



third international conference
of the journal Scuola Democratica

education and/for social justice

3-6 June 2024, Cagliari (Italy)

Education is a battleground of power, identity, and inequality. This volume unravels the tensions between exclusion and inclusion, privilege and marginalization, tracing how policies, epistemologies, and ideologies shape who belongs—and who is left behind.

PROCEEDINGS

01

Inequality, Inclusion, and Governance

Published by



ASSOCIAZIONE “PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA”
Via Francesco Satolli, 30
00165 – Rome
Italy



Published in Open Access

APA 7th citation system:

Scuola democratica (Ed.) (2025). *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the journal Scuola Democratica. Education and/or Social Justice. Vol. 1: Inequality, Inclusion, and Governance*. Associazione “Per Scuola Democratica”.

Please cite your contribution as follows:

Smith, A. (2025). *Closing the Gender Gap in Education. Symmetrical Practices from a Didactical Laboratory in STEM Fields*. In Scuola democratica (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the journal Scuola Democratica. Education and/or Social Justice. Vol. 1: Inequality, Inclusion, and Governance* (pp. 72-84). Associazione “Per Scuola Democratica”.

This book is digitally available at:

<https://www.scuolademocratica-conference.net/conference-proceedings-iii/>

ISBN 979-12-985016-1-4

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PROCEEDINGS

Vol. 1
**Inequality,
Inclusion,
and Governance**

Organizers and partners



Fondazione
di Sardegna

SCUOLA DIFFUSA (WIDESPREAD SCHOOL) IN REGGIO EMILIA AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHING METHODOLOGIES AND CLASSROOMS RELATIONS

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This ongoing research focuses on whether this exposure to informal and non-formal education changes teachers' teaching and assessment methodologies and improves the quality of relations within the classrooms. The analysis is based on data from focus groups and a survey, with primary and lower secondary school teachers. The survey investigates self-efficacy and agency. These teachers have confirmed experiencing lasting changes after WS. Preliminary results show that changes in teaching and assessment methodologies occur when teachers: share the design and responsibility of WS; could witness educators' actions and co-conduct the activities. WS has also a positive effect on classroom relations, both among students and with the teachers.

Education Outside the Classroom; community education pacts; teaching methodology; assessment; inclusion

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO report (2021) suggests reforming education by promoting it as a common good, shared by society. The challenge is defining educational spaces with these characteristics and fostering positive societal engagement. In Reggio Emilia the schools, the Municipality and the city have been in dialogue for the past 75 years to share children's education responsibility. Their common action has revolved around reflecting on space, content and time, designing a 0-99 community educational project and creating contexts able to make childhood culture visible, to give value to differences and promote the right of children to experience cultural and institutional places. Within this framework operates OE,

educational Service of the Municipality. OE educational philosophy, inspired by Vygotsky and Dewey, is based on a specific image of the learner, i.e. a citizen, a subject with rights, with high potentialities for development and ready to build relationships and learn. Learners are social and active agents: students construct knowledge and meaning through active experience with the world around them, where environment, cultures, and community have a decisive role. Knowledge is interwoven with reality in a *complexus* (Morin, 1999), which implies interdisciplinary, multidimensional and ecological thinking (idem; Bateson, 1971). An ecosystemic approach to knowledge refers to interconnections among educational contexts and considers processes dynamically, acknowledging different ways of researching, learning, and communicating (Gardner, 1983; Gallese, Sinigaglia, 2011). The 6-14 educational system provided by OE a public project based on a strong alliance between adults (policy makers, school managers, teachers, educators, pedagogical coordinators) grounds the socio-educational ecosystemic. The “Pact for Education and Knowledge”, signed by the Municipality and the Comprehensive Institutes of Reggio Emilia, sets the political, educational and cultural framework to the collaboration. The Pact considers education as a common good allowing for participative processes that open schools to the territory (Paterlini, 2023).

