their knowledge of the subject through the final score, compared to the group that only had a traditional class. However, it is interesting to note that the group that obtained a higher score in the post-test was the one that combined the use of the videogame with the classes on the topic of the rebellion in Cusco, leading to the conclusion that better results are obtained at the educational level when technological resources are incorporated or complemented with the teaching practices of the teachers in their work in the classroom.

In higher education, we found evidence of using these resources with very positive results. On the one hand, the study by Fernández-Sánchez et al. (2020) implemented the use of several serious games in the Social Education Degree with the aim of assessing their use in the development of competences associated with the profession. The results of this study showed that the use of different serious games by future social educators enables the development of key competences for those

professionals, generating social awareness. At the same time, it was also observed that they promote learning about community development, fostering personal initiative in the implementation of socio-educational intervention strategies and the acquisition of fundamental values. Thus, it was concluded that serious games can be a very useful tool in the training of Social Education professionals.

In other higher education degrees such as medicine, it can also be seen how the use of serious games can achieve very positive results in their students. For example, in the study by Chen et al. (2018) with 84 third-year students, they used the videogame *That Dragon, Cancer* (Numinous Games, 2016) with the aim of working on empathy. To assess this progress, the Jefferson Medical Empathy Scale (Díaz-Narváez et al., 2021) was used before and after completing the game. Finally, it was concluded that the students' average level of empathy improved after playing the game. In addition, students agreed that the videogame was a better option for learning empathy than the traditional methodology.

2. SERIOUS GAMES AS RESOURCES THAT RESPOND TO AND VALUE DIVERSITY.

Serious games can respond to and value diversity via the presence of a diversity of characters, narratives and game experiences, along with showing a diversity of realities. For example, *El viaje de Elisa* (Fundación Orange, Autismo Burgos & Gametopia, 2016) is a serious game aimed at students in the first cycle of secondary education, with the objective of raising awareness about the characteristics and needs of people with autism spectrum disorder/Asperger's Syndrome. In this graphic adventure videogame students have the chance to experience an interactive adventure in which, through tests and challenges, they will learn in depth about the characteristics of people with Asperger's Syndrome. In the designing, a compendium of research on serious videogames was carried out, in addition to planning all the aspects related to each part of the project: didactic units, script, music and others. For this phase, it was also considered that people with autism spectrum disorder had to participate, contributing opinions, ideas and experiences in all phases of the project. Once the design and production parts were finished, the project was tested by both students of secondary education and their corresponding teachers. For this purpose, two work sessions were held in which the virtual game sessions were combined with the dynamics and role-playing sessions in each group's classroom (Lancho Pedraza et al., 2016).

Likewise, *Iredia, el Secreto de Atram* (CEIEC, Francisco de Vitoria University, 2010) is another good example of a serious game that aims to raise awareness of hearing impairment among children between 9 and 11 years old. The game is divided into five levels related to the basic aspects of the world of sound and deaf-

ness, approaching its story through an adventure with fantastic touches. It presents situations that help to understand the barriers that deaf people face every day. The project has been developed by the CEIEC of the Francisco de Vitoria University, based on an original proposal selected in an open competition for deaf associations and the general public. The winning proposal served as the basis for its design and script (García-Tejedor & Peñalba, 2011).

Another serious game we can highlight is the game *Against all odds* (UNHCR and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, The United Nations Refugee Agency, 2005), in which the player assumes the role of a refugee who needs to flee his country. Through the different levels, the player experiences the situations the refugee has to face, such as crossing the border, finding shelter for the night or finding a job in the new country. This game can be used in classrooms to address equity, justice and inclusion, enabling the development of empathy, ethical decision-making and respect for diversity. In this sense, an experience of classroom use is shown in Hernández Martín and Martín-del-Pozo (2023), with Primary education students, particularly 10-year-olds, as well as recommendations for teachers and other related materials for the classroom.

On the other hand, *The Kite* (Anate Studio, 2012), *Little Kite* (Anate Studio, 2017) and *Repentant* (Anate Studio, 2018) is a trilogy formed by three videogames that offer different experiences with the aim of raising awareness of certain social problems. The main objective of these serious games is to represent gender violence, allowing reflection on this issue as a social problem, and trying to raise awareness about its presence in society. This trilogy, belonging to an independent studio, is the only one that deals with gender violence (Manzano-Zambruno & Paredes-Otero, 2021).

In relation to this, education in gender equality is an essential basis in society and emphasis should be placed on this issue from a very early age. In the study by Barrera Yañez et al. (2020), a review of those videogames is made, with the aim of raising awareness of aspects of gender inequality or gender violence, as well as the limitations that were found during the research. The first limitation found in these serious games is that several of the games were not available to be played or were on very specific platforms. On the other hand, it should be noted that most of them dealt with a single specific topic, and it would be more interesting if they dealt with a wider variety of content in order to have a greater impact on the players. Due to these limitations, no clear evidence was found on the impact of the games found on this topic. Thus, to address this problem found in the study, a prototype of a serious game designed to educate on equality was proposed, covering a wider range of topics (e.g. stereotypes and social control, the relationship with parents, the differences between love and control, or jealousy), with the aim of achieving a greater impact in its objective of raising awareness among adolescents.

Finally, it should be noted that some studies have tried to establish a general description of a specific domain within the field of serious games and gamification, which allows for a better identification and adaptation of the games to each vulnerable group in which they are implemented, in addition to the didactic objective of each one. In this sense, the study by Van der Lubbe et al. (2021) analyzed how vulnerable groups of people are empowered through gamified applications or serious games, for which a systematic review is carried out, dividing the study into two parts. In the first part of the research it is established that interventions often target vulnerabilities that are closely related to the characteristics of the vulnerable group, e.g. health risks of a disease or disorder, or substance abuse. In the second part of the review, technologies, game mechanics, evaluation methods and outcomes were studied. The research concludes that serious games showed great diversity, allowing them to be applied to many different profiles and behaviours. Reward, objective and story elements are the most used mechanics in the gameplay of these serious games. However, it would be interesting to incorporate labels describing the genres or types of games, as well as identifying the most important game mechanics, in order to find groups of games that are more similar in terms of how they work. The results of most studies focus on the effect of the game or on the participants' attitude towards the game, and are used as preliminary results to further improve the intervention. However, a follow-up over a certain period of time to check whether the effects of their use have been sustained is usually not included.

In conclusion, we have been able to see that serious games are being designed to respond to and value diversity, and that there are studies that are being carried out in this field, which allows us to advance in the frontiers of this field of work. However, further steps need to be taken in this respect. In view of this, the chapter follows a series of criteria and guidelines to be taken into consideration when creating this type of resource to respond to diversity and to value it. It should be borne in mind that depending on the type of videogame or serious game to be designed, as well as the diversity to be addressed, there are a greater number of specific and advanced criteria to be considered, but, for reasons of space, they cannot be dealt with in this chapter.

3. DESIGN OF SERIOUS GAMES TO RESPOND TO AND VALUE DIVERSITY.

When focusing on the design of serious games, it is worth mentioning, initially, the existence of design models both for teaching materials in general, such as ADDIE, as well as for the design and analysis of serious games, such as Activity Theory-based Model of Serious Games (ATMSG) (Carvalho et al., 2015). However, regardless of the design model used, we address below a series of criteria

and guidelines to be taken into consideration when creating this type of resource, to address diversity and assess it, following the classification of Martín-del-Pozo (2020) referring to evaluation criteria for the use of videogames in the classroom: (1) technical aspects; (2) aspects of content and gameplay; and (3) educational aspects. In addition, for each of the questions, an example of a videogame reflecting such a guideline or criterion is included.

3.1. TECHNICAL ASPECTS IN THE DESIGN OF SERIOUS GAMES TO RESPOND TO AND VALUE DIVERSITY.

First of all, from a technical point of view, among the guidelines to be considered is that information should be provided in different formats, for example, that information should appear in both text and audio. Another guideline to be considered is that subtitles can be activated or deactivated and that the font size of the texts presented (subtitles, instructions, dialogues, etc.) can be increased. As an example, we can mention the serious game *Interland* (Google, 2018), which presents the information in text and audio when explaining the context of the mini-games that make up the game. It should be noted that this game is aimed at learning about issues related to digital security and citizenship (for example, the use of good passwords in online services or caution when sharing information on the Internet, among others).

Regarding the text that appears on the screen, e.g. in conversations between characters or when the game gives instructions to the player, it is important to be able to regulate the speed at which the text appears and remains on the screen so that it can be read by users, in order to adapt to the diversity of players. An example of this is the serious game *Azul's Little journey: playing with data* (Martín-del-Pozo, 2023), which aims to learn about issues related to the appropriate handling of personal data in schools. In this regard, the text does not disappear from the screen until the player clicks on it, so that users have enough time to read the information. It should be noted that this game was developed with the eAdventure tool (eUCM Group, 2007), which allows the development of graphic adventure-type videogames without programming knowledge. Among the options that the program allows, it is possible to select whether the text remains on the screen until the user clicks, which was used in the development of this serious game. Similarly, in the serious videogame *Interland* (Google, 2018), there is a pause button in the explanations of the mini-games that, when clicked, allows the text to remain on the screen.

Moving forward with this section, we can also refer to the design of these resources considering colour-blind players. Following Molina-Lopez and Medina Medina (2021) for videogames in general, we can mention the association to a

secondary indicator of those important elements of the videogame that are based on colour. In other words, those elements that are important in the videogame but that can only be differentiated by colour, it is necessary to associate them with a secondary indicator, such as a symbol, a different shape of the piece or a letter, so that they can be distinguished by both. In addition, they also mention that different textures could be applied to those important elements or areas of the videogame that are not distinguishable until the player passes the cursor over them in a way that contributes to their differentiation by these players. Likewise, they also point out that there is the option for the player to customize the colour of the main elements of the game, such as enemy characters and/or friends, but without modifying the rest of the colours of the scene. As an example, we can mention the entertainment videogame *Among us* (Innersloth, 2018), very well known in recent years, in which players randomly assume the role of crewmate or impostor, and the crewmate players having to identify the impostors. One of the tasks in this game is that the crewmates have to match wires by colour. To make it easier to visualise, the cables are not only differentiated by colour, but also by a geometric figure or symbol (circle, triangle, star and cross). In this way, it is possible to determine how to join the cables by colour or symbol.

3.2. ASPECTS OF CONTENT AND GAMEPLAY IN THE DESIGN OF SERIOUS GAMES TO RESPOND TO AND VALUE DIVERSITY.

In this respect, the possibility of personalising the avatar of the character controlled in the videogame, so that the player feels identified, regardless of the game camera (first-person or third-person view), is fundamental. This personalisation can be carried out within a minimum and maximum range, which must be taken into account in the design process, depending on the technical, human and material possibilities available. Thus, customisation can vary from providing users with several character options to incorporating a character editor that allows them to edit a multitude of elements of the protagonist (hair, eyes, clothing, height, etc.). An example is the serious game *School of Empathy* (Instituto Tecnológico de Castilla y León, 2017). This serious game, developed in the framework of the European project «e-Confidence in behaviour changes through serious games» (H2020-ICT-2016-1, Reference 732420), was aimed at fighting bullying in the classroom. In it, the player experiences three characteristic roles of this problem: victim, bully and observer. To do so, at the start of the game, the player can select which avatar will represent the bully, which the bullied and which the observer from a variety of characters with different physical characteristics.

Likewise, in addition to customising the appearance of the character, the possibility of customising the name of the character in the game is also relevant, with the player being able to choose the name. As in the previous case, it is possible to choose between several options or to allow the integration of a name by the player. The latter can be seen in the serious game *About Us* (Martel-Santana, 2023), aimed at fighting bullying and cyberbullying in the Primary education stage and created

using the *RPG Maker MV* software (Degica, 2015). In this game, at the start, a menu opens for the players to select the letters of their name (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Example of serious game *About Us* regarding personalization of the main character's name



In addition, in relation to the above, in languages with gender desinences (e.g. Spanish or Portuguese) it is also necessary to take into consideration the wording of sentences. In view of this, the initial option may be to select the desinence or pronoun to be used throughout the texts offered by the game, or to elaborate the sentences in such a way that they are not marked in gender. For example, in the serious game *Azul's Little Journey: Playing with data* (Martín-del-Pozo, 2023), this second option has been used, as can be seen in Figure 2. In it, the school principal welcomes the player: <<Good morning, Azul. I welcome you to the school. I hope your internship goes very well>>, instead of options such as <<You are welcome>> in which the gender desinence for some languages is observed (e.g. in Spanish).

FIGURE 2. Example of serious game *Azul's Little Journey: playing with data* regarding the use of the language



Note. The images used to create this game scene are from Game Art 2D (student – main character of the game), and from Freepik (scene «school door» – user upklyak – and character «school principal» – user jcomp –)

Another guideline to consider is creating a level that serves as a tutorial for the game, so that any player, regardless of experience, can learn how to play. In this way, we allow each player to be integrated into the experience, and we address the diversity of game situations. In addition, as Becker and Parker (2014) point out, players rarely read game instructions, so it is a good idea to create a tutorial level that explains the rules and mechanics of the game, as well as the scenario in which the game takes place. An example is the game *DragonBox Algebra 5+* (WeWantToKnow, 2012). This game is aimed at learning algebra for children aged 5 and up. In the first level, first of all, an animation appears explaining how to play the game. Subsequently, the first screen of the level is easy, as well as messages on the screen accompanying the players in solving it, helping them to understand how to play the game.

Finally, another guideline would be related to what Aldrich (2004) indicates as one of the criteria to be well-thought-out for a good development of educational simulations that the scenarios should offer different options, i.e. that there is a sense of different possibilities open. Considering our focus, this also contributes to the response to the different players experiencing the game, as it allows for a personal experience, choosing the options to take, the order of completion or the paths to follow. An example of this can be found in the serious game *Interland* (Google, 2018), which allows the player to play the mini-games or worlds that compose it («Reality River», «Mindful Mountain», «Tower of Treasure» and «Kind Kingdom») in the order they consider.

3.3. EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS IN THE DESIGN OF SERIOUS GAMES TO RESPOND AND TO VALUE DIVERSITY.

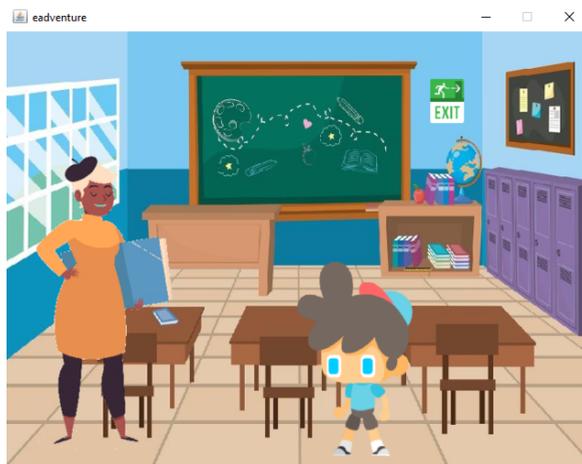
As far as educational aspects are concerned, we can first point out that serious games should be accompanied by a guide explaining what the game consists of, what the contents and objectives are, what level or age group it is aimed at, what computer requirements are needed, and even the estimated duration of the entire game, so that teachers can find out, initially, whether the game is suitable for their teaching practice. It would also be a good idea to include examples of activities, lesson plans or learning situations that can be implemented with the game to highlight and respond to diversity in the classroom. An example of this can be found in the serious game *Interland* (Google, 2018). In addition to being able to play on its website, it has a digital safety and citizenship curriculum available (Google & iKeepSafe, 2019) in which different lessons are presented, including the specifica-

tion of objectives for students, the description of different activities, as well as a glossary of useful vocabulary for the lesson, among other issues.

Secondly, as noted by Kirriemuir (2005, cited in Becker and Parker, 2014) another criterion pointed out by teachers is that the games should allow them to be started from whatever point the teacher needs, as class sessions may be of different lengths, have different outcomes or end at different times. In addition, this would even allow homework to be assigned at home or at specific times in class. Also, given the focus of this chapter, we add that this would also help to accommodate the diversity of students in terms of gaming experience, speed of problem solving, or other situations, since each student could start with a section of the game or, if working in multiple sessions, continue from the set point. The latter could also be done by including recording options in the game, although in some educational institutions' computers are configured in such a way that when they are turned off they erase everything that has been worked on, which would be solved with the option mentioned above. As an example, in this case we can mention the serious game *Against all odds* (UNHCR and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, The United Nations Refugee Agency, 2005), in which the player assumes the role of a refugee who needs to flee his country. As previously mentioned, through the different levels, the player experiences the situations that a refugee has to face. While the game can be played as a whole, the game is divided into 3 parts with 4 levels each, allowing at the beginning to make the decision to play the one you want to play. This would allow the teacher to play whichever level wanted in any class session, depending on the topic to be addressed (e.g. the issues faced by refugees when crossing the border, or settling in a new country).

Thirdly, bearing in mind that diversity found in classrooms is a reflection of the society in which they will find themselves, another key element is the one pointed out by Richard (2014) when mentions that diversity has to be represented in the game, through characters of different gender, sexual orientation, backgrounds and traits. In addition, these characters need to show a variety of skills, which are not stereotyped. Richard (2014) also points out that according to existing studies, the more diversity shown, the more this results in a reduction of players' negative stereotypes of other people, as well as increasing players' sense of ability. As an example of this issue, we can again mention the serious games *Azul's Little Journey: playing with data* (Martín-del-Pozo, 2023) and *About Us* (Martel-Santana, 2023) in which a great diversity of characters is presented, in terms of background, traits, gender and personal characteristics (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. Example of serious game *Azul's Little Journey: playing with data* regarding the diversity of characters



Note. The images used to create the scene are from Game Art 2D (student – main character of the game), and from Freepik (scene «classroom» – user stockgiu –, character «teacher» – user freepik –, and icon «exit signal» – user freepik –).

Finally, another way of valuing and responding to diversity is to allow students to participate in the creation of the videogame. As we have already mentioned, there are currently tools that allow videogames to be created without prior knowledge of programming (such as *eAdventure* or *RPG Maker*, among others). In this way, students can participate in the creation of the games, with greater or lesser levels of participation. On the one hand, students can create their own games both individually and in groups, and on the other hand, they can do so in collaboration with the teacher. In this respect, students can participate in different ways: they can create images of the characters and scenarios of the game, either through drawings or in digital format; they can participate in the creation and evolution of the game's narrative; they can participate in the writing and recording of the dialogues, etc. All this will allow, on the one hand, to reflect diversity in the classroom through the joint creation of this interactive story, as well as enabling the creation of narratives that deal with specific issues related to the value of diversity in society. In this sense, the literature provides examples of studies in which students have created videogames, using different creation programmes (Earp et al., 2016; Freina et al., 2019; González Rodero and Martín-del-Pozo, 2016).

4. CONCLUSIONS.

Throughout this chapter, we have approached serious games as resources and teaching materials that can be used in classrooms, as we have seen in different ex-

periences. Likewise, these resources can emphasize the value of diversity through the presence of a diversity of characters, narratives, and game experiences that also represent a diversity of realities. In this context, like other educational materials and resources, they need to be designed to embrace diversity and promote inclusive education for all learners. This is in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Based on this, a set of guidelines and criteria for the design of games has been presented, as well as examples of games with this principle in mind. In addition, depending on the type of videogame or serious game to be designed and the diversity to be addressed, other specific guidelines and criteria can be consulted in works such as Koster (2014), Morales Moras (2015), Rogers (2018), and Schrier (2014).

However, Mangiron (2011) has already pointed out, with regard to accessibility in videogames, that it is necessary to promote *Design for All* from the beginning of the creation of the game, i.e. from the conceptual phase. In this way, the accessibility options that will be incorporated will have been considered from the beginning and it will not be necessary to make changes after, which can be costly. This is also true for all the guidelines and criteria mentioned above, which must be planned and considered in the initial design phase of the game, in order to achieve full interaction with the other elements that make up the game.

