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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

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PROCEEDINGS

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

Organizers and partners



Fondazione
di Sardegna

FOR A SUSTAINABLE IDEA OF SCUOLA DIFFUSA (WIDESPREAD SCHOOL): MEANINGS, PRACTICES AND CHARACTERISTICS

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This paper intends to illustrate the actions that led to the definition of a sustainable (valid, actualized, shared and feasible) idea of Widespread Education, founding concept of the three-year European ERASMUS+ project “Widespread School: innovating teaching approaches outside the classroom”. The project Widespread School, inspired by the Reggio Emilia “Scuola Diffusa” experience, aims at strengthening the alliance between school and territory and experiment an approach to education based on the idea of Education Outside the Classroom (EOtC). Evidence shows that EOtC, roughly defined as conducting curricular activities out of the school building, effectively enhances the capacity to learn. Starting from European theories, models and experiences, the concept has been defined to support and implement its effective development at the cultural, political and practical level (Index model).

socio-educational ecosystem; widespread education; educational sustainability; Education Outside the Classroom

INTRODUCTION

Research in education and neuroscience have led to an extended and complex idea of the learning environment, encompassing both physical space and relational aspects. Neuro-phenomenological and embodied cognition perspectives are interpreting sociocultural dimensions as embodied cultural dimensions (Caruana and Gallese, 2011), as they are mediated by actors’ bodies, also and especially in the educational and school context (Damiani, Gomez Paloma, 2018; Gomez Paloma, Damiani, 2021). The space is redefined

in an ecological-systemic perspective for the interdependent interaction of all key components of the school-system (students, teachers, tools, content...) (OECD, 2010), that opens beyond “traditional” school.

This paper intends to illustrate the actions that led to the definition of a sustainable (valid, actualized, shared and feasible) idea of Widespread School (WS), an educational experience grounded in Reggio Emilia Pedagogy. Building on the literature regarding the educational and transformative value arising from synergies between diverse contexts, and interprofessional collaboration in support of the idea of schools as hubs of empowerment and learning connected with community and other local services (UNESCO, 2021), the project WS aims at strengthening the alliance between school and territory and experiment an approach to education based on the idea of Education Outside the Classroom (EOtC).

Schools and territories, as part of an educational ecosystem, implement a virtuous process where the variety of teaching, learning and assessment strategies positively influence, encourage and support the development of key competencies in both teachers and students (Mygind, 2019; Mangione, 2021). Inequality and illiteracy in the world are at historically high and rising levels (UN, 2020). A viable idea of WS could be a lever for co-development, well-being and prevention.

To achieve this macro-finality, reflection on the essential and necessary characteristics of WS and EOtC represents an essential step, still not fully investigated by literature (Cannella, et alii, 2023). It is important to specify that the strongly situated and dynamic nature of the concept, anchored to individual experiences and to specific contexts (cultural, physical and temporal), does not allow one to arrive at a closed and univocal definition; for these reasons, the objective of the present work consists in identifying ‘meta’ level foundational elements, capable of making certain types of learning environments and training experiences recognisable and common, also from a comparative point of view, while supporting and enhancing the variety and complexity of the dynamics and contexts. This brings us closer to a ‘sustainable’ guiding idea of WS, open and respectful of differences, but rigorous in the declination of certain key elements (founding characteristics) that guarantee validity, feasibility, efficacy; documentability, thus allowing for its evaluation and implementation.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

Since all project partners had some experience with EOtC programs, a brainstorming round helped defining keywords that guided both the literature analysis phase and the development of a practice collection form.

The researchers carried out a thematic literature review using Education Outside the Classroom as a search term. Of the 29 articles extracted only 15 were considered relevant based on inclusion/exclusion criteria. Articles focusing on digital resources and practices (i.e., Mixed Reality Immersive Learning, Mobile Learning), were excluded. Studies that explicitly investigated experiences with EOtC, theoretically and empirically, were included.