During the pandemic the Municipality, the schools and the city joined forces and signed “Community education pacts” to guarantee every child the same access to education, by multiplying and spreading throughout the city the educational contexts (Campanini, 2024). Cultural and working spaces became learning environments for prolonged time (weeks, months, a year) to foster innovative learning experiences, participation and shared culture for students and their families (Cannella et al, 2023).

Through the years the whole city has become a suitable and appropriate place of learning. Key aspect is the co-designing process that involves OE educators, teachers and non-teacher educators from the hosting sites. This process has helped define curricular, cross-curricular and multi-disciplinary areas related to the places. Theaters, museums, exhibitions, ateliers, farms host week-long experiences of 100 classes with their teachers and OE educators each year.

The gains for students in these settings have been investigated. Whether this exposure to informal and non-formal education changes teachers’ teaching and assessment methodology has not been so widely researched. To explore the global potential gains and analyse the possibility of expanding this educational

proposal to the European context, Reggio Emilia Municipality and some of its partners were granted funding for a 3-year European ERASMUS+ project “Widespread School: innovating teaching approaches outside the classroom”. The partners worked on a common theoretical framework and understanding of EOtC, through field and desk research and developed a common definition of the experience.

Widespread Education (WE) is a pedagogical approach that engages primary and secondary schools developing curricular objectives in cooperation with other organizations and actors outside the school across time (minimum 5 days) on contextualized, real, and authentic problems that matters to students and communities by co-researching, co-designing and co-teaching, bridging formal, non-formal and informal agents and connecting learning experiences in and out of school (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2024)

This definition has guided our research on teachers’ professional growth and inspired the designing of tools for teachers and policymakers to implement WE experiences in other contexts.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The gains of WE in terms of students’ engagement, participation and inclusion have emerged in previous studies, and so have teachers’ renewed understanding of active teaching methodologies and research-based learning (Mangione et al, 2021; Cannella et al, 2023; Bertolini et al, 2024; Landi, 2022).

This paper presents data from 2 focus groups, with primary and lower secondary school teachers, around the following research questions:

- What does change during WE experiences in terms of teaching and assessment methodology and relationships?
- How can these changes be maintained once the class is back in school?

Teachers’ background information was collected through a survey that investigates:

- professional satisfaction – 11 items on a 1-4 Likert scale (Talis, 2018);
- self-efficacy – 12 items on a 1-9 self-anchoring scale, 3 groups with 4 items for teaching strategies, 4 for class management and 4 for engagement (Tschannen-Moran et al, 2001);
- agency – 24 items on a 1-7 self-anchoring scale, 4 groups with 6 items for Iterational (professional and personal competences), Projective on self and on students (short/long term goals), Practical-evaluative (the

working environment with its potential and constraints) (Leijen et alii, 2024)

- teaching methodologies, through 4 open-ended questions, coded on 2 scales, i.e. on the horizontal axis from learning as transmitted to learning as constructed by learner and on the vertical axis from learning as individual endeavor to learning as socially construct (Landi et al, 2023).

Researchers conducted 2 focus groups in April-May 2024, one with 8 primary school teachers and the other with 4 lower secondary school teachers. The questions are presented in tab.1.

Tab. 1. Questions for the Focus Group

Let's get to know each other better. We ask you to introduce yourselves and go back in your memory to your experiences in WE to briefly tell how they unfolded.
What has changed in your teaching and assessment strategies since the experience of WE? What has fostered this change?
Have you noticed different relational dynamics developing during the week? What conditions were conducive to these developments? Could you describe the characteristics of these new relationships?
Has your relationship with the students changed during the experience of WE? In which ways?
In case you have noticed positive relational dynamics during WE week, under what conditions could they be maintained at school after the experience?
In your opinion, what aspects/dimensions of learning are most enhanced by WE?

The focus groups were transcribed and coded using a thematic analysis approach, both theory driven and grounded theory (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The thematic coding particularly referred to theory on teaching methodologies and assessment (Nigris et al., 2019; Gardner, 2012).