In addition to the above, it is also essential, once the game has been designed, to carry out a series of preliminary pilot tests, with experts in matters related to the serious game (e.g. teachers, pedagogues, game designers, computer engineers, etc.), and with a group of people with similar characteristics to the target group. In the first case, these tests allow us to find out, from their experience and their field of knowledge, what improvements the resource could have for its subsequent implementation in the educational environment. In the second case, this group will allow us to access the opinion of a group similar to the future target group, making it possible to adapt it better. In fact, as Becker and Parker (2014) point out, carrying out these pilot tests in which a sample similar to the future target group plays the game will allow us to determine whether the game favours player engagement, given that if the game does not achieve this, it will be difficult to achieve the educational objectives. In this way, the videogame should not be an end in itself, rather enables students to learn, responding to and valuing diversity, and being one more option in the rich amalgam of digital teaching materials currently available to teachers.

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TRAINING AND INCLUSION AT AGE 0-6 YEARS: THE SITUATION IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Recent regulations in Italy have introduced new nationwide rules that provide for an integrated educational and training pathway between kindergarten (0-3 years) and preschool (3-6 years). The new regulations call for kindergarten educators and preschool teachers to discuss and collaborate to ensure continuity in pursuing educational goals. The contribution will present the results of qualitative research involving 23 service managers (11 school heads and 12 educational coordinators) on the opportunities and problems related to the implementation of the new regulations. Special attention in the survey was paid to the issue of the inclusion of children with disabilities and the training of operators in the new integrated education system. The research reveals a great interest on the part of the service managers for synergic work that allows for valid and effective pedagogical paths for children in the 0-6 age group, and at the same time a series of concerns regarding staff training, the sharing of training objectives and the involvement of families.

Keywords: inclusion, kindergarten (0-3 years), preschool (3-6 years), educational continuity, research.

1. EDUCATIONAL AND INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

THE 0-6 YEARS SERVICES are the first educational context that, together with family members, take care of young children; they are important socio-educational services capable of supporting emotional, cognitive and social development in early childhood. The age group they look after appears remarkably delicate and complex because in these years every child begins to acquire their first autonomies and social skills.

Studies in psychology remind us that the earliest years of life are crucial for future well-being; from Bowlby onwards, researchers have made it clear that it is in early childhood that the ‘secure foundations’ are created to become autonomous citizens and capable of orienting themselves well in the world in later stages. While previous scholars believed that in building this secure foundation the relationship with caregivers (particularly the mother) played an important role, more recent studies also recognise the educational value of other caregivers, e.g. educators in 0-6-year-old services (Bondioli and Savio, 2018). The studies do not detract from the importance of the parent-child relationship but broaden the horizon of responsibility beyond family members to include those who have constant and significant relationships with the children.

The European Commission has repeatedly pointed out that early childhood services must be able to meet the special needs of preschool children by providing them with highly specialised educational support.

UNICEF points out that: «early experiences, combined with the potential derived from genetic inheritance, are the foundation of the human brain and constitute both the foundation and the scaffolding of future development» UNICEF (2018: 6).

Generally speaking, the organisational models for early childhood services in the European Union are of two types:

- *Unitary*: that is, an integrated model that goes from birth to six years;
- *Structured according to age*: where the system is divided into 0-3 and 3-6 years.

A further difference can be found in the age of entry to services, which varies considerably. In most European countries children have access to 0-3 services at 3 months, in some Nordic states the first entry is later as parents are incentivised to care for children up to 12 months, parental leave and various parenting support measures are promoted in the home environment.

The educational models proposed in early childhood services can thus be:

- *Centre-based*: a model that orients its design and organisation to the needs of the child and is defined on the basis of collaboration between professionals and families;
- *Home-based services*: children are cared for in a home environment by other parents or qualified staff;
- *Family support*: these are measures designed to facilitate the parental role and support the family in raising children.

Services 0-3 must allow the child to acquire specific skills from a cognitive, social and autonomy point of view. This means that regardless of the type of service, the essential aspect concerns the development of the child and the preparation of

an educational and relational environment capable of supporting and promoting learning and respecting the educational needs of each and every one. Didactics, therefore, assumes a very important role as it must guarantee significant educational experiences that deviate in part from the training requests more oriented towards disciplinary knowledge that characterizes the subsequent levels of education. Educational services for 0-3 years in Italy have seen a strong increase in the last 20 years because of the increased demand from parents who work and cannot count on the support of grandparents or other figures, but also because it is understood that a context edited by professionals is more stimulating than the figure of a babysitter or a grandfather. This does not mean that grandparents cannot provide care but it is in the relationship with peers that one grows better because one also learns by imitation. These socio-cultural phenomena, together with the greater awareness of the importance of quality education in the early years of life, have forced a redefinition of the Italian education system. In general, Italian services for 0-3 years have had two types of organization up to now:

- *Services by age*: kindergarten for children aged 0-3 and spring sections for children aged 5 to 6;
- *Supplementary services*: which include play areas, centres for children and families and home-based services (kindergarten – welcoming family/mother).

The new regulations, as will be seen, have imposed a different organization which provides for a unitary path for the 0-6 age range, which offers children education and training in continuity without a break between the two segments 0-3 and 3-6 years, as happened in the past.

Since 0-3-year-old services are often managed by private individuals or by the Municipalities, a great lack of homogeneity has arisen at a national level, both in terms of the number of services present in the area and in terms of the quality offered. According to the report of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) of 2019, the offer of public 0-3 years services is able to cover only 24% of the potential catchment area, much less than the 33% parameter set by the European Union for the reconciliation between work and family life. Services for early childhood continue to show large differences between the northern and southern regions, both in terms of expenditure by the municipalities and in relation to the number of users in the facilities. In this composite and uneven picture, it is imperative to comprehend how the inclusion of children with disabilities will be facilitated within the integrated education system for ages 0-6. The issue of the inclusion of people with disabilities in school programs has been the subject of numerous studies and in recent years many regulatory indications have governed the educational programs reserved for students with Special Educational Needs. In preschool (3-6 years) since the seventies of the last century, numerous studies have highlighted

the advantages of an educational and learning environment that is attentive to the needs of all students, with particular attention to those who encounter greater difficulties. We are talking about contexts where the furnishings, methodologies and teaching materials are designed to adapt to the needs of the little ones (Dettori & Carboni, 2021). There is therefore a very rich literature that analyses the most effective teaching methods to give quality answers to children aged between 3-6 years. Furthermore, the National Guidelines for the Ministry's Curriculum offer precise suggestions to the preschool teaching staff and provide support figures to guarantee personalized educational paths for students with specific disorders. The support teacher is provided whenever a child with a certified disorder is present in the class. Working in synergy with the other teachers, he or she has the task of promoting a positive climate in the school and a context where all the children can express their needs (Bocci, 2021). Even the teaching methodologies already in very early childhood must be adequate to offer valid help to children with specific disabilities to promote individualized learning, activities through sharing with classmates, the use of structured materials, and guided play (D'Alonzo, Bocci and Pinnelli, 2015). If for years research has been done to define quality pedagogical methods for preschool (which is usually included in a state comprehensive school that welcomes children aged 3 to 14), few studies have dealt with the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood services (0-3 years). Even the regulations, unlike those envisaged for preschool, have not clarified which educational and inclusive processes should be guaranteed for kindergartens, for example:

- maximum number of pupils in classes hosting children with disabilities,
- any specializations for the educator who follows the child more closely,
- relationships between school, family, health services,
- meetings and working groups between preschool and kindergarten colleagues.

Many public and private services, in the absence of such regulations, have not allowed children with significant disabilities to attend kindergartens, precisely because of the difficulty in managing particularly complex and onerous situations that required a one-to-one educational relationship. There is, therefore, a large pedagogical and cultural gap in the educational processes concerning the 0–3-year-olds and the 3–6-year-olds. The need therefore arises to review the educational processes in the range from 0 to 6 years both in educational practice and in a more strictly organizational and managerial context. At this stage, it is useful to recall the social model proposed by Honneth (2002), as it can guide and clarify the meaning of inclusion in all phases of life. The author identifies three forms of identity recognition that are interdependent in the development of each individual's individuality and to which three dimensions of the subject's self-realization correspond:

- *Recognition in the affective, relational and friendship sphere*: considers the recognition of the individual in the relationships of affection and care that he or she lives with a small group of people who allow him or her to have self-confidence;
- *Recognition in the juridical-political sphere*: defines an abstract conception that goes beyond everyone's biographical experience and includes all the relationships for which the individual is the bearer of rights and in which one's actions are accepted and respected by all, allowing for the acquisition of respect of himself;
- *Recognition in the social sphere*: consists of recognizing the actions of others as important. The individual is considered on the basis of their social value, i.e. their contribution to society itself. This allows them to have self-esteem.

This model can be found in Disability Studies, insofar as it proposes the recognition of disability as a process capable of overcoming stereotypes and prejudices in favour of an awareness of the other as a bearer of limitations but also of potential (Cottini, 2017). Disability present from birth or manifested during the first years of life is a particularly complex issue; it is a question of delving into the characteristics that this condition may entail on various levels. Now consolidated, the biopsychosocial view of disability proposed by the World Health Organisation's ICF in 2001, it appears useful to refer to a model that goes beyond the school and the family, which allows for an understanding of the various systems that come into relation in the development of the person (Dettori, 2015).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecosystem model goes beyond the individual situations in which the person is involved and considers various environmental contexts and the internal and external relationships they have.

There are four environmental systems proposed by the author:

- *Microsystem*: the set of relationships between the individual and the environment and the immediate environment in which the person is embedded;
- *Mesosystem*: the set of relationships between interacting microsystems;
- *Exosystem*: considers the system that incorporates microsystems and mesosystems;
- *Macrosystem*: concerns the institutional structures of culture and subculture.

The juxtaposition of this model with early childhood education is useful to explain the child's condition and the relationships that are entertained in the different systems in which it interfaces, to remind us that education goes beyond the family and school system and encompasses the entire social context in which it is embedded. The proposed web of relationships makes it possible to think of the child as an active part of the relational network and not exclusively as a bearer of needs. Very important for the 0-6 years age group are the closest environmental contexts in which the child is inserted, the microsystem and the mesosystem, i.e.

mainly the family and the early childhood education services. These contexts and their interrelation represent the central pivot on which the child's development will be defined.

Many studies have tried to understand specifically what direct and indirect benefits can be had through effective early educational intervention for all children and in particular for those with disorders. One of the most studied aspects concerns the development of social and relational skills, believing that interaction with the peer group plays such a decisive role during childhood that it subsequently influences a person's academic success and social and emotional development (Watkins et. al., 2005).

A study spanning more than 30 years by Buysse and Bailey (1993) showed how inclusive preschool education brought social and behavioural benefits and enabled individuals who had been properly cared for to have a greater chance of success in school in later years. Other research has also shown that there is greater development of social skills and interactions with the peer group by children with disabilities when placed in inclusive preschool services at an early age (Pickett et al., 1993). The importance of an inclusive context in early childhood for future well-being has been demonstrated in relation to specific disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders (Theodorou and Nind, 2010), developmental difficulties (Stanton-Chapman and Brown, 2014) and Down syndrome (Guralnick et. al., 2014).

The consolidation of social skills in children with disabilities attending inclusive services seems to be attributable to the important demands made on them in a spontaneous and playful manner by children with typical development. However, it should be pointed out that studies suggest that inclusion should be pursued through specific and structured interventions. Indeed, children with typical development would be inclined, during certain activities, to prefer interaction with children with the same level of development as themselves, to the exclusion of those with behavioural and relational difficulties. Difficulties in peer interaction for children with disabilities are most evident in less structured activities that require spontaneous interaction such as unstructured group play (Guralnick et al., 2006). An appropriately structured environment and the specific competence of educators can foster, within an inclusive context, the creation of positive relationships and quality interactions during play (Odom et. al., 2011). All this highlights the need to pursue a very careful approach in early childhood services that does not simply result in the inclusion of the child with disabilities in the peer group but is constantly supported by educational strategies that can guarantee real inclusion.

2. THE NEW ITALIAN LEGISLATION

Until recently, early childhood services in Italy followed separate paths: 0-3 years and 3-6 years, but with Legislative Decree No. 65 of 13 April 2017, on the subject of the Establishment of the integrated system of education and education from birth to six years, pursuant to Article 1, paragraphs 180 and 181, letter e), of Law No. 107 of 13 July 2015, there has been a shift to a unitary model that goes from 0-6 years. This legislation has made it possible to clarify and define the qualification required (specific degree) in order to work as an educator in the 0-3 services, overcoming the heterogeneity concerning the qualifications hitherto allowed and above all recognising the importance of a university education in order to be able to educate in very early childhood. For many years, the 3–6-year age group has been able to refer to national pedagogical guidelines on qualifications and public funding that almost entirely cover the cost of the service. The 0–3-year-old services, on the other hand, are currently in a phase of organisational and structural redefinition, so although they will be under the control of the Ministry, management will always remain in the hands of local municipal authorities or private individuals.

Law No. 107 of 13 July 2015, entitled «Reform of the national education and training system and delegation for the reorganisation of existing legislative provisions», and, in particular, Article 1, paragraphs 180 and 181, clarifies the importance of establishing an integrated system of education and instruction of children from birth to six years of age, in order to guarantee children equal opportunities for education, instruction, care, overcoming territorial, economic, ethnic and cultural inequalities and barriers. The law specifies the opportunity to promote the quality of the educational offer and continuity between the various educational and school services and the active participation of families in the educational processes affecting children.

Specifically, Paragraph 3 states that this integrated system must: «Promote the continuity of the educational and scholastic pathway, with particular reference to the first cycle of education, supporting the development of girls and boys in a unitary process, in which the different articulations of the Integrated Education and Training System collaborate through common planning, coordination and training activities».

The recent legislation therefore calls for a reorganisation of the Italian system that creates continuity between the 0–3-year-old services mainly managed by the private sector or municipalities and the preschool (3-6 years old) almost always managed by the state.

Although this new unitary vision of an educational pathway that includes accompaniment from 0 to 6 years is important, there remain some unclear questions to which research will have to provide answers in the coming years:

- What organisation will the 0-3 years services adopt in terms of number of pupils and educational staff?
- Will there be uniformity in municipal and private services?
- Will the preschool be able to enhance the skills of children arriving from the 0-3 years services in a perspective of educational continuity?
- Can there be true educational continuity in services that are governed by different rules and regulations (municipal or private in the 0-3 services; mostly State in the 3-6 services)?
- Is staff training, albeit with due specificity by age group, adequate for common planning of educational activities?
- How should inclusive services be organised for children with disabilities in the 0-3 age group?
- Do the school managers of the 3-6 years services and the educational coordinators of the 0-3 years structures have the skills and the will to share educational and didactic paths with a view to true educational continuity?
- Can joint in-service training and refresher courses be provided for preschool teachers and educators?

3. RESEARCH

The research that is the subject of the following work aimed to clarify what are the essential requirements that make an early childhood service concretely inclusive. The regulatory gaps and the above-mentioned questions, which are still little studied, actually result in a great deal of territorial heterogeneity in the organisation of educational activities. Numerous experiments are beginning and many services of the two different age groups are seeking confrontation to identify ways for effective collaboration. Also, with regard to inclusion, there is a great difference between preschool, which is governed by State laws and provides for specialised teaching staff, and the 0-3 years services for which there are no specific indications.

The inclusion of children under the age of three in education is a right recognized in theory, but in practice, it is not uniformly guaranteed throughout the country. The decision to deal with this issue arose from the need to shed light on inclusive practices in Italy, which precisely in this historical period has begun a redefinition of early childhood education services, moving (as mentioned above) to an integrated system from 0 to 6 years of age. The research wanted, therefore, to address the issue of the educational continuity of the services, with a particular focus on the inclusion of children with disabilities, starting from the considerations/

reflections of the heads of the services: educational coordinators for kindergartens, and school managers for preschools. In fact, two focus groups were carried out: one addressed to 11 preschool headmasters and another to 12 educational service coordinators (5 municipal and 7 private).

The *research questions* were as follows:

- Do the service managers understand the legislation that provides for the planning of educational paths for the 0-6 age range and do they share the contents?
- Have they already made contacts (even informally) with the services present in the area that do not fall under their jurisdiction?
- Have they held meetings with the educational staff of their schools/kindergartens to make them aware of the importance of joint work in services for 0-6 years?
- There have been meetings between the political decision-makers who manage kindergartens (municipal and private) and preschools (state administration).
- How do they consider this process of change envisaged by the legislation (identify any strengths and weaknesses)?
- Do they have a unified and pedagogically convergent vision regarding the inclusive processes of children with disabilities?

The *methodology* used is the qualitative one which allows a greater knowledge of the phenomenon studied through an in-depth comparison with professionals who are considered by the researcher to be particularly expert on the subject matter of the research (Alivernini et al., 2008). In this research, the focus group was used (Frisina, 2010). It is a group conversation focused on a topic in which the participants (8 to 12 members) are experts for approximately one and a half to two hours. The discussion is lightly structured, as the researcher follows a trail of points to be explored by recalling research questions and encouraging the free flow of ideas among the participants (Acocella, 2008).

The *sample* is made up of 23 service managers aged 0-3 and 3-6 who, contacted by the researcher, agreed to participate in the research. Of them, 11 are managers of comprehensive schools that had a preschool (7 females and 4 males aged between 45 and 62 years) and 13 Educational Coordinators (13 females aged between 31 and 57, of which 4 belonged to Municipal services and 9 to private services). The two focus groups (focus group n.1 was aimed at preschool principals, and focus group n.2 at kindergarten coordinators), were recorded and subsequently, the researcher proceeded to analyse the content using the Atlas software which allowed us to proceed in a more rigorous way in analysing the discussion that emerged

from the two meetings (De Gregorio and Lattanzi, 2015). From the analysis of the content, 5 fundamental thematic nuclei emerged which will be described below:

- Importance of joint work;
- Difficulty in sharing and comparing the two segments;
- Importance of adequate training;
- Attention to the inclusion of children with disabilities;
- Involvement of families.

To facilitate the presentation of the research results, the five thematic cores that emerged from the content analysis will be analysed individually and some excerpts from the discussions deemed particularly significant will be proposed, followed by an identification string which gives the reader some information on the participants, while guaranteeing their anonymity. The string will indicate: the age of the participants, the years of service, and the focus group in which they took part, n.1 (preschool managers) or n.2 (kindergarten coordinators); example: [45-8-1]: indicates that this is a manager who is 45 years of age, has 8 years of management experience and participated in focus group n.1.

1. IMPORTANCE OF JOINT WORK

«The most important thing is that preschool teachers and kindergarten educators work together, design together and establish common criteria for evaluating the skills that children reach, each must maintain their own specificity in the educational field because they are aimed at different age groups, but it is necessary to agree on the educational objectives to aim for» [53-21-2].

«Working together means speaking the same language, understanding what is meant by training goals and teaching methodologies. During the first meeting, I noticed that the teachers and educators used different terminology, and often they didn't understand each other on the meaning of planning, evaluating, and educational objectives. Even on the issue of inclusion, there are various interpretations that require greater clarity in pedagogical terms» [49-11-1].

2. DIFFICULTY IN SHARING AND COMPARING THE TWO SEGMENTS

«It's important to remember that until recently, the two educational sectors operated independently, each pursuing its own path. While this may have been effective, the lack of a pedagogical link posed challenges. Today, it is essential to establish this link by anticipating discussions between directors and educational staff to delineate the educational objectives. Everyone is expected to contribute towards these objectives in order to achieve meaningful outcomes.» [49-11-1].

«We tried to hold some meetings to get preschool teachers and educators to talk to each other and share working methods and criteria for defining personalized plans for pupils with disabilities: a lot of confusion; there is still a lot of work to do, even if there is a lot of goodwill» [53-21-2].

«A difficult aspect is the different backgrounds, some have a specific degree, others a simple diploma obtained many years ago. Furthermore, some educators take regular refresher courses, others never. It's not easy to speak the same language if you start from very heterogeneous foundations. Let me explain better: heterogeneity is an added value but sometimes there is too much distance just to share basic principles» [51-15-1].

3. IMPORTANCE OF ADEQUATE TRAINING

«It takes time to overcome the gap but it is necessary to start immediately with joint training. Pedagogists, psychologists, and experts must help our educational staff to find together shared strategies to make this change useful for the education of children aged 0-6» [51-15-1]. «Often our educators lack up-to-date training even on the most innovative methodology, this reform will be an opportunity to question themselves and find more suitable ways to better respond to the youngest students» [43-8-2].