Literature thematic analysis, both driven by a general and provisional definition of WS, but also grounded in the data (Braun, Clarke, 2006), focused primarily on the conditions that favor or hinder EOtC practical implementation. Namely, it sought to respond to the following questions:

- What teaching strategies or methodologies are used in EOtC experiences?
- What impact do they have according to teachers' and students' opinions?
- What challenges and obstacles are suggested for implementing EOtC?

The project partners designed a form to collect EOtC experiences, focusing on prolonged experiences (minimum 5 days, even spread throughout several weeks) of primary and lower secondary school developing curricular objectives through active educational practices, carried out outside the school building with an interaction between teachers, students, the environment and possibly "non-teacher educators", such as: museum educators, librarians, farmers, artisans, musicians. In this setting formal and non-formal/informal education interact. Key element to identify experiences was the co-designing of learning activities in and out of school. This co-designing process, done before, during and after the experience, takes place among teachers and external educators and has the "non-schooling" educational environment at its core.

Tab. 1. Guiding questions from the practice collection form.

WHO WE ARE? “Our educational ecosystem” (Describe the formal, non-formal, informal agents involved in the experience)
WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE? (Define the objectives of the project/experience/case/example)
HOW WE DO? (Describe the methodology/pedagogical strategies/procedure/tools of the experience and the design process—who is involved in the designing process, what tools do you use –i.e., co-designing grid, flipped chart, conceptual maps, etc.-, what do you design—)
HOW LONG WE STAY? (Describe the timeframe of your experience. How many days? How many hours per day? In which time-period?)
WHAT ARE SOME STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVING? (Describe 2-3 strengths, 2-3 weaknesses and 2-3 areas for improving the project in line with Widespread Education)

Through the form guiding questions (see tab. 1) some pillar elements emerged: description of the educational ecosystem (formal, non-formal, informal agents involved in the experience), i.e. the who; educational objectives of the experience, i.e. the what; methodology/pedagogical strategies/procedure/tools of experience and design process, i.e. the how; timeframe, strengths and weaknesses.

2. DATA ANALYSIS LEADING TO A GUIDING DEFINITION

2.1. Literature review

The literature analysis (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2024b) confirmed the co-existence of various interpretations and definitions of EOtC, which focus on different practices and characteristics.

According to Mygind et al. (2019):

Education outside the classroom (EOtC) can be characterised as a compulsory curriculum-based programme which is described as a holistic, school-based and pupil-centred strategy that can advance learning, physical activity, social relations, school motivation, and mental health involving all senses (p. 599).

Some scholars focus more on teaching in different places, as “Education outside the classroom (EOtC) is characterised as a teaching method in which teachers make use of the local environment as well as places distant from

schools when teaching specific school subjects” (Jorring et al., 2020, p. 414). Others are more interested in students’ active learning “Education outside the classroom (EOTC) offers students an opportunity to experience new and enriched learning activities and contexts, to take greater responsibility for their learning, and to connect more deeply with their local places and communities” (Watson et al., 2020, p. 25).

As for the research questions on strategies and methodologies, EOTC often involves child-led approaches to interdisciplinary experimentation, project-based learning, peer cooperation, physical activity, games conducted around “real-world” problems, yet no specific in-depth analysis of the teaching methodologies can be found in the literature.

As for impact of EOTC, they are mostly collected through reporting by teachers and are presented in Tab. 2. Benefits for students expand from different dimensions of school learning to soft skills such as research skills, to various dimensions of physical well-being, to better behaviour, to improvement in relationship, to a greater understanding of civic engagement and world real problems. While teachers benefit from the improved relationship with students and other professionals and greater understanding of active teaching and learning methodologies. Some well-being dimensions are captured through physical data such as cortisol levels, trying to measure learning gains for students has been mostly inconclusive.

Tab. 2. Impact of EOTC.

Support, development, and consolidation of school learning.
Development of life skills.
Research skills.
Greater school satisfaction and engagement.
Better understanding of the world.
Civic engagement.
Richer understanding of oneself (increased self-esteem, self-efficacy).
Increased physical activity.
Better regulation of biological stress-reactivity.
Positive impact on personal and social well-being (e.g., social relationships, group work).
Negative associations with hyperactivity-inattention.
Negative association with peer problems in pupils.