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. Survey

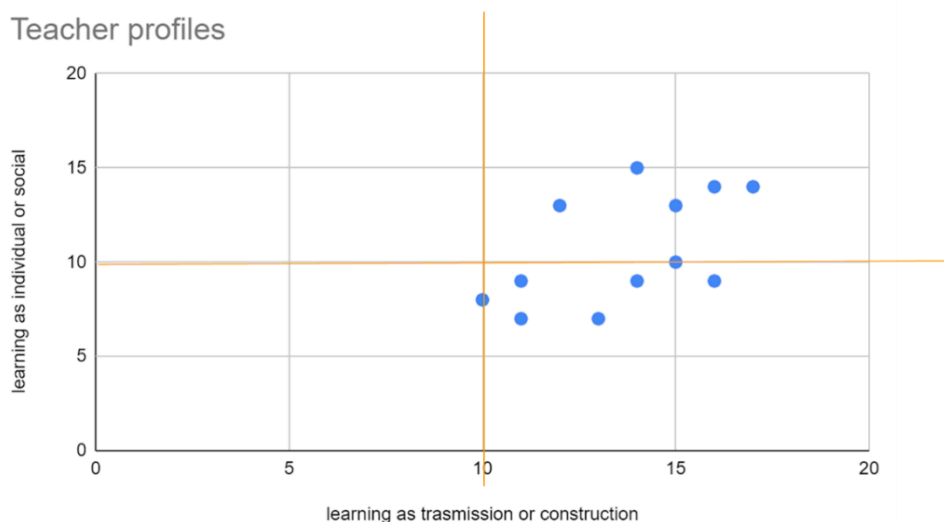
12 female teachers participated in the survey and focus groups. They are experienced teachers, with an average of 23 years on the job, and highly educated, 7 have a master degree. 83% have collaborated with Officina Educativa since 2010, all of them participated in the WE experience “Scuola Diffusa” at least once. They are generally satisfied with their job and do not

regret the decision to become a teacher (Talis, 2018).

Respondents feel their self-efficacy, especially on teaching strategies (combined mean of all 4 items= 31,3), while they feel more insecure on the ability to engage students (combined mean of all 4 items= 29,2). The personal history and professional development (iterational component, combined mean of all 6 items= 33,3) has the strongest influence on teachers' agency, while the short/long term professional development goals (Projective on self) have the lowest influence.

From the coding of the open-ended questions, it emerges that they see learning not as transmitted but as constructed by learners, as emerges from Fig. 1 plotting on the horizontal axis with all teachers' scores higher than 10. As for the other dimension, half of them see learning as a social construction and half as an individual construction.