«The significance of training cannot be overstated. To illustrate, consider the contrasting backgrounds of preschool teachers and educators. Preschool teachers, who are typically older, possess diplomas earned years ago. On the other hand, educators are generally younger and have received contemporary pedagogical training at university. However, their experiences vary greatly: preschool teachers have amassed a wealth of experience over time, while kindergarten educators, being relatively new to the field, have less experience. This disparity underscores the importance of continuous learning and training in the pedagogical field» [54-16-1].

4. ATTENTION TO THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

«Inclusion is a very important aspect, preschools have clear rules that require the presence of a specialized support teacher, this is not the case in kindergartens: everything is very discretionary. Especially for privately managed kindergartens clear rules are needed, for example in the presence of a child with disabilities it must be mandatory to have a support educator» [61-23-1].

«It is very important for synergy in inclusion to work closely together to share a model of Individualized Educational Plan that is similar for the two segments 0-3 and 3-6 years. Furthermore, there is a need for greater supervision by child neu-

ropsychiatry experts who help educators and teachers to draw up valid educational projects that have continuity over the 6 years» [40-7-2].

«Inclusion is very complex and requires personnel capable of putting themselves on the line, of updating themselves, of not giving up on the numerous difficulties. I think it is necessary to organize courses for staff of both age groups with pedagogues, psychologists, and doctors who also get to the heart of the various disorders (autism, intellectual disability, sensory disability, etc.) to get to know them better and have more intervention strategies» [51-15-1].

«One aspect that must be clear is that inclusion is improved if the health personnel who look after the children have more constant relationships with the educators, it is often not easy to talk to the neuropsychiatrist who looks after the child and little is known about his or her disorder. There are also little-known disabilities that require to be better understood by those who educate but having adequate guidelines by those who follow them in the medical field» [61-23-1].

5. INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILIES

«Families are always valued in the two segments; parents sometimes know what the school is very committed to and what goals it tries to achieve for their children. Even if we talk every day sometimes, however, there is not enough time to plan unitary interventions that give real continuity between school and family, especially in the support of very young children with disabilities» [43-8-2].

«School and family must communicate more, there must be a great educational synergy, we do everything but sometimes there is resistance from very apprehensive parents who may not accept their children's disabilities. Sometimes it seems they don't trust the quality of the service enough, it often happens that attendance is irregular, this discontinuity prevents you from doing continuous work with the disabled child» [53-21-2].

«How important it is to work in synergy with the family! Sometimes we have parents who are very present, collaborative, and interested in everything we do, other times there is a sort of diffidence, that is, they avoid them, they are afraid that we will talk about difficulties and failures, we understand that they are processing trauma and we must also support them if it is not easy» [43-8-2].

4. DISCUSSION

The research demonstrates that although preschool and kindergarten managers recognize the importance of an integrated system that leads to a unified educational vision for the 0-6 age group, there are still many uncertainties about the

feasibility of an effective system that combines consolidated habits and innovative methods. As the studies confirm, education in early childhood services is not easy, a great psycho-pedagogical preparation is required by the educational staff (Bonifacci and Tobia, 2017). A theme particularly discussed in the focus groups is the need to create more opportunities for discussion between kindergarten educators and preschool teachers. Those in charge recognize that it is not easy because the former, belonging to municipal and private services, have sometimes used different educational methods and did not envisage a uniform planning of educational activities. In kindergartens, great freedom is recognized in organizational terms (planning, evaluation, documentation) which makes it difficult to truly compare and share new models of joint work. This does not mean that educators who deal with children aged 0-3 must adopt the same methods as preschool teachers (or vice versa), but the need arises to have shared pedagogical key points on which to base the educational activity. Here, article 1, paragraph 3 of Legislative Decree no. 65 of 2017 clearly clarifies the purpose of the integrated system, which seems to be clear to those in charge but who do not yet have clear ideas on how to implement it:

- a. promotes the continuity of the educational and scholastic path, with particular reference to the first cycle of education, supporting the development of girls and boys in a unitary process, in which the different articulations of the integrated education and training system collaborate through activities of joint design, coordination and training;
- b. contributes to reducing cultural, social and relational disadvantages and promotes the inclusion of all girls and boys through personalized interventions and adequate organization of spaces and activities;
- c. welcomes girls and boys with certified disabilities pursuant to the law of 5 February 1992, n. 104, in compliance with current legislation on school inclusion;
- d. respects and welcomes diversity pursuant to article 3 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic;
- e. supports the primary educational function of families, also through representative bodies, encouraging their involvement within the educational and scholastic community;
- f. favours the reconciliation between the times and types of work of parents and the care of girls and boys, with particular attention to single-parent families;
- g. promotes the quality of the educational offer by making use of university-qualified educational and teaching staff and through continuous in-service training, the collegial dimension of work and territorial pedagogical coordination.

These indications call for a real reorganization of the services, it is expected that the managers of the services review many of their practices to «tune» them with those of the other training segment. From the focus groups, it emerges that this activity will not be simple and will require time and goodwill from both educators and preschool teachers. It will be particularly difficult to create a work team that brings together and actively participates in both municipal educators and those managed by private individuals.

In this rearrangement, it is also necessary to share practical but, at the same time, very important issues:

- How numerous can the classes be, is it necessary to have common indications, especially for municipal and private kindergartens?
- In the presence of a disabled student, is it mandatory to have a specialized educator in kindergarten as well as for preschool?
- On which areas should the training concentrate?
- At what times is it possible to plan comparison meetings that take into account the different time schedules of educators and preschool teachers?

These are the main issues that the managers of the services highlighted during the focus groups and which remain open, it will be necessary to provide for constant monitoring and continuous supervision by the managers. Another interesting aspect that emerged from the focus groups is the great sense of responsibility on the part of the managers, they know that they have the task of guiding and supporting this moment of transition which is not easy but at the same time delicate, necessary and important. The managers admit that it will be a difficult job and since we are dealing with different administrations it is not easy to find ways to meet and discuss, plan and experiment. They offer all their goodwill but do not deny their concern for the difficulty of the task and for this reason they ask for supervision, for example from the academic world, which is able to «homogenize» paths which so far in many cases have followed different paths without ever meeting. Particular attention was paid to the inclusion of children with disabilities who, as already mentioned, have clear rules in preschool: the presence of a support teacher specialized in inclusion and reduced numbers of pupils in the classes where a pupil with a disability is enrolled. The situation in kindergartens is very different, where in many cases (especially in the private sector) there is no experience of inclusion because service was not offered to children with disabilities due to excessive costs and lack of specialized personnel. The legislation now calls for a commitment from all services to include children with special educational needs and recognizes the need for adequate staff training.

Another aspect discussed at length in the two focus groups is the relationship and collaboration with families who, especially in the first years of their children's lives, when they attend kindergarten, have difficulty accepting the limits of their

children and sometimes are unable to talk about them serenely with the educators. The managers express an understanding of such a delicate situation and, at the same time, the need to better train the educational staff on the support to be given to families. Furthermore, the need for a greater presence of health personnel in services is highlighted in order to better understand the atypical development of the child and allow caregivers to help him make important progress in the field of learning and socialization. In summary, the research shows goodwill on the part of managers but also apprehension because the path to «integrate» the old educational practices in use with the new requirements of law 65/2017 requires a lot of effort by managers, educators and teachers to implement a system that for now is still little tested in practice.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

In conclusion, it is evident that managers are aware of these aspects:

- the great opportunity that law 65/2017 offers to review the services and give them greater quality through a review of educational methodologies and constant monitoring of the pedagogical actions that are implemented;
- educational staff must be adequately trained and, in some cases, it is necessary to provide common paths for kindergarten and preschool educators;
- families and healthcare personnel must be more valued in order to better understand the educational needs of children with disabilities;
- the rules for inclusion: staff training, number of children in classes, planning and documentation must be better defined in both kindergartens and preschools to ensure fairness of inclusive processes.

How to respond to these challenges in a concrete way and not only through the formulation of theoretical ideas which then perhaps have no place in daily teaching? Surely, the keywords to respond to these needs are: research, experimentation, and sharing. It is therefore a question of promoting training processes aimed not at educators but with educators. Participatory research, action research, and training research can allow researchers and operators to find answers together to the questions highlighted by the research. Experimenting with good practices can be a valid start for identifying critical issues, good practices to be exploited, and new teaching forms to be shared. The educators of the two segments (0-3 and 3-6 years) are not asked to standardize teaching and methodologies, on the contrary, everyone must take care of the age group of competence by identifying the most suitable methods. In fact, an integrated education system does not mean standardizing but differentiating in order to do better in response to the specific needs of the children's ages. However, a greater connection, a sharing of pedagogical principles, and

better clarity in the language are desirable and can be achieved through training and experimentation.

Law 65/2017 provides for the establishment of *Poli per l'infanzia* (The Child-care Centres); article 3 reads:

«The «*Poli per l'infanzia*» welcome, in a single complex or in neighbouring buildings, several education and training facilities for girls and boys up to six years of age, within the framework of the same educational path, in consideration of the age and respecting the times and learning styles of each one. The poles for childhood are characterized as permanent research laboratories, innovation, participation and openness to the territory, also in order to promote maximum flexibility and diversification for the best use of resources, sharing general services, collective spaces and professional resources». Creating these Childcare Centres would give the opportunity to share not methodologies which, as we have already said, are specific by age, but pedagogical intentions and educational goals to be pursued over a long period which includes the first 6 years of the child's life. Managers could, in this sense, put into practice the willingness to work together (as they stated in this research) and stimulate their staff to actively participate in this experimentation.

The purpose is very well clarified in paragraph 2 of Law 65/2017: «To enhance the receptivity of the services and support the continuity of the educational and scholastic path of girls and boys aged between three months and six years of age, the Regions, in agreement with the Regional School Offices, taking into account the proposals formulated by the Local Authorities and without prejudice to their competences and their autonomy, they plan the constitution of *Poli per l'infanzia* defining the management modalities, without giving rise to bodies endowed with scholastic autonomy. Childcare Centres can also be set up in educational directorates or institutes comprising the national education and training system». Agreements have already been activated between the administration of the Municipality of Alghero and the researchers of the University of Sassari to study and experiment with an integrated system for 0-6 years. In this already active agreement, the possibility of setting up Polis for children will also be evaluated, starting from October 2023. In this experimentation, particular attention will be paid to the needs and requirements of all children, with a careful eye for those with ailments and/or disabilities.

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THEATRE AS AN EDUCATIONAL AND HUMANISTIC RESOURCE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Society is undergoing continuous changes, demanding a transformation in university teaching. In this context, we present a cooperative project that we have been developing in the course «Fundamentals of Geography and History in Primary Education» as a response to this call for transformative education. This methodological proposal is based on the use of theatre as a key element for the comprehensive education of individuals, primarily for future Primary Education teachers at the University of Salamanca. It's an approach that sets aside traditional lectures in favour of a more practical and meaningful learning experience. We will outline the sequencing used in the implementation of this pedagogical project, as well as some of the benefits obtained from using theatre for teaching Social Sciences. We present this work as an effort towards educational innovation with a gender perspective, in line with the principles of the European Higher Education Area. We position theatre as a useful tool for cross-cutting, cooperative, and competency-based learning.

Keywords: Social Sciences, theatre, didactics, humanism, educational innovation.

1. THEATRE IN THE COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

With the advent of the European Higher Education Area, significant educational transformations have taken place to adapt teaching practices. There has been a recognition of the need for these modifications to prepare future citizens of the 21st century to address the specific characteristics of this period. In other words, there is a proposal to explore new learning methodologies that promote a transformation in teaching, especially at the university level.

In this context of transformation, it is important to highlight the attention given to the mechanisms of teaching and learning. Thus, we turn our focus towards theatrical representations as a beneficial resource for modernizing education. This is because it aligns with a useful tool for the comprehensive education of individuals in the field of Social Sciences, going beyond mere content acquisition.

To provide further context, we can refer to the Great Dionysia of 5th century BCE Athens as the origin of theatre. Greek thought is notable for its anthropocentric perspective. Despite the Great Dionysia, most scholars agree that it wasn't until the 16th century that theatre fully developed as a useful instrument in education.

We refer to the context of pedagogical humanism where the comprehensive development of the individual is at the core of the educational process (Montera, 2014). Great thinkers, inspired by Greco-Latin antiquity, crafted a pedagogy that would be beneficial for shaping individuals in alignment with the broader societal, economic, and cultural transformations of their time. Moreover, one could argue that this historical context, and its decline, bears significant resemblance to the present day.

In this context, the Society of Jesus presented a pedagogical proposal that remained steadfast until the 19th century. Theatre held a prominent role within it (Segura, 1985), a prominence not seen in other educational currents at the time. Even in the 19th century, after the educational reforms of the Society, theatrical representations of the content explained in the collegial classroom were maintained (Gómez, 2006).

It is well known that figures like Miguel de Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca, Lope de Vega, Francisco de Quevedo, Tirso de Molina, and even Molière himself, were educated in Jesuit schools where university theatre thrived (Lobo, 2020). In this way, the humanistic and Renaissance ideals were instilled within the educational context, despite criticisms that arose due to its «worldly» characteristics.

For the Jesuits, the mental visualisation of a place was fundamental in their pedagogy. It was essential to imagine, to use an unreal composition to provide a precise understanding of reality. The fantastic or non-real served as a resource for comprehending what had occurred. Whether it was an event from the past, such as a martyrdom, or a future event, known as the «postrimerías», one had to envision it.

This reliance on fantasy and imagination for the comprehension of abstract concepts is found in current pedagogical proposals (Egan, 2008). In our case, it has allowed us to facilitate students' approach to any historical event. In this manner, the acquisition of complex historical processes is enhanced, yielding optimal results.

Similarly, as support for this proposal, it should be noted that since the academic year 2019-2020, we have observed a noticeable and striking timidity among

our students. Interestingly, among future teachers, there is a certain fear of public speaking. Individuals who will be tasked with leading a classroom, who must interact not only with their students but also with their families, exhibit insecurity when expressing themselves.

It is not novel to discuss issues of concentration among students either. This aspect could be influenced by social media, video games, or television. The constant need for a rapid response to any type of stimulus conditions the educational process.

Every pedagogical structure responds to a socio-political context (Montera, 2014). It must serve as a tool of mediation between the individual and their environment. Through theatre, we have combined the development of historical thinking with the society of the 21st century.

By combining theatre with competency-based learning, encompassing all types of intelligence present among students, genuine results are achieved in emotional and value-based education in line with current needs. Not only do students satisfactorily acquire various content specific to Social Sciences, but a comprehensive development of the individual is also achieved.

We present a different tool to the students of the Bachelor's Degree in Teaching at the University School of Education in Zamora (University of Salamanca). The focus is on the training of future professionals, aiming to address the identified shortcomings (beyond the mere acquisition of content), with the goal of enhancing their future teaching activity (Durán, 2004). In other words, it provides a response to the educational challenges encountered in our formative practice.

2. WHY THEATRE?

Approximately a decade ago, Vieites (2014) identified three purposes for which theatre has been used throughout history. Firstly, he speaks of education for theatre, where theatrical practice aligns with the purpose of the process. Next, he presents theatre as a cross-cutting tool to develop social competencies and skills, that is, education through theatre. Finally, this author introduces education through theatre, linking it with the contents and competencies of other areas. Therefore, theatre is not an end in itself, but a useful resource for teaching practice.

It is also necessary to mention the «Theatre in the School» project. It is known that this project was established in 1986 in Tarragona, Spain. Currently, this project is implemented in over 2,000 educational centres nationwide. Despite the efforts being made (Álvarez & Martín, 2016), it must be noted with surprise that theatre is introduced very sporadically in the classroom.

It does not correspond to a practice that allows for the consolidation of all the knowledge acquired, but rather serves as a supplementary activity, often with an exclusive recreational purpose. In our case, the use of theatre in teaching is understood as an appropriate methodology to meet the prevailing demands of today's society.

This is because, above all, theatre is dialogue. In a context of conflict, where in the West we witness the wariness of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, in a situation of democratic crisis where, in the case of Spain, politicians struggle to reach an agreement for the benefit of society as a whole, dialogue is presented as a tool.

In this way, this educational project promotes listening. It allows the development of social communication, both in the performance of the play and in its preparation. Twenty minutes of performance include hours of preparation, listening, discussion, problem solving, analysis and reflection on the project to be defended.

Around the preparation and performance of the play, an equal and open debate is encouraged, where each person's participation counts. Opinions are compared, positions are argued, propositions are made. By working in random groups, individuals communicate who, in a natural setting, might not do so.

It is important for students to no longer be mere spectators of the teaching of Social Sciences, and more specifically, the teaching of historical time. They become true actors in their own education and learning. This is because they will convey knowledge to their peers through the performance. They must prepare their theatrical interventions, thus mastering, in a critical and analytical manner, the subject matter to be represented. There are also debates in the days leading up to the performance.

In this way, theatre becomes an educational tool for the human development of the learners. It encourages an increase in individual sensitivity, channeling the various emotions of the students that often remain unexpressed. They express their emotions while engaging in cooperative and collaborative learning. What is observed in practical terms has a significant impact on student learning (Gómez, 2006).

As we can see, the main objective of our teaching proposal is to create in the classroom a framework of coexistence in line with the democratic society in which we live. This emphasises the need for tolerance and cooperation. Fostering peaceful relationships with critical thinking and reflection among future citizens is an aspiration of Western democracy.

We must also highlight that theatre encourages self-critique and confidence, acquiring some research techniques specific to Social Sciences, and fostering in-

tellectual curiosity. The student must construct their theatrical representation, for which it is necessary to delve into the recommended bibliography, both in print and digital formats, analysing it to draw their own conclusions that will enable them to achieve their objectives.

Like time detectives, the students will recreate the past in which the protagonists lived, applying discovery-based learning, promoting collaborative work, interactive learning processes, and the students' interest in historical events and the role that women played in their unfolding.

In this sense, Gardner's theory (2012) on multiple intelligences, competency-based education, and holistic education are implemented thanks to the educational practice of theatre (Llamas, 2013). We have observed that it promotes the development of intelligence in all its manifestations in the educational reality, particularly enhancing the comprehensive development of the individual through self-awareness and personal self-construction of the students.

Society demands a transformation in teaching. It expects the educator to innovate, contribute new ideas, and transform their methodology. A continuous change to provide a solution to this Society in crisis. With theatre, we propose this renewal with a dual purpose: firstly, to teach historical thinking through creativity and innovation, and secondly, to achieve a more engaging and dynamic learning of content. In this way, thanks to theatre, students delve into the analysis of events from an analytical, questioning, and transformative perspective.

Therefore, by meeting the aforementioned objectives, theatre is a powerful pedagogical resource (Navarro, 2010). Theoretical aspects specific to Social Sciences are utilised and combined with other cross-cutting competencies of the university degree to present ideas and concepts with greater clarity, which, due to their abstraction, may appear complex to 21st century students.

Despite all that has been mentioned, some authors criticise this methodology for the alleged loss of the academic rigour of teaching (Álvarez & Martín, 2016), without taking into account what is stated in the European Higher Education Area. The student must cease to be merely a receptacle of knowledge and acquire other competencies that facilitate their life in society.

In other words, with theatrical practice, one learns to learn in a different way. The traditional system of the lecture takes a backseat, where the memorization of historical events is replaced by a different construction of knowledge, in a lively, shared, and collaborative environment (Navarro, 2007). For this reason, theatre is the chosen resource to develop our cooperative project.

A response to the deficiencies in learning historical time caused by the predominance of traditional teaching. A didactic proposal that addresses the current challenges in Social Sciences education.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF A COOPERATIVE PROJECT

Given all that has been mentioned before, in the 2020-2021 academic year, we implemented the teaching proposal we are presenting for the first time. From this academic year onwards, we have continued its implementation, making the necessary adjustments based on the practical experience.

This pedagogical effort stems from the need for reforms in the teaching of historical time at the University School of Education in Zamora. We are faced with a need to communicate ideas in an innovative way, aiming to inspire wonder and motivation. There was a request for a renewal of teaching practices among the students regarding this area of knowledge. Academic results needed improvement. The majority sentiment towards the subject was not as expected, despite the great efforts being made. It was crucial to spark the students' interest in Social Sciences in general and history in particular.