Improved student-student and student-teacher relationships.
More situated and experiential learning situations.
More active pedagogical strategies (e.g., experimentation, problem-solving, peer collaboration).
Addressing more authentic problems and projects due to contextualization.
Greater collaboration between teachers and other professionals.

The literature reviewed has identified various challenges and difficulties associated with the development and implementation of Education Outside the Classroom (EOtC) mostly grouped in psychological, social, geographical, material, and political. At a psychological level there is a tendency for gains to be context connected and hard to keep once the students go back to regular schooling. Socially, EOtC requires more work and cooperation from teachers and a reorganization of working environments. Some places might not be suited to have experiences of EOtC due to weather and geographical conditions. At the material and political level, resources could be necessary to ensure transportation, renting spaces, hiring educators, finding partnerships and so on.

2.2. Collection of European Experiences

Partners collected 19 concrete experiences of EOtC from Italy, Spain, Norway, Croatia and Finland (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2024a). We summarized key elements such as location, adults involved and timeframe in tab. 3.

Tab. 3. Summary of collected practices.

#	Country	Places	Adults involved	Time
7	Italy (Reggio Emilia, Naples)	Neighborhood and its activities; farm, theatre, natural site, castle	Teachers, Educators, local artisans, families, experts, professionals from the welcoming sites.	1 week (5 days) per year
3	Spain (Catalonia)	Natural site, historical Site, museum	Teachers, professionals, university researchers, families	Many outings throughout the school year/3 hours per week
2	Norway (Oslo)	Public space, private companies	Teachers, professionals, social activists	2 months

3	Croatia (Zadar)	School garden, downtown, technological forum	Teachers, families, professionals, historians, museum personnel, tourist guides	2 hours per week throughout the school year; 1 week;
4	Finland (Espoo)	Local forest, Animal habitats, library, Yrityskylä (business society)	Teachers, professionals, literary art counselors, librarian	2 hours per week during the school year; 5 days during school year

There is a great variety in timeframe (5 days, 2 hours throughout the school year, 2 months), although they are all prolonged experiences. Also, the places (indoors and outdoors, natural and manmade, places of business or of culture, and so on) and learning areas involved vary greatly: from library readings to archaeological digging; from recycling at a company to studying of castles; from farming to forest exploring. Yet, there are some strong elements in common across countries and cultures:

- students' active learning: research-based, project-based; STEAM, interdisciplinary;
- the richness of the socio-educational ecosystem involved, both in terms of actors involved and variety of fields and professions;
- teachers' active involvement in EOtC designing and implementation.

2.3. Defining a concept to guide actions

The aim of the Erasmus+ project is to design tools supporting implementation of schooling outside the school building throughout Europe. To that end a common definition was needed. Yet, as we have seen, EOtC is very broad concept that describes a variety of schooling experiences carried out outside the school building but lacks the precision necessary to guide and support implementation. On the other hand, WS, the educational experience that inspired the project, is a specific experience connected to a specific place, culture and idea of education (Cannella et alii, 2023).

The project group decided to move beyond these 2 concepts and characterize Widespread Education, as a culturally transferable, yet somehow prescriptive and defined concept able to orient action in the different contexts.

Widespread Education 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

This operational definition of Widespread Education is coherent and instrumental to supporting the generative and transformative pedagogy in an ecological-relational perspective.

CONCLUSION

The identification of a common frame for systematizing and defining Widespread Education is aimed at building a Toolkit for teachers, consisting of guidelines and materials for the implementation of Widespread Education. The toolkit will support the development of practitioners and contexts in a coherent and sustainable “widespread” perspective.

Moreover, interviews and focus groups with practitioners, policy makers and leaders help the research group define the key organizational and managerial aspects of Widespread Education, to design policy guidelines helping implementation of Widespread Education experiences across Europe.

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