Fig. 1 Teachers profile emerging from open-ended questions



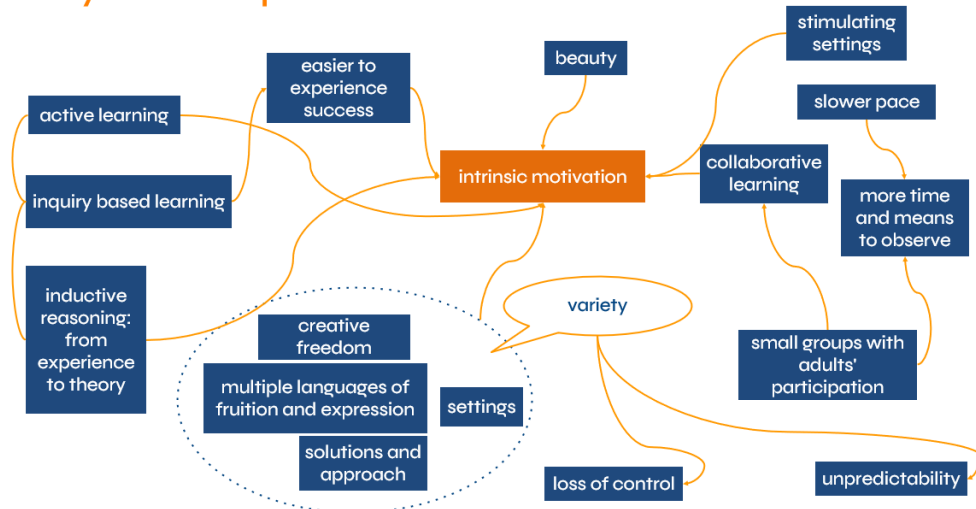
2.2. Focus Group

All teachers share a common, coherent vision of WE as summarized in Fig. 2. All elements recognized in a WE experience, i.e. active learning, creativity, aesthetic pleasure, collaborative setting, dynamism, concur in supporting intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation seems to be the key element to create a positive, learning-intense, inclusive, productive learning environment. Motivation and active participation are supported by the lack of testing, in the words of a secondary school teacher “they know they are being observed but

with eyes that aim to valorize them”. This lack of traditional assessment causes a lack of fear and inhibition. Students feel spontaneous, free to ask and state when they do not understand. Teachers recognize that this is unusual in classroom settings.

Fig. 2. emerging codes from focus groups’ analysis

why is Widespread Education different?



Their activity is spurred, as a primary school teacher said, by the students’ role as “creators of their own knowledge (...) (In the WE setting) they were completely free but more importantly they were really called upon to have their say”. Teachers reported a similar activation in class during group work. Moreover, students displayed fewer behavioral problems during WE, especially if they were given a role and tools to fulfill it autonomously. If the motivational hook is maintained once back in school, the same benefits continue. Teachers wondered: “how to make them feel responsible for their own learning (outside WS) in other settings and using different strategies”. Especially secondary school teachers considered that the enquiry/research-based learning experienced during WE cannot be the rule in the classroom, because it would not be effective in supporting formal learning. Therefore, their question is how to have the same level of motivation and activation during regular schoolwork.

Primary school teachers seem more willing to use active methodologies in their lessons, but they also express doubts on the full applicability of WE methodologies in the classroom, as one of them says: “given the time

constraints and the numbers [of students in the classroom] is not always possible to give them their freedom in seeking their own paths in knowing (...) to adjust and change group according to their interest". Three aspects strike as transferable: the observational tools students experience during WE, working in groups and providing more time for students to display their growth and learning. Teachers admit that those are transferable also because students explicitly ask for them once they are back in class.

In WE setting students work in small groups "moving independently, discovering, relating to each other", each student having a specific role and task. A secondary school teacher notices that these organizational strategies support relations and inclusions since each group works separately but to build a common class product with contributions of everyone; she says: "they still had to think beyond their group to also explain what they were doing to others and seek a consistency of meaning with other groups". Regarding relations and inclusion, all teachers agree that the unusual setting requires new skills allowing academically weak students to display competencies other students do not have. Students' perceived value changes in the eyes of teachers and classmates. This renewed confidence can only be maintained if there is methodological and organizational continuity between WE and school, otherwise teachers admit that you lose some of the gains.

CONCLUSION

The teachers who participated in this study are experienced, in majority highly educated teachers, with a sense of instructional self-efficacy and an understanding of learning as constructed by learners and therefore coherent with WE. These teachers recognize WE as positive, energetic, inspiring, inclusive, highly motivational, effective learning experiences. Yet, bringing those teaching and assessment methodologies back to school is not easy, due to pressure to reach learning goals, pace of learning, differences in the environment. The more transferable aspects are group work and observational tools both for students and teachers. Sharing the design and responsibility of WE; witnessing educators' actions, co-conducting the activities in WE and continuing in school the research started during WE are ways to support lasting changes in school setting. However, further research is needed to ensure gains' transferability to the classrooms. In terms of classroom relations, the dynamic environment typical of WE settings cannot be duplicated in class. Yet, continuity in teaching methodologies and in students' new roles acquired during WE, can

maintain the relational gains back in the classroom. Given the participating teachers' characteristics, strongly coherent with WE theory, there is a need to confirm the preliminary results with further research.

Acknowledgements

This paper is developed under the ERASMUS+ KA220SCH project entitled *Widespread School: Innovating Teaching Approaches Outside the Classroom* funded by the European Union. Reference of the project: KA220-SCH-E7BDB190.

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