More specifically, this proposal has been put into practice in the subject of «Fundamentals of Geography and History in Primary Education» at the University School of Education in Zamora. It is a mandatory subject in the second year of the Primary Education Teacher degree program at the University of Salamanca. This subject is fundamental in laying the groundwork for the other subjects in this field that are taught in higher years.

The number of enrolled students is around one hundred. They are divided into groups of ten, with one secretary representing them to the other groups and to the teacher. The teacher holds continuous meetings with these ten secretaries to explain the situation of their group, address any difficulties they may be facing, or discuss any particularities that may have arisen. The rest of the secretaries are also present in these meetings, reaching joint agreements.

This way, the entire class works together as a team. The secretary does not defend their position but conveys the opinion of the entire class. It would be very challenging to reach a consensus with one hundred students, so it is essential to do so through their representatives. Additionally, it should be noted that the teacher has at least four meetings with each group throughout the process, during which the progress of their work is presented. These moments involve listening to each individual, with the whole group present. These meetings have proven crucial for resolving issues that naturally arise when fostering individual critical thinking and reflection. Interestingly, in many cases, it has been observed that initially some groups or students opt for individual work, only to ultimately choose collaborative work.

Once we have outlined how these groups function, it should be mentioned that each group is assigned a historical figure randomly. The teacher provides a comprehensive list from which the assignment will be made. Among these names,

some stand out, such as Helen of Troy, Penelope, Cleopatra, Hypatia, Isabel de Bohemia, Simone Weil, Teresa de Jesús, Juana Inés de la Cruz, Rosalía de Castro, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Maruja Mallo, María Moliner, and so on.

As we can see, in all cases, we refer to women. Except for the 2020-2021 academic year, this project has been conducted with a gender perspective, as we observed the unfortunate gap in knowledge among our students. When asked about significant women in history, in many cases, we received silence as a response, and in other cases, quite remarkably, they named current television personalities.

The list of women who made history is extensive, ranging from goddesses to queens, from courtesans to inventors, from actresses to saints, from writers to politicians. It is necessary to broaden our students' view of the role of women throughout history. They will be urged to understand that those listed serve as examples of the significant impact these female figures have had on history. Since a woman is the central figure around which the entire project is built, it will be a woman narrating the events as the true protagonist. This is to emphasise that women are historical agents in our past (Ortega, 2022).

One of the expected final outcomes is that dialogue will take place among the different groups. In other words, among all the characters in the theatrical performances, both main and secondary, but primarily among the main characters, they will analyse the society in which each one lived. This means that each woman will present her socio-cultural context to the others, expressing her views on it. This fosters deep critical reflection, analyses events, and compares them with a broad historical perspective beyond what the predominant historiographical currents indicate.

Throughout this process, the teacher's role is that of a guide. In line with what Garrido (2005) pointed out, we have prioritised the teaching act as a stimulus for competency development. The progress of the learning process is meticulously accompanied, but without revealing the criteria held about it. Students should receive advice, recommendations, and guidelines, but under no circumstances should learning be limited.

In this way, being a projective task, completely open to the creative capacity of the students, the following advantages are presented in the educational process:

- Firstly, the margin of spontaneity is significant. The possibility of expressing certain aspects of their mental representations is much greater than in other methodologies. Similarly, although it may be complex at first, it addresses shyness, improving verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Secondly, by encouraging analytical information retrieval and synthesis, an approximation is provided to the main constituent elements of historical processes. After providing each group with some recommended references

at their disposal, they must delve into them, looking for other authors to complement their view of the events to be represented.

To achieve these advantages, continuing with what Susana Nicolás Román (2011) has stated, different phases have been indicated for the proper development of this pedagogical practice. They have been modified over the years through their implementation, resulting in the following points:

- Presentation of the proposal. On the first day of the subject, the proposal is presented to the students. This is a fundamental moment because it must be emphasised that it is an activity that will be central to the entire subject. It is not an isolated activity but corresponds to a project integrated into the development of the subject. Therefore, students must understand the pedagogical importance of the methodology being presented to them. For this, we have found it interesting to project a recording from previous years' courses. While, at present, the majority of students enrolled in the subject are already aware that it is developed using this teaching methodology, as they have heard about it or even seen the results from previous years.
- Formation of the groups. Once the proposal has been presented, it is time to form the work groups. If we want to promote cooperative work and the inclusion of students, it is essential that the configuration of the groups is done randomly. In recent years, it has been observed that, in this way, we ensure that no student is left without a group and that the student makes an effort for the common good rather than personal preferences.
- Selection of the protagonist. This choice is usually made from a more or less extensive list presented on the first day of class. We believe that the students should not make this selection themselves (avoiding many issues from different groups wanting to choose the same woman). We usually prefer to be the ones making the selection, presenting it to the respective group. This «presentation» is done in the second week of classes, so they have had a chance to become interested in these women, looking for some general information about their biographies.
- Temporal Sequencing. Once the workgroup and main character are established, it's time to begin the actual project development. This temporal sequencing is explained to them after the «assignment» of the main character. We should note that we recommend the following model to students: temporal contextualization, development of the life and thoughts of the represented woman, comparison with other characters, and a concluding resolution. However, each group is free to make the modifications they consider necessary. Similarly, it's advised that they do not exceed twenty minutes in the entire performance, so they should keep this in mind for the temporal sequencing. At this point, students conduct an in-depth bibliographic research

- to substantiate their future performance. Our experience indicates that a high percentage of groups typically structure the entire theatrical representation through a motor story (Egan, 2008).
- Rubric Creation. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the rubric was already provided by the instructor in the presentation of this activity. This was done to ensure that students understood what was expected of them. Experience suggests that, for greater learning and freedom for our learners, it's better for them to collectively and consensually create the rubric that will be used for peer assessment, both for other groups and their own. This is the appropriate moment to do this since they already have a clear understanding of the activity they will be undertaking. They often emphasise aspects such as originality, time distribution, coherence of the script, development of imagination, expressiveness of the performers, resources and materials used, and finally, the presentation of historical content. Similarly, especially in the rubric designed for evaluating group members, aspects like participation, involvement, and contribution of each member should not be omitted.
 - Search for Secondary Characters. We recommend that each student portray at least one character. These can be real or fictional. This is a moment where students need more guidance and direction when approaching the future of the project. It is essential that they understand the actual role some women played throughout history, but for this, it's necessary that they are related to their contemporaries, to the whole of society, and the events that were occurring (Stanislavski, 2002). They need to understand that the lives of men and women have been intertwined. That is, it would be equally erroneous to present a story of female supremacy as it would be to do it from a male perspective. Although it is more common to observe women being relegated to a secondary role in favour of men, pushing men to the background in favour of women would be making the same mistake. Our protagonists will serve to reach a middle ground, presenting our history from a common perspective; from the perspective of the society of the period. That is to say, to talk, for example, about Cleopatra, one would have to talk about Caesar and Mark Antony; to talk about Teresa de Jesús, one must present her confessors, among whom Jerónimo Gracián stands out.
 - Script Development. Once the group has analysed the context of the main character and decided who the secondary characters will be, they must write the theatrical script. It is the moment to specify the objectives that each group wants to develop throughout their performance. Some focus purely on political aspects, while others delve more deeply into society, economy, culture, or the relationships between different social classes. We refer to a moment when students develop their imagination (Egan, 2008). They must seek different resources that make the work engaging but without allowing

- fantasy to distort reality. That is, they must figure out what they want to convey and how to do it without it becoming warped.
- Preparation of the Performance. Following the importance of the Jesuit composition of place, it is essential to consider the setting. For decoration, it is recommended, in line with the SDGs of the 2023 Agenda, to use recycled materials. In this way, they are taught to give another opportunity to various materials that, in most cases, would be destined for recycling. They are helped to broaden their perspective in view of their future educational work. To see in each object not waste but an option and a possible resource.
 - Performance and Recording of the Play. Once the aforementioned points have been covered and the necessary rehearsals have been conducted, the play is performed for the entire class and recorded for preservation. Typically, in the theatrical performance, the effective transmission of knowledge as well as the correct interrelation between the characters are positively valued. Peer assessment is carried out following the rubric devised collectively.
 - Submission of Work and Critical Evaluation. Finally, an individual report of the entire work is submitted, highlighting those aspects considered most relevant.

As can be observed, these phases are strongly influenced by what Mercer (2004) and Álvarez & Martín (2016) have outlined. Also, following the points raised by these authors, the major challenge encountered lies in the expression difficulties the students have. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, this is one of the aspects we aim to improve with this methodology, although, naturally, they do not disappear.

It has functioned as a hub of relationships between students and the instructor. Thanks to this contact, a more personal rapport is fostered, where individualised and cooperative learning of the students is consolidated. The acquisition of socio-historical content becomes much more engaging for students when offered through characters and a plot that embody them. That is, by reliving the event, they can engage in a deeper interpretation and understanding of it. It is a participatory methodology, through which students acquire competencies specific to teamwork, the development of activities and attitudes inherent to a collective methodology, or, among other aspects, the transfer of knowledge, empathy, respect, and motivation.

Similarly, it encourages students to highlight various issues, such as equality, democratic thinking, the promotion of coexistence, or participation in intercultural communities (Ferrer Aracil et al., 2022). It has stimulated imagination and conflict resolution.

From a practical standpoint, the steps taken to choose the theme that contextualizes the biography of the assigned protagonist are twofold:

- The first is to select, within the corresponding historical period, a particularly dramatic moment, a situation, or an event of institutional, economic, or sociocultural crisis, where tensions, declared or latent struggles are reflected. That is, a situation important enough to allow for the narrative creation that articulates the theatrical representation.
- Within such a situation, seek different characters, both historical and imaginary, to serve as secondary characters. For this, it must have special relevance in the context being presented as it should act as the guiding thread of the plot. As educators, we encourage students not to exclusively choose characters belonging to the elites, thus revealing the «hidden face» of history, promoting understanding on the part of the students. This helps to highlight the need to teach a history that is not centred on socio-economic elites.

As we have observed, each of the groups must undertake a small research task, analysing bibliography provided by the instructor dealing with that historical period. Once this research is completed, they will weave an argument that faithfully narrates the events, with the possibility of adding more or less novelistic details. Imagination should not hide (or distort) the historical, but the use of fantasy helps students understand the issues they observe in their families, neighbourhoods, and schools (Egan, 2008). Once we have selected the event, its protagonist, and what happens to them, it is necessary to present the plot. Although there are numerous possible options, as mentioned, we have implemented group meetings where the role of each character is written, in collaboration with those involved in the dialogues.

In this way, a more practical, active, innovative, meaningful, and cooperative teaching approach is achieved. An approach in line with the requirements of the European Higher Education Area. The individual as a whole becomes engaged in this process of learning historical processes.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As has been observed, we find ourselves facing a playful, innovative, cross-cutting, and interdisciplinary strategy. It aligns with one of the current directions in the university space: learning in a different way. It's important to emphasise that our aim is not to train actors or playwrights, but rather future Primary Education teachers who are humanistic, free-thinking, with critical and reflective capacities. This objective is notably achieved through the implementation of the presented project.

Students move away from merely memorising conceptual information, promoting the development of reflective thinking, leading to reasoned and analytical explanations. In this way, we respond to the desire for a departure from the dominance of historical description or narration, the positivist inclination to highlight characters (mainly male) who are decontextualized, or to mention specific events when addressing the teaching of long and complex historical processes (Santiago, 2016).

Regarding grading, this project corresponds to three points of the final grade (out of ten). Over these years, we have observed that the majority of students achieved a grade ranging from good (seven out of ten) to excellent (ten out of ten). The self-assessment of our teaching work and the peer assessment among students is satisfactory, which encourages us to continue with this educational experience.

It should be noted that thanks to this methodology, interpersonal relationships among students and between students and the instructor have strengthened. Similarly, we find it surprising that there has been a stimulation of oral expression and reading, as well as personal confidence, to some extent diminishing shyness, although there is still work to be done in this regard.

A greater understanding of historical time and space is achieved. Students interpret the traces of the past from personal perspectives that have a more realistic character than when done through lectures. The student ceases to be a mere «spectator» of historical events and becomes a participant in them. This way, they understand how individuals are the subjects who shape history. Similarly, we observe how the students connect the historical event with their present-day history, envisioning future proposals for a transformation of society.

Having a woman as the protagonist in each of the stories aligns with current social trends regarding gender perspective. Similarly, by presenting them in a clear context, in relation to their entire society, where, as is logical, we also observe male presences, it promotes a more realistic understanding of historical events.

With this cooperative project, we break non-egalitarian sociocultural standards and elitist thinking in favour of defending rights and equality. The challenge of any educational system is to educate democratic and egalitarian citizens. For this, it is necessary to work on the critical thinking of future citizens.

Working according to the principles of project-based learning methodology engages all students in problem-solving, decision-making, and active activities (Ruiz & Ortega, 2022). This inclusive methodology embodies a humanistic approach to education, which aligns with Ignatian pedagogy, the foundation of our teaching philosophy. It's an education for change that strengthens the positive aspects of current society and promotes critical and reflective thinking in each individual, seeking to achieve transformation in areas that require improvement.

We make progress in teaching and learning among future teachers, as it allows for the education of critical, reflective, and holistic thinking, in which it is possible to develop multiple intellectual, axiological, communicative, and motor skills. In other words, the desired integral formation of the individual is achieved.

It should be emphasised that students are aware of their own learning process. Autonomy and personal initiative increase. Digital competence develops in the search for resources. While it is true that among the negative aspects we observe that not all students approach the activity in the same way. Some do not take on the minimum responsibility, which can negatively impact their group. This is why it is very necessary to closely monitor each group, for which secretaries play a fundamental role, in order to address these undesirable situations. Nevertheless, we observe, in general terms, a greater interest from students towards the subject and its contents once this methodology has been implemented.

The re-signification of various historical processes, which students had previously approached, sometimes without the desired result, is achieved. Throughout the implementation of this project, we observe how students make ethical judgments about the role of women in history and the importance of their proper understanding.

Looking ahead to the future, we would like to integrate other subjects in the degree program into this proposal. This will allow for greater learning among students, making them see that education is not a compartmentalised entity, but rather it is linked with other characteristics inherent to society. It has been a real success for the students to become familiar with specific individuals, as this facilitated the understanding that historical time is made up of events experienced by our ancestors.

In conclusion, we would like to reinforce that the Greek people discovered democracy at the same time they invented theatre. We are aware of the challenges that democracy currently faces in the Western world. We have pointed out that theatre is the art of the word, and the word is the root of dialogue and the foundation of peaceful coexistence. Therefore, we understand that theatre is a useful tool for the understanding of historical processes and the development of Social Sciences among the future educators of our society.

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THE PROBLEMATIC OF RURAL SCHOOLS: DIFFICULTIES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RURAL TEACHERS' TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

Education is a basic right that must be accessible to every family, no matter where they live or their socio-economic status. In the case of Castile and León, this autonomy is characterised by its great extensions, low birth rates, ageing population and demographic dispersion, which implies a poor rural education, and the necessity to create rural schools with multilevel courses in order to supply education to children from these areas. Rural education has been usually undermined, comparing it to education in urban areas. However, schools in rural areas offer a unique way of living, creating a strong relationship with the community and the environment, at the same time the school becomes a cultural symbol for that community. Therefore, the rural teacher will have to become part of this symbiotic relationship and employ all the resources of the rural school to help children grow in an integral manner, so that they are able to overcome the difficulties that rural schools and rural areas involve.

Keywords: rural school, rurality, multilevel education, teacher training.

1. INTRODUCTION

IN SPAIN, BASIC COMPULSORY EDUCATION goes from 6 to 16 years old, which comprises the stages of primary and secondary education. Moreover, despite not being compulsory, most children from 3 to 6 years old are also well schooled. According to the Spanish Statistical Office (also known as INE), 94.2%

of children from the second stage of early childhood education were schooled in the academic year 2020-2021.

Developing means to bring schooling closer to every student is mandatory in order to allow them to get their basic right as it is education. And that implies offering schools in rural areas, where there is lower population, so that families and children do not have to travel long distances to get to the nearest school. Spain, despite being a country where population is very concentrated compared to other European countries (Banco de España, 2020) still has many differences within the territory. There are some urban, developed areas, such as the Basque Country or Catalonia, with big cities and high population, while other regions such as Castile and León or Andalusia cover a greater extension, but lack population and industry, so the dispersion is higher.

It is difficult, however, to define the limits of the concept of «rural» or «rurality». The Spanish Statistical Office, for instance, defines a rural area as the town or village with less than 10 000 inhabitants, specially focusing on the ones with less than 2 000 inhabitants as totally rural (Morales Romo, 2017). In other countries such as the USA the definition of «rural» sets the numbers in less than 2 500 inhabitants but adds the fact that the town has to be at least 30 miles far from an urban centre (Barter, 2008). In Canada the importance relies on the population density: less than 150 people per square kilometre.

As it was being said, Castile and León, the community in which this article focuses, is characterised by its great extensions, low birth rates, ageing population and demographic dispersion. More specifically, according to the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food, in 2020 35.9% of the inhabitants of this autonomy lived in rural areas and 84.2% of these people did so in small villages (with less than 5 000 inhabitants).

Most of the population, thus, try to live in urban areas because of the multiplicity of resources and services. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world in 2020, rural areas were seen as a place of escape from the claustrophobic flats in greater cities, where people had to remain confined for three months. According to González Leonardo et al. (2022), in 2020 exits from rural areas diminished 12.6% while entries increased 20.5% from the previous period. In other words, in recent years rural areas gained better acceptance from urban citizens.

The «new rurality» is a concept that has already been coined. Sanz (2011), while analysing the changes in the rural world in the past decades, shows a society that tries to revitalise the rural areas, getting advantage of their many possibilities and bringing modernity into it.

Nevertheless, one of the key points of the new rurality implies highlighting the unique identity that rural areas have inherited throughout the ages. In fact,

Jerry M. Lowe (2006) acknowledged that these rural schools should reflect «local culture, community and individuals needs and competencies» (p. 28). This rural identity must remain and live with the modern inventions and technology that are conquering our world. There need to be a perfect balance between old and new, between tradition and modernity, in order to keep rural essence, while bringing these rural places together to the modern times. And rural schools are a perfect vehicle to get to that objective.

In the following pages, we will try to analyse how the rural school works as the cultural heart of many villages and regions, why it is difficult to expand the possibilities of rural schools and, finally, how teachers should deal with their profession in these significantly different schools, exploiting the full potential rural schools and their environment offers in the light of the students' integral development.

2. THE RURAL SCHOOL

Living in the village, where most of the jobs belong to the primary sector, has always been condemned, as the main vision thinks of the village in terms of rural backwardness or even poverty. There are not great investments, industries, and even in most of the villages, there are few local businesses – or none.

This idea opposes the great concept that cities have always portrayed. While the city represents success and a dynamic way of life, rural areas are synonymous with failure and inflexibility (Benito-Lucas, 2013). Furthermore, in a territory such as Castile and León, with yellow landscapes of great cereal fields, the image does not invite foreigners to stay and move in.

However, rural schools are seen as a glimmer of hope in these depopulated places. Rural schools work not only as the main and only resource for students to enter the educational system in underpopulated regions. It also acquires an important symbolic value, an incomparable relevance in the community (Santamaría-Cárdaba and Sampedro Gallego, 2020). Whereas the existence of a school in the town or region is seen from an optimistic perspective, its disappearance is a major sign of the decline rural areas have been gradually experiencing.

As a symbol of continuity and future, rural schools raise children whose families still choose to stay in non-urban places. Some of them have always lived in these rural landscapes, so they try to survive and keep the essence of the village over time. Some of them are new neighbours, brought to the countryside by specific work, or precisely to flee from the noise and stress from big cities. As Barter (2008) agreed, «the importance of the sense of place impacts schools and shapes rural life (p.472).

Moreover, these schools do not simply represent hope for the future of rural life in those communities. Communities and schools participate one from the other

constantly, creating a symbiotic relation that differentiates from the urban schools (Barter, 2008). In fact, a headmaster stated that, in her school, a mother supervised the entrance of the students, and, overall, the different people that interact in the school environment are family members of the students (Álvarez-Álvarez, 2020). The relationship between rural schools and their environment is bidirectional. On the one hand, rural schools cannot separate their existence from the context, and their uniqueness comes from exploiting the resources that the rural area offers, as well as keeping a sense of belonging and rural identity. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the village or region also take part in the school's activities, and they collaborate if the school needs any special help (Santamaría-Cárdaba & Sampedro Gallego, 2020; Moulton, 2001).

In fact, so as to guarantee the functioning of the rural school, all the agents that participate in this process have to work in a coordinated manner, including administrations (Raso et al., 2017). However, as traditionally administration treated rural education as if it had an inferior category or quality, there are still some weaknesses that start with rural schools being managed from distant urban areas.

Apart from that, due to the low number of students and the impossibility in most of these schools to fill all the courses of infant and primary education, in 1986 it was published a law which created the Grouped Rural Schools (in Spanish *Colegios Rurales Agrupados* or *CRA*). Through this model, a school is constituted by courses in different neighbouring villages, and the place with more courses and students becomes the head of the *CRA* (Abós Olivares & Lorenzo Lacruz, 2019).

In these Grouped Schools, courses are multigrade: that is to say, in one single class, we can find children from many ages and levels. This becomes an important challenge to the teacher: despite having fewer children than in a normal classroom, the teacher needs to constantly change from one level to another, keeping educational quality for all the children.

As we have been portraying, education in rural areas has many particularities and, of course, it involves more and different problems than a school in an urban neighbourhood. In the next section, we will dive deeper into the difficulties a teacher in these rural schools will find, and how these difficulties have been changing throughout the years.

3. THE PROBLEMATIC OF RURAL SCHOOLS IN SPAIN

Traditionally, rural schools were seen as a place for children to learn basic education for a few years, in order to obey the legislation that made this education compulsory. However, the conditions were not as adequate as they should be. Not only was it the fact that schools were socially underrated, but also classrooms were

overcrowded, with even 90 students in each class, and the academic resources were very limited (Benito Lucas, 2013).

Whereas the classroom ratios have changed and diminished, both in urban and rural schools, there are still some problematics that surround rural schools.

Firstly, while some schools lack enough resources to fulfil the needs of their students, others get too many materials that actually end up packed and unused. Both teachers and parents realise that, despite the initial emotion of receiving laptops or other resources, they do not make proper use of them (Morales Romo, 2017).

There can be different reasons why resources are not fully exploited, and these reasons condition the whole educational process in rural areas. On the one hand, the motivation and interest of the teacher to use and get advantage of all the possibilities the school receives is key to expanding the educational process. However, teachers in these schools can feel lonely and isolated, as there are usually few activities to do in their free time, and they have to leave their families and friends to move to their destination village. Moreover, teachers who receive a village as a destination are usually novel teachers, having just passed their opposition's exam, and they have no previous experience, which affects the educational process and the flexibility to use different resources. They will probably stay in that village for a few years and then leave, which does not allow the school and the students to keep an educational stability. In fact, Moulton (2001) states that, for rural schools, it is difficult to find good teachers, but it is also difficult to keep them, showing this idea of relocation and instability.

This problem is specially noticed in big regions such as Castile and León or Andalusia, whereas in other places such as Cantabria, teachers tend to last more time or even settle down in the town or village forever (Álvarez-Álvarez, 2020). In fact, one of the main demands of the headmasters in these rural areas are precisely policies that fix and stabilise teachers in rural areas.

On the other hand, there are also technical limitations that stop the possibility of fully exploiting these resources. Despite being the resources sent from the Administration, some digital tools such as laptops or tablets can be useless in a rural school where the Internet connection is still limited or even non-existent. As Morales Romo (2017) states, the problem is not the lack of materials or the acceptability by the educational community, but the accessibility and adaptability of these resources to the concrete context. There is a significant digital gap between cities and some rural areas, and this also affects education.

Besides technological and material resources, there are some other limitations in rural education. As it was said before, courses are usually multilevel due to the low demand of students in these places. With the continuously increasing «emptied Spain», the existence of a school is very significant. But there is also a fear that

these schools can close and disappear, especially with the low levels of natality in these places (Santamaría-Cárdaba & Sampedro Gallego, 2020). And the closure of these schools, on the contrary, also implies that new families will not move to these rural areas, provided that they do not have any institution to school their children.

Moreover, in some rural areas where there is a rural school may not be other important services required for a better education. For instance, it is difficult to find bookstores or stationary items in small towns or villages, so parents have to travel to a bigger town or city to buy the materials their infants will need (Moulton, 2020). Following this line of thinking, after primary education many students have to move to a high school in a different town so, in the end, all the efforts to stay in the village finish when the student turns 12 years old.

Nevertheless, the rural school characteristics can also be an advantage for children's education. For instance, despite the difficulty of having multigrade education for the teacher, children can learn from one another: younger children get some ideas and concepts from listening to the eldest lessons, at the same time that the eldest learn how to take care of and assume more responsibilities with the youngest students (Santamaría-Cárdaba & Sampedro Gallego, 2020). Instead of setting limits to the content a child is able to learn during a specific course or age, they are exposed to more difficult concepts, so that, when they grow up and have to study them, these concepts sound more familiar than would happen in a regular classroom. Furthermore, the heterogeneity and diversity in multilevel education also promote an integral education for these students (Callado Moreno et al., 2015), as they live with and accept the different necessities and abilities of each child.

Opposing all the problems previously exposed, rural schools have a unique figure that can manage the situation, get students to learn and grow as integral individuals and transform these disadvantages into opportunities for the educational process: the teacher of the rural school.

4. TEACHING IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A CHALLENGE AND AN OPPORTUNITY

Teaching in a rural school is a reality that most of the new graduates assume as, in the Spanish education system, experience as a teacher is relevant in order to choose your job destination. New teachers lack previous experience, so they usually get where other people do not want: small villages, with few services and improvable communications. However, as they have just finished their degree, most of them confront the situation as a challenge rather than a problem. They leave the university highly motivated, with lots of ideas and theories in their minds, and discover in their first school an opportunity to put into practice different method-

ologies they have learnt. As they do not have the experience to know what kind of activities or methodologies fit better for each class group, they will initially try to exploit all the resources without any kind of stereotypes. There will be success and failure during this process.

However, there is a clear thing about teaching in rural schools: Spanish students do not receive enough training during their degree about this particular kind of institution (Benito Lucas, 2013; Santamaría-Cárdaba & Sampedro-Gallego, 2020). They may be slightly mentioned about the existence of these rural schools in a theoretical and rote manner, but the real demographic and educational situation is not truly addressed. In Canada, for instance, future educators receive a «university course on Current Issues in Rural Education» (Barter, 2008, p. 468), where they learn alternative approaches that benefit rural education. The first step to reach better rural education comes, thus, from the education of the ones who will one day become teachers in this context.

As they are not fully trained in rural education and rural institutions, mentoring in the school itself becomes a possibility to help teachers develop their profession. In fact, mentoring does not only allow teachers to adjust better to the organisation of the school, but also can facilitate the individual's establishment in that particular area (Lowe, 2006). According to Raso et al. (2017), permanent training as well as other incentive policies from administrations can promote a better educational quality as well as the settlement of teachers in these schools and areas.

Beyond training, teachers in rural schools should have basic features so that the teaching-learning process is effective. Firstly, they should love nature, and be able to establish connections with the environment in order to bring contents closer to the students' reality. In addition, they should be truly concerned about the problems and the situation of that specific community and introduce relevant topics for the community in the classroom (Santamaría-Cárdaba & Sampedro Gallego, 2020).

Opposing these concerns on tradition and community, the teacher should also try to implement innovative methodologies and modern resources in the teaching process. There should always be a balance between tradition and innovation, between rural identity and modernity (Morales Romo, 2017). The most complicated task of the teacher is to find and keep this balance throughout the scholar year and the different subjects.

However, as stated before, technical circumstances make it sometimes difficult to introduce resources such as digital tools, which are nowadays the basis of modern education. From the highly motivated teacher at the beginning of the year, the continuous difficulties and impediments can make this motivation lower or even disappear, so it is necessary permanent training in new methodologies and concrete contents that can be implemented in rural schools.

Besides resources, there is another important component of the teaching-learning process that needs to be adapted to this concrete context: the curriculum. According to Jeanne Moulton (2001), «the curriculum (the knowledge and skills to be taught and the methods used for teaching) may not be relevant to rural communities” (p.11), as the curriculum is established in an office of an urban area, thinking on the necessities and possibilities of urban areas and their population. Gallo and Beckman (2016) also acknowledge that education policies usually do not fit with the characteristics of rural schools. During this article, it has been repeatedly said that rural schools imply difficulties that urban schools do not have. However, rural schools also offer opportunities that urban schools will never have, based on the proximity to the countryside. Therefore, contents that can be more relevant and better addressed in rural schools may not be reflected on the curriculum.

The rural teacher should readapt the curriculum in order to fulfil the students’ needs and expectations for the future, always regarding that, in the end, the Spanish system is a very regulated system in education, and most of the students will have to pass the same exams to be admitted in universities. There should be highlighted important contents for their own environment and situation, but never losing or forgetting the basic education every student should have when ending primary education. Jeanne Moulton (2001) describes the situation as follows: «While rural schools should not look like urban schools, they must offer the same opportunities as urban schools for children to advance through the school system to higher levels» (p. 29).

5. CONCLUSIONS

After this research on rural schools and teachers in these rural institutions, we can conclude that, despite the initial difficulties rural schools can present, education in the rural areas can be a unique opportunity, both for teachers and students. The incredible landscapes rural areas are settled in, the countless resources and the population itself makes the rural environment an ideal place for schooling children.

Despite the usual mindset from urban areas and citizens to undermine rural education, these schools contribute to the development not only of the members of the educational system, but the whole community. As a symbol of continuity and cultural identity, these institutions also help preserve hope and feelings of belonging in rural areas. The rural school is strongly influenced by its community, but so is the community. And a growth in the number of pupils is also felt as a victory, as an indicator of a possible demographic growth.

There are of course many limitations due to the characteristics of the area and the lack of services and resources. Nevertheless, these limitations can be easily over-

come thanks to the commitment of the teachers. Their motivation and their efforts to make students learn and grow, both academically and personally, are the key to get over any of these difficulties. Headteachers also have an important role: they are seen as a cultural reference by the community and the students on one hand, but they are also responsible for creating a comfortable work environment, in which all the teachers work in a cooperative manner, so that these teachers would like to stay in these rural areas, despite being far from their homes. If teachers stayed longer in rural areas, it would be much easier to develop an integral program for students, so that they get lifelong learning during their primary education.

However, there are still some problems that should be fixed. The first and most important one is the training of future teachers on rural schools and their dynamics. Teacher-training schools and universities should go deeper in this topic, as most teachers will have to stay in a rural school, at least, once in their lives. Moreover, learning about rural schools also helps open their minds, and offers new opportunities that can be also implemented in class – for instance, nowadays most of the teachers are dependent on new technologies, but if some day there is no light in the school, they still have to be able to teach the different contents. That is to say, having different strategies is always beneficial for teachers and future teachers.

The administration should also pay attention to the individual necessities of each school, and, instead of wasting resources that will be kept in boxes because of their futility in those education centres, invest that money in things that the school really needs, as they can be facilities or stationary materials. This money could also be used for cultural trips, for instance visiting different cities and their historical monuments, going to the theatre or listening to a music concert. As rural areas do not usually have cultural centres with activities in school hours, these students need to travel further and hire a bus, so this would be a better investment than a laptop with no Internet connection.

In a nutshell, it seems clear that teaching in a rural school is an experience that opens teachers' minds, helps them develop both personally and in their jobs, and give them an experience for life, as they learn to live in the countryside, in a mixed community in which everybody contributes to the enhancement of the region. Further research would be relevant in order to discover different methodologies that perform better in rural schools, and teachers should try to prepare themselves to work in a rural school, at least, once in life.

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WORK AS CONTEXT AND PRETEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING: AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY FOR ADULTS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Adult lifelong learning has continually adapted to societal and labour market shifts. When addressing people in vulnerable situations and seeking access and success in the labour market, three major pedagogical approaches emerge. The first approach focuses on classroom-based training to cultivate employability skills, following a Train to Place perspective. The second approach emphasizes alternation, combining classroom skill acquisition with on-the-job experiences. Lastly, the Place to Train perspective is founded on the belief that the work environment acts as a catalyst for fostering essential employability skills. This chapter explores how the work situation provides a conducive framework for skill acquisition from a work-based learning perspective, specifically through the analysis of case studies. Numerous studies have highlighted the potential of Workplace Learning for facilitating personal growth, particularly within a safe environment that encourages trial and error. This pedagogical approach recognizes the genuine work context as fertile ground for learning and skill development, imbuing skills with practical utility and meaning.

Work-based learning; Vulnerability; Key competencies; Pedagogical practices; Case studies

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of change stands out as one of the most widely agreed upon characteristics of the modern world. These transformations have far-reaching effects across all aspects of life, particularly in the realm of employment. It is within

this context that the concept of Lifelong Learning, heavily influenced by the Human Capital Theory¹, gains significance. There is a prevailing assumption that investing in education and training translates into economic and social development (Cavaco, 2013). This recognition is closely tied to the evolution of the Lifelong Learning field. Numerous guidelines have been formulated, and funding has been allocated, particularly by European Union funds. Notably, in May 2018, the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. This Recommendation identifies eight key competences – Literacy competence, Multilingual competence, Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, Digital competence, Personal, social and learning to learn competence, Citizenship competence, Entrepreneurship competence, and Cultural awareness and expression competence – «essential to citizens for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion» (European Union, 2019, p. 4).

Given the global changes that have reverberated through local employment dynamics, the range of situations potentially exposing individuals to vulnerability has expanded. Globalization and the resulting economic restructuring have widened the typology of situations that tend to disconnect individuals from steady, stable, and decent work. The identification of situations faced by disadvantaged groups is intricate, and even within these groups, a diversity of circumstances exacerbates or mitigates vulnerability.

To address these challenges, a range of pedagogical practices has been employed by professionals who support individuals in vulnerable situations to facilitate their social and labour integration. In this chapter, we aim to contemplate these practices within the context of evolving and intricate labour markets. Our analysis draws on empirical research carried out with professionals from nine case studies in Portugal within the sphere of Portuguese Social Economy Organizations² that provide support and counselling to people facing vulnerabilities and aspiring for professional integration. The case study method has been employed by various disciplines within the social sciences, enabling researchers to capture the holistic and meaningful attributes of real-life events (Yin, 2009, p. 4). We chose interviews³

¹ The Human Capital Theory is based on the work conducted by a group of neoclassical economists from the Chicago School. Notably, the publication of the book «Human Capital» in 1964 by Gary Becker stands out.

² The case studies are located in the Metropolitan Area of Porto, Portugal. Data collection for the case studies took place between March 2019 and May 2021.

³ We interviewed different professionals (Human Resources managers, Social Integration Income technicians, vocational and/or employment counselors, job coaches) engaged in social and labor counseling and support for individuals disconnected from the labor market.

as our primary data collection method, which we subsequently transcribed. Additionally, we undertook observations, particularly during visits to case study sites and participation in teamwork meetings. Official documents, such as the organization's website, statutes, and documents detailing the conducted activities, were also consulted. Furthermore, we conducted a documentary analysis of the tools employed by interviewees, professional of social economy organisations in their social and labour integration support work.

Regarding sample composition, given the qualitative and exploratory nature of this study, a convenience sample was chosen. This sample adhered to criteria of diversity in the presented practices, while also encompassing practices involving social and vocational integration work with individuals facing vulnerability. The case studies were selected based on preexisting knowledge, the researcher's proximity, and/or recommendations from key informants, following a snowball sampling approach. A unique code was assigned to each case study: Alfa, Beta, Gama, Delta, Kapa, Lambda, Omega, Iota, Zeta.

We delve into a comprehensive reflection on the findings that illuminate several critical questions at the heart of our study. Our analysis centers around the following inquiries: How do educational and training pathways impact adults facing vulnerable situations? What assortment of lifelong learning approaches do professionals employ when supporting people with complex needs with their integration into both social and professional spheres? What pedagogical strategies are embraced by these professionals? Furthermore, what key competences and skills do these practitioners develop and employ throughout their work?

Drawing upon both theoretical frameworks and empirical data, we embark on a thorough examination of the role played by on-the-job training, while also addressing pivotal issues that must be navigated to enhance the accessibility and success of adults with intricate needs within lifelong learning and employment systems.

The culminating sections of this chapter extend beyond theoretical contemplation to offer actionable proposals aimed at education students. By fostering an environment of inclusivity within training and labour markets, we strive for a future that transcends barriers, ultimately forging pathways to lifelong learning and gainful employment for all.

2. STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND THE RISE OF LIFELONG LEARNING DISCOURSE

The twentieth century has witnessed profound transformations in the landscape of labour markets. The period known as the «thirty glorious years,» spanning

from post-war times until 1973, marked an exceptional era of economic and social history characterised, in the Western world, by full employment and relative stability for much of the workforce (Paugam, 2006). However, the mid-1970s brought about a structural economic crisis that triggered mass unemployment in Europe, initiating a significant shift away from traditional full-time and stable employment patterns (Boyer, 1987, p. 288). This transformation heralded a new era, one that departed from the traditionally male-dominated (Sarfati & Bonoli, 2002) and predominantly white (Lorey, 2015) concept of full employment. The resulting absence of job creation contributed to the emergence of labour market segmentation, raising concerns regarding access and the distribution of available job opportunities.

Presently, labour markets continue to provide stable employment for a considerable portion of the population. Nevertheless, this stability exists alongside the persistence of long-term structural unemployment, job insecurity, low wages, poverty, and social exclusion (Sarfati & Bonoli, 2002). Individuals' experiences in the labour market, spanning access, retention, and detachment, are highly diverse and can range from positive to entirely deprived access, influenced by an array of complex factors impacting individuals, organizations, and communities. These experiences exist along a spectrum that encompasses varying degrees of vulnerability, often stemming from a multitude of factors or forms of «multiple discrimination» (Becuwe & Laurent-Merle, 2013).

The ongoing changes within the labour market, coupled with their speed and complexity, have underscored the centrality of lifelong learning for individuals to remain adaptable and employable. Consequently, lifelong learning has garnered increasing attention on the agendas of international bodies such as UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, OECD – The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the European Union (Ávila, 2023). Distinct from the Lifelong Education Movement that emerged in the 1970s, the perspective of Lifelong Learning was initially formulated by the European Union in the mid-1990s and later embraced and disseminated by UNESCO (Cavaco, 2013).

2.1. VULNERABILITY AND ITS MULTIFACETED NATURE

Vulnerability is a multifaceted concept, transcending simple institutional and administrative classifications. It applies to social groups that, due to their exclusion or marginalization, are denied fundamental human rights. Employed within various scientific disciplines (Alwang et al., 2001), vulnerability eludes a reduction to fixed categories. Rather, it is a condition that can extend to individuals in the labour market, subject to precarious work and low wages.

The delimitation of socially vulnerable groups resists straightforward institutional categorizations. Such simplifications often overlook the diverse identity and experiential factors inherent to each individual (Lima & Trombert, 2017, p. 17). The term «vulnerability» lacks a stable and universally agreed-upon set of indicators for classification.

Categories like young NEETs (Not in Employment Education or Training), precarious workers, long-term unemployed individuals, those with low qualifications, and single mothers embody constructs that can lead to vulnerability. However, these situations are shaped by a combination of factors that result in processes of «social disengagement» (Paugam 1992 as cited in Lima & Trombert, 2017, p. 37), which can vary significantly. A comprehensive legal concept for socially vulnerable groups, one that considers their complexity, is both necessary and desirable (Bengoetxea Alkorta, 2020).

According to the Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market, there are several categories of vulnerable adults (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014, p. 17):

- ‘worker with disabilities’ means any person who: (a) is recognised as worker with disabilities under national law; or (b) has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment(s) which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in a work environment on an equal basis with other workers;
- ‘disadvantaged worker’ means any person who: (a) has not been in regular paid employment for the previous 6 months; or (b) is between 15 and 24 years of age; or (c) has not attained an upper secondary educational or vocational qualification (International Standard Classification of Education 3) or is within two years after completing full-time education and who has not previously obtained his or her first regular paid employment; or (d) is over the age of 50 years; or (e) lives as a single adult with one or more dependents; or (f) works in a sector or profession in a Member State where the gender imbalance is at least 25 % higher than the average gender imbalance across all economic sectors in that Member State, and belongs to that underrepresented gender group; or (g) is a member of an ethnic minority within a Member State and who requires development of his or her linguistic, vocational training or work experience profile to enhance prospects of gaining access to stable employment.

2.2. LIFELONG LEARNING FOR PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Amid challenges related to labour market flexibility and the ensuing labour precarity, there is a confrontation of situations of fragility that impact the majority of the workforce and potentially lead to unemployment (Ebersold, 2001). In this context, the definition of social and professional integration becomes a complex

matter. Is it characterized by employment status, job type, stability level, contractual arrangement, tasks performed, income, foreseeable job retention, or engagement in lifelong learning activities?

For those in vulnerable situations, lifelong learning assumes an even more critical role in their social and professional integration. However, these groups, particularly those with limited qualifications, often engage the least in education and training dynamics (Eurostat, 2016; Cavaco, 2013). This phenomenon reflects the «Matthew Effect» or «cumulative advantages,» whereby individuals with extensive educational backgrounds have an advantage in accessing new learning opportunities (Ávila, 2023, p. 24). It is essential to note that the Human Capital Theory's influence on the perspective of Lifelong Learning has drawn criticism for its oversimplified view of the labour market. This criticism includes its linear perspective, confusion between qualification and skills, and inherent biases in equal opportunity access (Marques, 2000). That is why, despite the strong connection between lifelong learning and employability, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of supporting this correlation for people with complex needs. This support aims to enhance access and success within both interconnected domains: learning and labour.

In Portugal, efforts to address social and professional integration have been ongoing since the 1980s and 1990s, coinciding with the expansion of social policies and active employment measures (Oliveira das Neves & Graça, 2000). European directives, European Social Fund resources, and the Employment Strategy have contributed to the diversification of tools for integrating vulnerable individuals into the workforce. Despite a disruption due to austerity policies during the 2008-2013 economic crisis, the emphasis on education and qualification has remained consistent. The «Novas Oportunidades» (New Opportunities) Initiative, for instance, certified over 700,000 adults with limited schooling between 2006 and 2011 (Capucha, 2019). The introduction of the Programa Qualifica has reinvigorated the focus on education and training, fostering alternative pathways to traditional education for both youth and adults. Lifelong learning and training measures also remain prominent in community funds, supporting training initiatives for the entire active population. Presently, the spotlight is on upskilling and reskilling, with a special emphasis on digital skills, namely through the «Portugal + Digital» Programme.

3. PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES WITHIN THE APPROACH OF SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Supporting individuals in vulnerable situations involves equipping them with a range of resources, tools, techniques, and means to ensure effective interven-

tion outcomes (Boulayoune, 2012). Pedagogical methodologies for employment support can be categorized into three modalities, each with distinct pedagogical orientations, through lifelong learning approaches. These three modalities are a proposition that emerges as a synthesis of theoretical contributions (e.g., Pachoud & Allemand, 2013) and the lexicon derived from public policies on lifelong learning (e.g. *Learning System in Alternation*).

The first approach emphasizes classroom-based training, focusing on enhancing employability skills. Termed «Train to Place,» this modality concentrates on skill development through structured educational settings.

The second approach emphasizes a blend of classroom learning and on-the-job experiences. This approach, termed «Alternation,» recognizes the value of combining theoretical skill acquisition with practical real-world application.

The third perspective, «Place to Train,» posits that the work environment itself serves as a powerful catalyst for fostering essential employability skills. This perspective recognizes the work context as a setting conducive to skill acquisition and learning through real-world application.

3.1. WORKPLACE LEARNING'S ADVANTAGES

Both the second and third pedagogical approaches are founded upon the recognition of workplace learning (*Apprentissage en Situation de Travail*), as elucidated by Roblot and Semedo (2018), which capitalizes on the advantages offered by authentic work contexts to foster individual growth. This modality embraces learning through trial-and-error and self-assessment, acknowledging the work environment as an opportune space for skill development. Furthermore, it enables individuals to understand the practical utility of acquired skills (Roblot & Semedo, 2018, p. 74).

The different models of WISEs – Work Integration Social Enterprises – that have emerged in various international contexts (Cooney, et al., 2023) are precisely one of the modalities that focus on learning and training technical skills, but above all soft skills. These models often incorporate formal training followed by real-world practice within the work context. This integrated approach includes individual and group support moments to foster competence development and integration strategies.

Illustrating this approach, the Portuguese WISEs Law was enacted from 1998 to 2015, targeting individuals with low qualifications, self-esteem challenges, lack of support systems, and specific health issues or drug dependencies. This transitional model encompassed training for up to 6 months, followed by a 2-year work contract with the Insertion Enterprise, facilitating skills training for eventual integration into the regular labour market.

In the context of Spanish WISEs⁴, Marhuenda (2018) builds on Michael Eraut's work, introducing the concept of a «learning trajectory.» Departing from conventional competence development, this notion acknowledges the multidimensional nature of workplace learning.

3.2. COMPREHENSIVE DIMENSIONS OF LIFELONG LEARNING: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Ávila's synthesis (2023) categorizes lifelong learning into three dimensions: formal, non-formal, and informal. These dimensions coexist and are not mutually exclusive. Formal learning occurs within established educational and training systems, non-formal learning transpires in training contexts without conferring degrees, and informal learning takes place in less structured settings across various spheres of life.

We align with Paul's proposal (2020)⁵, which consolidates the contributions of multiple authors around a set of assumptions aimed at empowering supported individuals. These assumptions include: 1) A relational approach emphasizing equality; 2) Ethical principles that respect individuals' choices and avoid substitution; 3) Personalized methods instead of standardized approaches; 4) Flexibility tailored to each individual; 5) Context-specific action; 6) Reflective questioning; 7) Institutional framework (Paul, 2020).

4. LEARNINGS FROM FIELD RESEARCH

4.1. CHALLENGES IN EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS AND LIFELONG LEARNING FOR ADULTS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

In examining the educational and training journeys of adults within the context of the case studies, several recurrent patterns emerge, revealing negative perceptions of educational systems and those responsible for education and training. These patterns often intersect with precarious school and professional trajectories, particularly notable among certain groups, such as women facing multiple preg-

⁴ It's worth noting that, in Spain, WISEs are regulated (Law 44/2007, of December 13) and correspond to a transitional insertion model into the regular labour market.

⁵ For further exploration, refer to «La Démarche d'accompagnement» by Maela Paul (2020), a work in which the author synthesizes the contributions of authors such as De Robertis, Astier, and others.

nancies or young individuals who dropped out of school, subsequently possessing limited professional experiences.

While the overarching objective of lifelong learning is to foster skill development and, by extension, social and professional integration, the individuals under study often find themselves trapped in a cycle of perpetual learning. Many individuals move from one training course to another without achieving sustainable professional integration. Unfortunately, this consistent participation in training doesn't provide them access to the social protections normally afforded to fully employed individuals, which leads to a significant skepticism towards training opportunities as a viable solution: «[...] people end up telling us this: *I've taken many training courses, but they were all useless. You here gave me the opportunity to have a job, to succeed*» (E1 – Zeta).

The cumulative experiences and life paths of these individuals shape a distinct set of socio-emotional competencies, often characterized by shared attributes. Notably, demoralization (Castel, 2003) and a pervasive lack of confidence in both the system and their own capabilities are commonly echoed by interviewees. One interviewee aptly states: «*This is where a person gains confidence in oneself... it's about regaining self-confidence, starting over, isn't it? These questions of competencies are extremely important for this. Because people have completely lost faith in the job market, they don't believe anymore... And that's why there's a great deal of distrust in the system, a... and therefore, also situations of corporate behavior that were not the best, not paying for certain hours... there's a great deal of skepticism about vocational training*» (E2 – Iota). Furthermore, a prevailing sense of low self-esteem and a negative self-image, especially in relation to their association with education and training. Notably, there is an unfortunate connection between these adults and their perception of education and training, a sentiment they openly share with support professionals, articulating thoughts like «*I don't do well in school; my mind doesn't work; I never managed to; [...] so, the problem is me*» (E3 – Zeta).

4.2. EXPLORING EFFECTIVE LIFELONG LEARNING APPROACHES FOR COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

Drawing upon the three aforementioned lifelong learning paradigms, our case studies predominantly align with the second and third approaches: *Alternation and Place to Train*, as it can be observed in table 1.

TABLE 1. Pedagogical models of each case study

<i>Case study</i>	<i>Pedagogical approaches</i>		
	<i>Train to Place</i>	<i>Alternation</i>	<i>Place to Train</i>
<i>Alfa</i>			x
<i>Beta</i>		x	
<i>Gama</i>		x	
<i>Delta</i>		x	x
<i>Kapa</i>		x	x
<i>Lambda</i>		x	
<i>Omega</i>		x	
<i>Iota</i>		x	
<i>Zeta</i>			x
<i>Total</i>	0	7	4

Source: The author

Interestingly, the initial and more conventional approach of classroom training as the primary means of competence development finds no resonance within any of our case studies. Nevertheless, in specific counselling scenarios, adults might be directed towards formal training programs following this approach.

The case studies predominantly align with the second and third approaches – *Alternation and Place to Train* – while some cases (Delta, Kapa) combine both strategies.

The *Alternation* approach emerges as a dominant choice, adopted by seven out of nine case studies (Beta, Gamma, Delta, Kappa, Lambda, Omega, Iota). This approach features individual and collective sessions, peer workspaces, and individually co-constructed plans. The core principle of this methodology is the creation of tailored plans, reflecting the ubiquity of individual and collective sessions across all cases to diagnose and reactivate employability skills.

While the *Alternation* approach unifies the case studies, variations arise in competences acquisition within real work contexts and pedagogical strategies. This spectrum spans from basic support services for active job-seeking, combining individual counseling sessions, collective training sessions, and job referrals, to a more comprehensive framework with diverse pedagogical strategies. This second framework emphasizes in-depth engagement through individual counselling, collective sessions, and a peer support system, fostering social connections and knowledge exchange among individuals in similar situations. It also emphasizes real work experiences, such as in-house workshops, internships, socially useful activities, and job placements. Moreover, this approach coordinates efforts across contexts, in-

volving family, significant individuals, and institutional partners. Collaborating with hosting entities enhances trust and support, with professionals assisting both beneficiaries and support counterparts.

Four case studies (Alfa, Delta, Kapa, Zeta) exemplify the *Place to Train* approach, highlighting work as a platform for competence development. Employability skills training unfolds within real work contexts under professional guidance, serving as a real learning environment. Professionals monitor this work to guide its progression and ensure its transformation into a true learning experience: «*In a job out there, unprotected, they had no place. Because they had to go home to learn how to relate to their employer [...]. This can only happen in a very protected, very special context*» (E2 – Zeta).

Professionals attribute the success of the Place to Train approach to its focus on practical training within real work contexts. The combination of real-world interaction and a transitional phase in a «protected employment logic» is deemed crucial for participants' confidence. Participants' testimonies affirm its effectiveness, indicating that this approach contributes significantly to successful professional integration. The space for making mistakes and being able to try again is considered by the professionals to be essential for effective and lasting professional integration.

The creation of in-house micro-businesses stands out as a pivotal pedagogical strategy within the Place to Train approach. Participation varies based on individual capabilities, allowing for focused skill development. Participants recognize these on-the-job contexts as opportunities to enhance concentration and focus on specific tasks. This strategy also provides room for second chances, fostering resilience in situations where competitive employment settings might not offer the same latitude: «*OK, there was a mistake, but we're going to carry on. People don't think this is going to happen to us, as if they were going to be pushed aside straight away*» (E1 – Zeta).

Ateliers play a vital role in diagnosing abilities and competences, providing valuable insights into interpersonal dynamics, preferences, and strengths. One case study – Kapa – provides showcases the identification of specific skills through close observation, leading to personalized professional pathways: «*there were small examples even within the institution, where at snack time, for example, he was really very different, he would pick up the little things and put them away straight away, he would ask where he had to put them, to wash them, in other words, there were small details of observation that we had and we realised that these skills could really be put to good use*» (E2 – Kapa).

This comprehensive analysis underscores the significance of tailored lifelong learning approaches for competence development. The prevalence of the *Alternation and Place to Train* methods underscores the importance of practical experienc-

es. By leveraging these insights, educators and professionals can optimize lifelong learning experiences, ensuring effective competence development and seamless professional integration.

4.3. FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGIES OF SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE ADULTS' EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

We have synthesized the prevailing assumptions present in the methodologies employed across the case studies, closely aligning with Paul's model (2020). Employing an inductive approach, we proceed to articulate each of these assumptions within our systematization, acknowledging the inherent overlaps, interactions, and interdependencies among the seven identified assumptions. Part of the identified assumptions align with established literature, while others appear to be distinct concerns within the context of the studied cases. We begin by elucidating the four assumptions that bear semblance to established theoretical models: 1) Human-Centric Relationship of Equality and Trust; 2) Empowering Self-Determination and Individual Pathways; 3) Upholding Rights and Personalized Responses; and 4) Holistic Approach to Employability.

The initial assumption pertains to the establishment of a human relationship built on equality and trust between the insertion agent and the supported individual. This is operationalized by the avoidance of judgment regarding the choices and life circumstances of the supported individual. For instance, one interviewee stated, «*There are families I've been assisting since the start of the protocol, 15 years ago, who have never entered the job market, never engaged in any training. They manage to get by with irregular odd jobs, because for some families, that's the only way they can survive. It's not through the RSI [Social Inclusion Income] that anyone survives*» (E6 – Omega).

The second assumption revolves around the promotion of self-determination among supported individuals, particularly in exploring potential vocational avenues and collaboratively devising integration pathways. This humanistic and pragmatic approach acknowledges that in some instances, achieving employability might not be viable. In such cases, professionals assist the supported individual in managing their expectations, thus alleviating the burdensome task of support from a solely charitable standpoint. This approach highlights a shift towards rights-based perspectives and the recognition of multidimensional issues, necessitating collaboration with various local partners.

The third assumption centers on the rights of the supported individual, emphasizing individuality and privacy through tailored responses aligned with unique needs and coordinated with diverse partners. The intention is to provide a spectrum of resources to the individual, as expressed in this quote: «*This aspect of being by the person's side and then neither of us will complicate matters, in principle. In other words, if the person is struggling, we'll try to help... translating the information because sometimes it's not accessible to everyone and needs to be translated*» (EE – Lambda). This rights-focused approach further empowers the individual to take initiative in their own life.

The fourth assumption is grounded in a holistic perspective that regards employability as inseparable from other facets of an individual's life.

While the first four assumptions align with established literature, the remaining three appear to be distinct concerns within the context of the studied cases. The fifth assumption – the Human Resources Development approach – is closely tied to the notion of transition, focusing on recognizing individual capabilities and the value of human contribution to success (Swanson & Honton, 2008). This approach acknowledges that development entails both gains and losses, underscoring the need for a systemic view encompassing emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions, underlining a commitment to ongoing professional growth (Lamintakanen et al., 2008).

The sixth assumption centers on creativity and innovation in addressing supported individuals' needs, transcending the confines of formal policy frameworks. The professionals' approach goes beyond prescribed directives, being predominantly driven by necessity rather than standardized mandates. This individualized approach poses the challenge of discretion identified by Hespanha (2008), allowing innovation and tailored responses to flourish in successful scenarios, yet also risking potential biases and prejudices in challenging situations.

The final assumption is centered around advocating for decent and inclusive work for supported individuals. This encompasses ensuring job retention and professional satisfaction through well-matched job placements. The goal is to prevent the creation of a sub-labour market, an issue of concern for professionals. Establishing contractual relationships with employers is pursued, prioritizing sustainable over precarious professional integration. This advocacy work is underpinned by trust-based relationships with employers, many of whom become partners, benefiting from ongoing support throughout the entire process. This advocacy is intertwined with the context of public policies, with effective responses hinged on alignment and adequate resources to facilitate the complex task of socio-labor integration for individuals outside the job market.

4.4. EXPLORING KEY COMPETENCES FOR SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION: INSIGHTS FROM PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

The final research question delves into the pivotal skills that professionals target when working with the intended audience. Our investigation aimed to discern which competences hold the greatest significance for professionals in their endeavors to facilitate social and vocational integration. The pedagogical methodologies employed by the interviewees are best situated within the realm of non-formal or even informal education. Across all examined cases, a discernible trend emerges aligning with the European Union's definition of key competences, primarily focusing on Personal, Social, and Learning to Learn competences. These competences encapsulate the aptitude for introspection, effective time and information management, collaborative teamwork, adaptability, resilience, self-guided learning, emotional well-being, and fostering a health-conscious, empathetic, and conflict-resolving attitude (European Union, 2019, p. 11).

The competences most consistently addressed in adults pertain to cross-functional skills crucial for professional performance. Although varying from individual to individual, work pace frequently emerges as a competence of central importance. Professionals recognize the need to nurture task persistence, enhance teamwork and community engagement, bolster resilience, and cultivate a constructive approach to challenges. As articulated by an interviewee, *«motivation to maintain the path, to continue pursuing the actions that were agreed upon between us»* (E3 – Beta). Moreover, communication proficiency and empathy towards others are emphasized, dismantling the notion of being unalterably fixed in one's ways: *«I am like this, I won't change»* (EE – Delta). The objective is to instill work habits and the ability to focus on task completion, both of which are essential and translatable across diverse job contexts. Through real-world work settings, the aim is to inculcate employability-related habits such as punctuality, commitment, effective communication, professional appearance, role adaptation, and meticulous hygiene practices.

The case of Omega employs artistic approaches, infusing creativity into the developmental process, thereby elevating the competence of creativity itself. Additionally, the methodology harnesses personal skills through participation in theater and the arts, transcending personal limitations and inhibitions: *«exposing oneself.. in an area so distinct for them»* (E5 – Omega). Strategies to facilitate job integration underscore the enhancement of cognitive flexibility skills, as highlighted by field notes: *«the person also gains confidence in performing the task, which allows them to increase their work pace»* (Field Notes, initial visit, Beta). The array of case studies undertaken uniformly underscores the importance of nurturing the learning-to-learn competence, encouraging adults to sustain an attitude of perpetual learning.

A core motivation is to activate skills that fuel enthusiasm for meaningful and fulfilling work, often achieved by promoting higher formal qualifications.

Importantly, the competence of citizenship, encompassing the ability to participate responsibly in civic and social life, is another dimension comprehensively addressed by our interviewees. Competences like motivational capacity, breaking isolation, and establishing new life routines are developed, as is evident in statements like «*the issue of schedules, people realizing that that dynamic of cooking, washing hands, having certain precautions*» (E1-1 – Gama), reflecting a broader societal and citizenship context. For instance, budget management surfaces as a prominent focus area, particularly among young individuals with disabilities who have yet to experience professional integration. Direct interactions with clients from diverse backgrounds necessitate efforts to overcome language barriers, motivating individuals to learn English words for effective communication, as exemplified by «*knowing some words in English because the tourist asks for a towel and she doesn't know [but uses] Google translator*» (E2 – Zeta).

Illustratively, we can spotlight the Alfa case, which has developed a model aligning closely with all eight key competences defined by the European Commission (European Union, 2019). Guided by the pedagogical model championed by the Réseau Chantier École – Entreprises Sociales apprenantes, Beta formulated a comprehensive Grid for monitoring and assessing competences. This grid, organized around macro competences and corresponding behavior indicators, served as the foundation for competence tracking booklets. These booklets, designed to ensure the transferability of developed competences to subsequent social and vocational contexts, encompass a range of macro-competences including those pivotal for path success, communication, literacy, numeracy, digital proficiency, and the application of professional competences, underscoring hygiene and safety at work. For instance, associated with Restaurant & Bar activities: «*At the end of the day we always take half an hour or so to work on maths [...] Which is to take the coins, so that they also know the coins, they separate the coins by group, the ones of two, put the ones of ten together, the ones of twenty and so on [...] To work on maths a bit every day, because it's something they also need every day*» (E3 – Alfa).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

At the conclusion of this chapter, it becomes evident that work serves not only an economic and social purpose but also functions as a means in itself. To effectively engage with adults facing complex needs within lifelong learning, it is imperative to challenge the negative perceptions they hold towards education and training systems. This necessitates the pivotal role of professionals in this context.

Pedagogical strategies centered on authentic work environments offer a promising avenue for imparting enduring skills and attitudes demanded by contemporary labour markets. Professionals cultivate a diverse range of competences to holistically integrate individuals into both society and the workforce. This interplay of competences nurtures resilience, adaptability, self-assurance, and an ongoing thirst for knowledge. This underscores the transformative potential of personalized, non-formal education in shaping the trajectories of adults in vulnerable situations.

A crucial requirement is the explicit articulation and alignment of intervention assumptions for both professionals and the individuals they support. In a pedagogical approach that advocates collaboration and non-substitution, it becomes paramount for stakeholders to share common protocols. Hence, a comprehensive presentation of the support approach, encompassing assumptions, duration, functioning, and roles, is advised.

Central to this pedagogical approach is a collaborative alliance between professionals and assisted individuals, where shared information underpins the relationship. The key lies in jointly formulating strategies tailored to each individual's unique circumstances, with professionals contributing technical expertise and individuals drawing from personal experience. The relationship is characterized by specialization and mutual respect rather than hierarchy. This philosophy resonates with Paul's (2020) «not-knowing» approach, prioritizing dialogue over assertion and fostering an environment of inquiry and growth. This stance empowers the professional to synchronize with the rhythm of the relationship, eschewing fixed certainties that can constrict possibilities (Paul, 2020). The synergy of professional expertise and individual experience creates a dynamic that engenders unique and effective responses, bolstered by reflective questioning and necessary self-critique (Estivill, 2020).

The amalgamation of theoretical exploration and empirical inquiry underscores the significance of diversified tools and intervention methodologies in effective professional practice. In addition to the broad array of strategies showcased in various cases, diversification in the pedagogical approach to support each person emerges as a strategic asset. Recognizing the limitations of sole reliance on methods like interviews, the inclusion of symbolic expressions and real-world context simulations augments the expressive potential of the assisted individuals. A vital element to enhance tool effectiveness and empathy involves professionals testing the instruments on themselves before recommending them. This personal experience enhances guidance and augments professional practice, as advocated by methodologies like the PATH approach (Pearpoint et al., 2001, p. 7).

Peer education dynamics in group interactions exhibit potency in enhancing empathy and diversifying pedagogical strategies. Peers, embodying empathy and empowerment, complement professional intervention, fostering a unique sup-

port system. Given the complexity of aiding vulnerable individuals, advocating for multidisciplinary teams involving professionals from various domains proves essential. This holistic approach aligns with the ethos of addressing not just the individual but also their support networks.

Given the intricate nature of supporting people in vulnerable situations, we advocate for the formation of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams, encompassing professionals from diverse domains like social work, education, employment, and rehabilitation. This holistic approach aligns with the ethos of working with not just the individual but also their support networks, encompassing family members or entities that host internships or employment opportunities.

In summary, collaborative, dynamic, diversified and inclusive pedagogical approaches emerge as crucial in supporting those with complex needs, nurturing resilience, resourcefulness, and sustained growth. The transformative potential of personalized support flourishes within this intricate interplay, guiding individuals towards a more secure and fulfilling future.

5.1. IN SHORT, A FEW PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

This chapter culminates with a series of practical proposals designed to complement the discussed reflections and lessons. These applications, strategies, reflections, and activities immerse education students in the foundational principles of aiding vulnerable individuals. By engaging with these exercises, students can develop a nuanced comprehension and practical skills that prepare them for meaningful involvement in real-world support scenarios.

1. **Need for Professional Specialization:** Given the intricate nature of adults in lifelong learning systems and their past negative experiences, a specialized professional profile for working with this target group is pertinent. Proposing specialized and formal training programs and encouraging engagement with multidisciplinary communities of practice can provide intentional and specific roles for supporting individuals in vulnerable situations.
2. **Reflective Journaling:** Encourage students to maintain reflective journals documenting instances where they embraced the «not-knowing» approach in the different dimensions of their lives. This practice fosters the values of questioning, humility, and openness, which can be applied when working with people with complex needs. Reflecting on challenges and their overcoming can foster the development of reflexive competencies. This process also serves as a means to cultivate the skill of recognizing the concept of double expertise and to nurture the notion of a non-hierarchical relationship with trainees. Within this journal, each student can contemplate the

difficulties they encountered and explore how they successfully navigated these challenges.

3. Creating Diverse and Inclusive Pedagogical Toolkits: Task students with crafting pedagogical toolkits that encompass methods such as symbolic expression, real-world simulations, and peer education. Each toolkit should cater to a specific scenario, encouraging critical evaluation of method suitability in diverse contexts. Ensuring the utmost inclusivity of each tool is paramount, aiming to comprehensively address the diverse profiles of trainees. Therefore, we advocate a process of self-inquiry into how pedagogical practices can be optimized to foster both inclusion and a profound sense of belonging, aligning with the guidance of the Scottish Universities Inclusion Group (2022). This advocacy for self-assessment and preliminary testing of these tools prior to implementation not only deepens professionals' self-awareness but also serves as a compass to navigate their pedagogical endeavours.

By implementing these practical proposals, education students can actively engage with the principles and strategies discussed throughout the chapter, fostering a robust foundation for effectively supporting individuals in vulnerable situations.

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DON'T LEAVE FOR TOMORROW WHAT YOU CAN
BUILD UP TODAY! USING EARLY SOCIOEMOTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT TO FOSTER HEALTHY, INCLUSIVE,
AND SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The chapter addresses the relevance of focusing on the building blocks of inclusive communities, and ultimately, societies. These include the development of the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure an adequate mindset that will allow for today's children and future adolescents and adults, to live their lives with well-being, mental health, and success, in communities that value diversity. Identifying needs and opportunities associated with key socioemotional learning (SEL) dimensions, such as social awareness, and skills such as empathy, is essential for any educational agent and/or professional that wants to contribute for significant changes towards more inclusive educational contexts. Recent research supports and underlines the importance of SEL in adequately preparing children, adolescents, and adults to better manage every dimension of their lives, from education to their careers,

including relationships. This chapter's objective is to provide a framework, underlining how early SEL can be used by educational agents and professionals to foster lifelong inclusion, learning and career development. Starting by presenting key theoretical aspects, we proceed to underline methodological solutions, and finish by presenting examples of best practices that can offer important insights for improving educational systems.

Keywords: SEL; skills; career; inclusion; education

INTRODUCTION

SOcial and Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained significant attention in educational settings due to its potential to enhance students' emotional competence, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance (e.g., Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2021; Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2015; Mahoney et al., 2021). SEL models encompass a range of dimensions and skills designed to foster emotional awareness. Additionally, recent literature has underpinned that early childhood is a critical period for brain development and learning and that SEL provides the foundation for children to develop essential emotional and social skills that are fundamental to their future academic and personal success (e.g., Durlak et al., 2022; Coelho et al., 2023; Djamnezhad et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017; Wigelsworth et al., 2020). It is now undeniable that socioemotional skills set the ground for positive social interactions, academic achievement, and overall well-being, not only during childhood but across adulthood (Durlak et al., 2011; Cipriano et al., 2023). Overall, investing in SEL since early childhood sets the stage for a brighter and more successful future for children as social competencies lay the foundation for future active citizenship behaviours, positive democratic values, and inclusive societies. By nurturing empathy, communication, critical thinking, and responsible decision-making, SEL interventions provide children with the tools they need to become engaged and empowered citizens who work towards building equitable, just, and inclusive communities. As these children grow into adults, their SEL experiences contribute to shaping democratic societies that value diversity, respect human rights, and prioritise the common good.

SEL can be described as an educational model that commonly includes several interconnected dimensions that contribute to a holistic approach in nurturing emotional and social development among individuals. This includes the process through which each individual «*apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions*» (CASEL, 2021). These dimensions typically include: (i) self-awareness, which refers to the developing the ability to recognize and

understand one's emotions, strengths, and weaknesses, thereby fostering empathy towards oneself; (ii) self-regulation, related to the ability of controlling both emotions and behaviours, which in turn enable individuals to respond empathetically to the emotional experiences of others; (iii) social-awareness, implying the individual's ability to perceive, understand, and be conscious of the social dynamics, needs, within their proximal contexts, and thus enhancing empathy towards others by fostering understanding of their emotions, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds; (iv) relationship skills, they imply building and maintaining positive relationships through effective communication, active listening, and empathy-driven interactions; and (v) responsible decision-making, which refers to the process of making choices and taking actions that are thoughtful, ethical, and considerate of the potential consequences and impact on oneself and others (Mahoney et al., 2021; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

In their framework, CASEL underlines the integration of SEL principles and practices at various levels, including students, teachers and educators, families, and the broader school environment aligned with the bioecological models of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and the dynamic development systems theory (Osher et al., 2020). In light of such broader developmental theories that underlie the malleability, plasticity, and individuality of learning and development process, as well as the role of relationships and contextual factors, the CASEL highlights the need for school settings to implement evidence-based SEL programs and curricula. It is pivotal that schools intentionally foster students' learning and development of social and emotional skills, ensuring that SEL is included in daily classroom activities and routines by creating positive and supportive learning environments. Additionally, the need for open communication between parents and teachers to collectively support the child's SEL is stressed. Furthermore, the model underlines the need of school-level action (e.g., Adi et al. 2007; Ştefan et al., 2022; Wigelsworth et al., 2022), and a community-level action to potentiate and extend SEL and its impact to the broader community.

Overall, SEL models are instrumental in fostering emotional and social competences among individuals, as well as in creating positive learning environments that contribute to inclusive societies and engaged communities. For that, an integrated approach in SEL must be taken, by incorporating multi level action to create a cohesive development of children's skills and extend positive SEL competencies benefits to the larger society, promoting positive, healthy, and inclusive outcomes for all stakeholders. As schools are in a privileged position for promoting development and learning, prioritising SEL in education can contribute to creating a more empathetic and compassionate society.

1. SEL SKILLS AS BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Savickas' Life Design model of career development underlines that 21st century workers must see themselves as life-long learners who can use increasingly sophisticated technology, embrace flexibility rather than stability, work on their employability and create their own opportunities within the work market (Savickas et al., 2009). Unlike their parents and grandparents, children born in the 21st century have to cope with a fast-moving, ever-changing and dynamic labour market, much more demanding in terms of their ability to adapt to constant change, and much less job security (Hirschi, 2018).

The new relationship between employers and employees that was introduced in the 21st century, greatly influenced by globalisation, and digital and information technologies, dictated that occupational prospects are far less definable, predictable, and linear, with plenty of difficult job transitions (Coetzee, 2019). These changes require workers to change their perspective and attitude about their careers and develop skills and competences quite different from prior generations. This new paradigm implies that career belongs to the individual and not the organisation (Duarte, 2004), meaning that individuals can, and should, develop a skill set that will allow them to be the most prepared to deal with career challenges, which tend to come earlier and earlier in our life course.

From this perspective, career development and interventions should assist individuals to reflect on their main characteristics (vocational strong points) as being relative to the context in which they live and not universal. The objective is to resolve problems, namely of adaptability and adjustment, that may arise as individuals build their lives, by matching their needs to those of the work contexts (Savickas et al., 2009).

Thus, the most efficient way to help students in building their careers, from pre-school to university and beyond, is to promote the awareness and use of processes and tools that will allow them to make choices that express their self-concepts. Habits of reflection on the self and the environment, receptivity to feedback, and the imagination of possible (professional) selves (Savickas et al., 2009), are excellent examples of key processes that are at the base of consistent career choices.

Moreover, if attention and awareness towards life contexts, social interaction and feedback, are key dimensions of career building, then it becomes fundamental for society in general and educational agents (namely parents, teachers, psychologists) to help individuals, from the earliest age possible, to develop the necessary skills to achieve proficiency, which is to say, SEL skills. Important skills, that have been thoroughly researched by CASEL, such as, for example, recognizing situational demands and opportunities and empathising with others (social awareness) play an important role in the way children, adolescents and adults are able to be

prepared for the challenges posed by their career choices and, very importantly, use resources and support available for them to cope with those challenges and be successful. Being able to communicate effectively, develop positive relationships, and resisting negative social pressure (relationship skills) are another example of crucial SEL skills, that, in this case, for example, will empower students and workers to develop and maintain social support networks, which they can and should rely on to gather knowledge, tools and resources to achieve their career/life goals.

Another cornerstone of the Life Design model is the concept of career adaptability, which pertains to a set of self-regulation competencies/resources, used by individuals to solve unfamiliar, complex, and ill-defined problems presented by developmental vocational tasks, occupational transitions, and work-related problems and/or conflicts. Self-regulation is defined as a set of attitudes, beliefs, and competencies that enable people to override impulses when faced with situations, such as academic failure, school-to-work transition, or job loss, among many others (Savickas, 2021), and act in a coherent, consistent, and adjusted way, considering their career/life path, avoiding bad career decisions, psychological maladjustment (e.g., stress and anxiety), among other potential negative outcomes (Lipschitz-Braziler & Gati, 2019). Research shows that self-regulatory capability for sustaining one's career is a precondition for career wellbeing and satisfaction (Van Dam et al., 2015). Thus, developing career adaptability provides people not only with the necessary tools to plan and execute a given career path, but also to cope with unexpected barriers to its progression, which can occur at any given time in our vocational development, avoiding career crises with potential impact for mental health, well-being and personal development.

Achieving a good level of career adaptability implies developing specific skills or resources, namely, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2021). This means that if we want to prepare our students to efficiently deal with their vocational/career development we should help them to be orientated towards the future and motivated to anticipate, and prepare for career moves (concern); be responsible, disciplined, organised and assertive as they build their careers (control); be open, inquisitive, curious, and exploratory about themselves, opportunities, and information, concerning their careers (curiosity); and be assured and persisting about making realistic career choices, as well as flexible, resilient and efficient when solving problems, moving towards achieving career goals (confidence) (Savickas, 2021). Optimally, every person should develop career adaptability from an early age, so as to be able to cope with unavoidable difficulties and problems that come, especially from transitions, whether they occur between preschool and elementary school, or between university and the work market.

Developing career adaptability, considering the skills implied in each key dimension (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) is intrinsically associated

with SEL, as many of the skills promoted by SEL programs and activities are the same. For example, motivation and proactivity, important to foster concern for my career (career adaptability), are internal processes included in the self-growth and self-management dimensions of SEL model, and often addressed, as such, in SEL promotion program and activities in educational contexts from different age groups. Also, having confidence (career adaptability) to make realistic career decisions and solve problems, implies developing resiliency, self-efficacy, self-assurance and persistence, all processes included, as well, in SEL's dimensions of self-growth and self-management. Self-development and identity formation are an integral part of the most well-accepted and research validated career development and career guidance models, like Donald Super's developmental model, as well as the most recent approaches, which are built upon the same theoretical and methodological pillars (Maree, 2020). In general, and considering what's been said, as well as the research data available, it's important to reinforce the implementation of school-based programs for SEL promotion, at every school level, as the implementation of such programs will clearly benefit student's development, namely in terms of vocation/career development. In this, school and educational psychologists can play an important part by applying some of the most recent good practices in career guidance, which focus on (early) promoting the (SEL) skills which are at the base of the dimensions of career adaptability, by implementing activities specially designed to that effect (Taber, 2019).

Nevertheless, it's important to note that in order to potentialize key SEL processes (e.g., self-efficacy) towards career development, these should be presented and framed as important skills for career building by educational agents. Especially because some of these processes are often overlooked as important tools for career construction and decision-making by students, educational agents and professionals. In this sense, intervention programs in educational contexts should be designed in a way as to integrate SEL and career development elements, thus potentializing both dimensions. This means that educational agents and professionals involved in such intervention programs should be proactive and act as advocates, increasing student's access to opportunities and resources, namely career related, as well as providing inclusive settings and contexts where students can feel safe and confident to explore potential career paths based on an evolving SEL skillset. Advocacy and inclusiveness are especially important in the case of career guidance of students with special needs, who are often discriminated against in this process and seen as having to settle with what society can provide them, more than being able to choose and proactively build their careers (Maree, 2020). The active role played by educational agents and professionals is fundamental for the efficacy of intervention efforts aimed to promote SEL and career development.

2. SEL AS THE BASIS FOR A LIFELONG EDUCATION THAT PROMOTES INCLUSION

Inclusion, equity, equality, cooperation, solidarity, responsibility and respect are principles that should govern social and educational policies and practices. Ensuring everyone's right to education means guaranteeing access, attendance, participation and success in quality educational processes and, consequently, in citizenship processes and cultures of coexistence.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as a leading agency in the field of education, helps countries to develop their education systems at different levels of schooling and activity, from childhood to old age, through secondary education, higher education and adulthood, in formal and non-formal contexts, for children, young people, adults and the elderly.

For United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022), inclusion translates into a continuous, systematic, intentional and deliberate effort to eliminate barriers to access to success in education, in a universal and complete logic, for everyone, regardless of the type of barriers (neurodiversity, access to school, stereotypes, prejudices, gender, race, disability, socioeconomic status, geography, etc). It therefore implies resizing inclusion action to a broader, multidimensional and intersectional view of diversity, i.e., promoting a structured and comprehensive view of diversity, equity and inclusion (Cerna et al., 2021).

So, lifelong learning, development and education involves considering the cognitive, personal, social and emotional skills that are fundamental to inclusion, diversity and equal opportunities, taking into account family, educational, community, social, cultural and professional contexts. The recognition of some basic SEL skills as essential for personal and professional fulfilment and satisfaction, quality of life and well-being, leads to the realisation of the need for a holistic and long-term educational approach that promotes inclusive responses and mediation at a personal, cognitive, emotional, social, educational and professional level for children, young people, adults and the elderly, with a real positive impact on human development, quality of life, social inclusion and the promotion of human rights and citizenship. In fact, the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017), a document approved by the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission, stresses that: *«Everyone has the right to inclusive and quality education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and successfully manage transitions in the labour market.»* (p. 11).

Inclusion presupposes the right of each individual to (diverse) contexts that respond to their potential, expectations and needs within the framework of a common and plural educational, social or professional project that provides participa-

tion and a sense of belonging in effective conditions of equity, thus contributing decisively to greater levels of social cohesion. This means providing multiple means of representation, action and expression, as well as means of involvement, focusing on diversity, adequacy and the promotion of strategies to overcome challenges and ensure that each individual has equal access to opportunities, taking each and every one to the limit of their potential, to the detriment of any kind of discrimination.

All educational agents, from top and middle management to teachers and technicians and families and the community, are essential figures in education and social transformation. Welcoming and supporting all individuals, regardless of their abilities and requirements, are two indisputable ethical and professional commitments.

Inclusive education in childhood is fundamental, because at this stage of development the contributions to the formation of identity are varied and will act as a foundation for an adult who is welcoming, inclusive, cooperative and respectful of individual differences.

Thus, SEL also takes on added importance in terms of inclusion, especially in childhood, as SEL programs show lasting benefits beyond the immediate gains (Durlak et. al., 2011; Durlak et. al., 2022; Sklad et. al., 2012). Socio-emotional competencies are developed in various contexts (classroom, school, family and community) and imply that learning environments with shared goals and aligned practices are created in an articulated way, creating opportunities for social, emotional and educational growth.

Scientific evidence is consistent that SEL has a positive impact on children, adults and the wider community. In educational contexts, students involved in SEL programs showed an improvement in academic performance. In terms of mental health, students involved in SEL programs experienced fewer behavioural problems and decreased emotional distress, and the same trend was seen in social and emotional skills. SEL also improved students' perceptions of school climate, safety and sense of belonging. In other words, SEL helps foster safe and supportive environments that promote learning and well-being, where all students and adults feel respected, supported and involved, developing communication, problem-solving and cooperative work skills, as well as learning more tolerant behaviours. Research also shows that positive school climates promote academic performance, future educational success, mental well-being and positive relationships. Studies also show that students who have strong relationships with teachers and peers are more motivated and engaged in learning, more willing to deal with challenging material and persist with difficult learning tasks, and more likely to seek help in situations of conflict, violence, crisis, stress and discrimination (Cipriano et. al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011; Synder et al., 2011).

When it comes to the contexts in which people live in adulthood, SEL also shows an increased importance, particularly in professional contexts, where social and emotional skills are increasingly valued, with employers mentioning socio-emotional skills that they consider essential when recruiting, such as communication, self-awareness, the ability to work in a team, problem-solving and integrity. Several surveys show that professionals consider socio-emotional skills (sometimes referred to as «soft skills») to be very important in professional contexts. These skills are transferable as individuals' career plans change in an ever-changing world (LinkedIn Corporate Communications, 2019; Society for Human Resource Management, 2019; Wall Street Journal, 2016). Believing, then, that the school has as its imperatives and objectives both the academic training of students and their personal, relational and social training, the school context thus proves to be the ideal context to promote this change in the paradigm of inclusion and non-discrimination. Strategies need to be devised that promote aspects such as the responsible exercise of citizenship, learning to get involved in social and civic life, learning to engage in dialogue, respecting human rights, empathy, a positive attitude towards differences, the development of social skills and emotional control, self-knowledge and the development of self-esteem. These are essential skills that must be present for healthy coexistence in society (González-Perez & Pozo, 2007). Educational settings are key contexts for a sense of service and the promotion of eminently educational values (justice, non-violence, forgiveness, solidarity, participation and cooperation, honesty, loyalty, respect and recognition, empathy, hope, self-discipline, trust and responsibility, commitment, creativity, flexibility, serenity and patience), as opposed to counter-values, which are seen as disintegrating inclusion (hatred, fear, fundamentalism, lies, fraud, corruption and domination) (Costa, 2014). It is important for the educational community to promote proactive and positive strategies that allow for greater knowledge and mastery of the social reality in terms of citizenship, coexistence, violence and discrimination. This predisposition to collaborative intervention results in greater effectiveness in preventing problems of inclusion and greater concerted action to change the paradigm.

The willingness to listen and be listened to, and effectively try to introduce changes in behaviour in terms of integration, inclusion and non-discrimination, also involves the skill of empathy. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in the other person's shoes, to understand them, to try to understand what is going on in their mind and to identify and understand their feelings. The perspective of empathy derives from a fundamental principle in interpersonal relationships: 'Everyone has their own motivations for acting'. It involves trying to understand how and why someone feels a certain way, but not from your own perspective, but by trying to think like that person, with their beliefs and values and generating the motivation and mobilisation needed to listen and be heard. This is the only way to create

and expand common areas of communication, because revealing the ability to put yourself in the other person's shoes, demonstrating that you understand their subjective experience and providing a reassuring feeling, also reveals involvement, connection and concern. It involves understanding what the other person is feeling and perhaps even being able to legitimise self-regulatory behaviours that go beyond what is socially expected. This attitude will not reinforce negative feelings, something that a coercive or punitive measure would do. Empathy opens up a space for dialog, a space that is fundamental to solving problems in any context. This work naturally implies a greater investment in the relationship with the other, an investment that involves, above all, adopting an emotional perspective devoid of value judgments, to the detriment of a purely cognitive perspective. In this way, it is possible for individuals to effectively learn and establish more sustained relationships and transfer this learning to other life contexts (Soares, 2019). The learning naturally translates into a significant improvement in the paradigms of coexistence, whether in educational, family or professional contexts, because in the long term, these approaches contribute to individuals taking greater responsibility for solving their own problems and feeling more motivated to share feelings (Soares, 2017).

It is suggested that educational and social leaders resolve to create organisational cultures that foster an inclusive paradigm, in the sense of valuing difference, in a practice that involves and reactivates communication, thus managing to heal and overcome discriminatory relationships. Any professional with educational ambitions, be they a psychologist, teacher, sociologist, psycho-pedagogue, socio-educational mediator, principal or social worker, can develop projects in this field and bring together the specific potential of their area of expertise with that of inclusion, thus contributing to the promotion of appropriate climates for effective educational success and well-being. There are mechanisms that make it possible to think of a more inclusive education and it is necessary to implement them (Soares, 2019):

1. investing in an organisational and/or school culture with a strong social and educational commitment;
2. to build and foster relationships based on peace;
3. promoting, defending and nurturing values such as justice, freedom, cooperation, respect, solidarity, commitment, autonomy, dialogue and involvement to the detriment of discrimination, intolerance, violence, indifference and conformism;
4. spread these principles regularly among all those involved in the educational and/or organisational community;
5. investing in group work and collective projects;
6. promote SEL programs suitable for various and different agents of the educational and/or organisational community;

7. creating equality and equity and creating cooperative, democratic and positive climates in the context of action;
8. encourage reflection, the exchange of arguments, points of view and opinions in a logic of growth, learning, development and empathy;
9. to use techniques for reflection and moral development, debating experiences, clarifying values, discussing dilemmas and alternative ways of resolving individual, intergroup and intragroup differences;
10. provide situations that encourage communication and coexistence, in a logic of empowerment, recognition and legitimization of the parties.

In short, we need answers that are linked to improving overall relationships and coexistence between everyone. We need to train and aim to acquire strategies that can be easily transposed to the various contexts of the individual's life. In this way, more positive and respectful relationships are created, and an educational space is created that fosters healthy, cooperative and inclusive relationships. Inclusive education is responsible for creating the conditions to promote the learning of strategies for autonomy, development and growth in ways of thinking, knowing, being and acting in every kind, resulting in a more inclusive and equitable contexts, where diversity is welcomed and valued.

3. ADVOCACY AS A CATALYST OF SEL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Complex societal issues of the 21st-century impact children and adolescents' academic success and positive social-emotional development (Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). Specific concerns related to inequity and social injustice within school settings, based on race/ethnicity, gender, class, disability status, sexual orientation, cultural background, and immigration status have a negative effect on students' academic performance and social and emotional growth (Storms, 2013; Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). These inequities challenge the school setting to «the need for professionals to make a more concerted effort at addressing environmental factors that serve as barriers to academic, career, and personal/social development» (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009, p. 269).

In this sense, the literature highlights the role of educational professionals, such as school psychologists, school counsellors, principals, and teachers, as social agents who can contribute to eliminating the achievement gap, increasing academic expectations, and becoming more proactive in order to build a safe and inclusive environment to all students regardless their condition or social standing in society (e.g., Ratts et al., 2007; Storms, 2013; Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). In fact, professionals can take on the role of educational leaders working as social justice advocates, help to advance diversity and human rights, increase access to oppor-

tunities and resources, and improve educational outcomes for all students (Ratts et al., 2007). Therefore, advocacy is one way by which social justice and inclusion are attained (Crawford et al., 2014; Lowery et al., 2019). Advocacy encompasses attitudes and actions of educational professionals at an individual (micro), institutional and community (meso) and societal/political (macro) levels, to seek positive change, and influence inclusive decision-making (Lowery et al., 2019; Presseau et al., 2019).

Shields et al. (2018) stated that advocacy «would involve communicating how old knowledge frames perpetuate inequity and working toward equitable reconstruction with a focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice.» (p. 8). Hence, advocacy is a key skill in the 21st century to address equity for all students and is a lifelong pursuit (Grapin et al., 2021). These competences seem particularly relevant for marginalised students due to individual, social, and learning factors at risk for social, emotional, and behavioural challenges (Ballard et al., 2021; Ratts et al., 2007).

Using advocacy practices to attend to student concerns can empower students, and it can transform educational professionals' practices, roles, and responsibilities (Ratts et al., 2007; Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2020) highlights that creating equitable school environments requires that professionals' practices «reflect understanding and respect for human diversity and promote effective services, advocacy, and social justice for all students, families, and schools» (p. 2). It involves the three levels of the advocacy competencies to promote all students' academic, career, and personal/social needs (Ratts et al., 2007). At the individual level, advocacy practices are focused on the domains of student empowerment and student advocacy. Empowering students encompasses increasing students' self-advocacy by working with them, in the classrooms, in small groups, or individually, to develop skills for students to speak up for themselves about their rights and take their own actions (Ballard et al., 2021; Ratts et al., 2007). Professionals can also advocate on behalf of students contributing to others' awareness and reflection to build a supportive environment (Ballard et al., 2021). The school/community level of advocacy involves collaboration practices and systems advocacy to address and change environmental barriers (Ratts et al., 2007). When professionals involve students in collaboration practices, it can contribute to their empowerment and comfort to advocate for their needs and their peers' needs (Ballard et al., 2021). Moreover, advocating for students implies embracing a systemic change beyond helping individuals. The concern with well-being and positive development of children drives educational professionals to address and eliminate barriers beyond individual aspects, which implies an analysis of environmental factors and systemic intervention to be effective. The societal/political level comprises public information and social/political

advocacy domains. It involves informing the general public about issues related to inequities and social justice and how professionals can influence public policy (Ratts et al., 2007).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) play a significant role in social justice advocacy by empowering children, adolescents, and adults with skills to address complex societal issues. For instance, competences, such as empathy and perspective-taking, are crucial in inclusive contexts as they allow advocates to better grasp the experiences and challenges faced by marginalised groups. These competences may represent the core skills for respecting and welcoming diversity in several contexts, which will, in turn, facilitate a smooth integration in any educational/work context where individuals have to adjust to colleagues from very different social and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, self-awareness competences provide the recognition and self-reflection about thoughts, feelings, and biases that could be related to discriminatory behaviours. Creating inclusive and respectful environments also involves using effective communication, embracing inclusive language, encouraging others to do the same, and avoiding language that does not respect diversity (American Psychological Association, 2021). While SEL contributes to social justice advocacy by ensuring pivotal competences to address inequalities and enhancing attitudes and practices toward positive changes and a more just and inclusive society, using social justice advocacy practices also provides the development of social and emotional competences, contributing, for instance, to enhance empathy towards others experience and identities and awareness of other's needs.

Therefore, empowering students to embrace inclusive attitudes requires developing social and emotional skills and involvement in advocacy actions. Educational professionals have a significant role in supporting students and engaging in systemic interventions for creating a school culture and climate aligned with SEL and inclusive principles. Designing projects and both school and classroom activities intentionally prepared to promote SEL and advocacy attitudes can provide an opportunity for effective development. Nevertheless, these practices require professional development opportunities to enhance their own SEL and advocacy skills in order to be well-prepared to facilitate SEL and social justice advocacy actions, beyond scientific and pedagogic preparation.

The impact these professionals, who are also role models and significant figures, have on their students, can also make a difference in the way these students make career choices and cope with the barriers that they will inevitably face. As social justice advocates, educational professionals (e.g., school psychologists, teachers) can potentially impact, directly and indirectly, their students' career development and choices. In a more direct way, as advocates for social justice, educational professionals can support the inclusion of all students, especially of those at risk of exclusion and discrimination in school contexts, providing or helping to provide the

necessary support (e.g., economical, educational, psychological, material) for them to achieve their learning goals and academic success, necessary for career building. Additionally, they can empower students to recognize and overcome individual and contextual barriers that limit their choices and career development. Advocating for students' rights and interests and adopting collaboration practices between educational professionals and stakeholders can also contribute to a more inclusive career. In the same sense, indirectly, educational professionals, as role models, can help their students to develop an inclusive and empathic mindset, attitudes and behaviours, which will make them more able to adjust and adapt to a wide variety of academic and work environments, with regard for their implicit diversity. One way or the other, having educational agents and professionals acting as advocates for key values like social justice, inclusion, equity and diversity, can greatly help students to build a sound internal structure and skillset, based upon which they can plan and execute their career projects.

4. CONNECTING TO EDUCATION: CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATION TO EDUCATION

Throughout this chapter, we have been discussing how SEL can play a unique role in creating a more inclusive society and how diverse educational settings and educational agents can decisively contribute to empowering individuals and communities to actively construct a more equitable future. From a lifespan perspective, anchoring educational practices in SEL principles can have a significant impact on overall psychological development (CASEL, 2021), given that they are entwined with dimensions such as well-being, perspective-taking, social awareness, and self-regulation, amongst others. Moreover, in a world pervaded by uncertainty, having the ability to deal with the unexpected in a positive and adequate way can shape one's sense of self-efficacy and define self-regulation mechanisms that indelibly structure positive and meaningful developmental trajectories. Discussing SEL implies considering what it means to think, feel, and act in context (Elias, 2019). Accordingly, SEL has the potential to engage individuals in a continuous meaning-making process in which the self, the other, and the World come together to construct a complex, dynamic, and inclusive understanding of human essence and development.

The framework outlined in this chapter emphasises how SEL can be used in a variety of educational contexts, and at every stage of development. Indeed, it can be a tool to intentionally foster lifelong inclusion, learning, and career development, to name a few. It can apply to formal learning contexts (e.g., schools), as well as non-formal (e.g., community groups and organisations) and informal (e.g., friends and family).

In the first section, we laid bare the theoretical underpinnings of SEL that can help define SEL programs and curricula which can be integrated into regular classroom activities and routines to create positive and supportive learning environments. Some specific strategies were presented, such as ensuring that educational agents communicate about SEL in an open and encouraging manner and setting up the right conditions for effective articulation between school and community-level interventions, whose effects extend beyond the boundaries of the school to the larger community.

Another key developmental sphere where SEL can have a significant impact is career development. Preparing students (and individuals) to deal with uncertainty and creatively overcome unforeseen obstacles has emerged as a pivotal competency in light of the ongoing and demanding challenges posed by the modern labour market. To develop such competency, it is essential to act systemically and to intentionally foster proficiency in the development of positive relationships, social and self-awareness, effective communication, and responsible decision-making, all core SEL skills (CASEL, 2021). Besides, from a developmental viewpoint, cultivating the ability to critically reflect on one's experiences and expectations contributes to a more efficient analysis of situational demands and opportunities, which in turn results in an active construction of contextual and self-knowledge (improving self-regulation), unfolding developmental possibilities that would remain inaccessible otherwise. The development of goal-directed behaviours can also help define (and achieve) personal development goals, which contributes to constructing and sustaining an invaluable sense of being able to steer life's course by means of personal action (Bandura, 2001).

In fact, the fundamental goal of transformative SEL practices like advocacy is to encourage agentic behaviour. A more equitable, just, and inclusive society can be achieved through effective and long-lasting societal change brought about by advocacy practices that empower people and communities. By endowing individuals with empathy and perspective-taking, these practices contribute to constructing a society where the relationship between oneself, the other and the World is nurtured, promoting a continuous balance of individual and collective needs. In this light, advocacy can also spur societal change, namely through the active involvement of educational agents in the inclusion of marginalised groups in the construction of tomorrow's society.

Altogether, the different sections of this chapter emphasise the importance of intentionally encouraging the development of appropriate interpersonal skills throughout the lifespan in plentiful life contexts when aiming to help individuals and communities reach their maximum potential. However, such a complex and challenging goal is not always easy to accomplish, particularly when considering education and the idiosyncrasies of learning contexts, highly permeable to con-

textual diversity, as well as to cultural, social, and political demands. Therefore, discussing some best practice examples can offer crucial insights for creating and implementing genuinely transformative SEL programs (in schools, organisations, and communities around the world).

Best Practices

Transformative SEL is embedded in the pursuit of equity, social justice, and cultural relevance (Jagers et al., 2019), seeking to promote embedded and contextual knowledge. Nevertheless, this can be a particularly difficult task when taking into account the variety of realities that exist in educational settings. Furthermore, if we consider how one-size-fits-all approaches rarely succeed in achieving favourable and long-lasting effects, the significance of anchoring SEL in context-based practices is further underscored (Bryk et al., 2015). This allows for designing and implementing interventions that provide tailored starting points and precise inputs, ensuring that the necessary adjustments are made to ensure the participants' progress is as good as possible. Hence, it is important to use data to inform decision-making processes related to the implementation of SEL, given that «*effective SEL instruction draws on theory and research and is carefully planned*» (Elias, 2019, p. 235). In fact, because SEL is a dynamic process, any interventions based on its principles must be open to continuous assessment and to making changes whenever and wherever they are required (Hanover Research, 2019). Furthermore, context-based practices increase the likelihood that SEL strategies and skills will be transferred to daily life contexts in real-time (Education Analytics, 2019), having an impact outside of the classroom and becoming inseparably woven into the social and cultural fabric of the community.

Therefore, the best practice would be to balance interventions that are evidence-based and context-based. Although it can be challenging to find evidence-based interventions that have been used and studied in contexts similar to one's own due to the unique nature of each educational setting, starting with «best practice» and then designing and evaluating an intervention that is specifically tailored to each educational context can maximise efficiency and impact.

However, it is crucial that SEL interventions take into account not only students but also other educational agents (like guardians and families) in order to guarantee the community's active involvement. To achieve this, schools must make an investment in boosting student achievement by addressing the emotional and social aspects of learning through engaging and interactive methods. At this level, art can be a unique vehicle to encourage social and emotional expression while also supporting general wellbeing in people of all ages. These actions can be supplemented by parent discussion groups or workshops where SEL topics can be discussed according to their needs (such as school advocacy, self-care, or co-regulation at home). Therefore, actively developing school-family-community partnerships

is a best practice that can support a systemic, well-coordinated, and successful approach to SEL.

At the same time, SEL strategies and programs should be developed using a developmental lens in order to be flexible enough to accommodate different developmental stages and provide time for implementation and assessment (Jones et al., 2018). Rushing interventions can be detrimental given the influence SEL programs and practices can have on a person's psychological development. The process of internalising experiences (Vygotsky, 1978), which is essential for the worldmaking processes (Goodman, 1978) that bring about meaningful and profound developmental change, depends heavily on time. In this sense, encouraging self-reflection in all SEL participants and educational agents is a best practice that can be used in any learning environment and has a direct impact on learners' capacity to critically evaluate their personal experiences, take advantage of opportunities, and deal with a variety of challenges.

Nevertheless, institutional and organisational involvement is necessary for such best practices to be successful. The organisational culture must also be rooted in SEL principles for this to happen. A clear message regarding the importance and inclusion of every educational agent is required, along with adequate staff support and training. Exchanges between school personnel interested in SEL programming should also be encouraged. In other educational settings, measures such as implementing mental health services for all staff and integrating SEL topics (e.g., empathy, mindfulness, burnout, ...) into the organisational discourse and priorities, can prove to be effective.

Last but not least, intentionality is crucial. An intentional action is required to foster a significant (and thus long-lasting) change within psychological development structures; otherwise, the ability to internalise and (re)construct experiences is put at risk. Enacting this intentionality in educators will, however, require fundamental changes in the preparation of educators as well as educational researchers. To ensure that these professionals receive better SEL training and that SEL principles are widespread in national educational communities, policymakers play a decisive role.

In a nutshell, learning is a multidimensional process that encompasses social and emotional dimensions, as well as cognitive and physical. In this day and age, discussing education, pedagogy, learning processes, curriculum, academic achievement and the climate and culture of contemporary schools is inextricably linked to discussing socio-emotional competencies. In a world where civic life and citizenship appear to become increasingly complex, SEL competencies emerge as a powerful tool to countervail nefarious forces and be able to construct a meaningful sense of self and of positive purpose. Because of this, SEL is still an invaluable

framework for illuminating the debate revolving around the challenges of contemporary education.

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Both the value of difference and the value of lifelong learning align with the broader goal of creating inclusive and equitable societies, where every citizen has access to education and the opportunity to realize their full potential along life (SDG 4, for 2030). Contemporary pedagogy requires educators to be the transformative forces in enriching the potential of learners, encouraging them to develop a growth mindset and to view learning as an ongoing journey of exploration and discovery throughout life. Like the brushstrokes of a painter, educators create different meanings, giving value to differences in lines, layouts, colors or shades, allowing art to flourish in an endless process.

Educators and policymakers will find in this handbook a springboard for thinking about education as a collective capital rich in transformative experiences and processes of lifelong learning. Divided into three sections, the book explores in depth the value of difference, the value of lifelong learning, and presents proposals for achieving these values in different educational scenarios, addressing some of the multiple educational needs in the global and interconnected societies.



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